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Abstract

This qualitative study examines the implementation of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) in an urban school in the northeast region. Educators participated in semi-structured interviews and discussed their concerns and challenges teaching at-risk students. Discipline referrals were also analyzed and an in-depth analysis was completed for the two students who received the highest number of referrals over a period of three years. While PBIS helped to improve the learning environment for some students, it did not reduce referrals for the two most targeted students. Although staff learned some effective disciplinary procedures, many proactive PBIS strategies failed to improve outcomes for students who exhibited the most severe behaviors. This study contributes to educational research, demonstrating that males of color are overrepresented for discipline and suspensions. Educators had difficulty detaching themselves from their personal philosophies and assumptions about students of color. Interviews revealed that these educators' perceptions, validated or not, dominated their beliefs and teaching styles. Educators also struggled to meet the needs of students requiring special education services or diagnosed with health impairments. In spite of PBIS, teachers were not adequately trained to prevent the pervasive loss of classroom learning time due to disciplinary disruptions. Findings indicate that professional development is needed in the following areas: identifying strategies to help students with ADHD that do not use medication; identifying strategies to assist students in the intensive group for challenging behavior; and implementing culturally responsive training to help educators acknowledge and dispel biased assumptions. Future research should examine how to best implement PBIS to decrease the amount of learning time lost in an academic setting due to misbehavior.

TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY EXCLUSION

Syracuse University – School of Education

Dissertation

Twenty-first Century Exclusion

Valarie A. Torrence

Syracuse University

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)
in Special Education in the Graduate School of Syracuse University

DATE: May 2014

TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY EXCLUSION

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Chapter 1

Introduction

As an educator, on any given day I am a social worker, nurse, nurturer, judge, jury, and police officer—striving to fully utilize teachable moments for the benefit of all of my students, though sometimes more patiently than others. I entered the teaching profession after 10 years as an insurance collector and 13 years of working as a clerk for the United States Postal Service. I wanted to make a difference and to leave my mark as someone who had a positive influence in my community. I had little knowledge of the incidental titles that came with the job and could not be avoided unless I was willing to settle for being a mediocre teacher, and I was not willing to do that.

When I was a fifth grade teacher at Brick School House (BSH), I remember telling my students—and truly believing—that the classroom was filled with potential doctors, lawyers, scientists, and great leaders. Then, years later, I received a disappointing update on several students from that class. The following comments are documented conversations I had with students and their relatives. I was shopping at a local store when I heard the familiar call of “Hi, Mrs. T.” I didn’t immediately recognize the face but, based on the semiformal tone of her greeting, I could tell that it was someone who knew me as a teacher. She was the grandmother of an African American student from my fifth grade class years ago. He lived with his grandmother, father, and sister. His birth mother had abandoned him and his sister when they were babies.

I asked the grandmother how my former student was and she replied, “You don’t want to know.” She went on to explain that my former student was now in state prison for shooting someone and had been there since he was 17. She said he would be celebrating his 21st birthday

in a couple of days behind bars. I was shaken by this news and was on the verge of tears, which was apparent to the grandmother, as she began to apologize for upsetting me. This young man had so much potential, and probably still does. He was a smart fifth-grader and was on grade level in all academic areas when I had him as a student. I remember him as a hard worker who was polite, athletic, and well liked by his peers. He was quiet but articulate, and received great parental support. But his grandmother explained that once he got to a certain age, he didn't want to listen to her anymore. He moved out and went to live with his birth mother, and his attendance at school became irregular. He started hanging out with the wrong crowd and it wasn't long before he dropped out of school and got into trouble with the legal system. I still wonder exactly what went wrong.

I remember hearing about another African American student who also was part of my former fifth-grade class. He often would get into trouble, but his dad would come in and support both his son and me. He struggled in reading, writing, and math, and he was performing two years below grade level in most areas. Tragically, his father had a massive heart attack when he was 10. After his father died, he seemed to give up on life—at the age of 11. Years later, the local paper reported that he was involved in gang activity and, at the age of 16, he too was sent to jail for a gang-related shooting. His sentence was 25 years to life.

I also recall two Latino students, a brother and sister, who were very smart and performing on grade level in all academic areas. They lived with their mother, who was known for her struggles with drugs and for her numerous encounters with the police. A colleague and I often would assist the children when they were in need. Mom spent the two years that both students were in my class in and out of jail. Both children moved back and forth between living with their aunt, who was caring and protective (based on my observations from my interactions

with her), and residing with their troubled mother. When at home, their mother was usually under the influence of drugs and alcohol (according to her children), and they often were left to take care of themselves.

The girl had aspirations to go to college and become a teacher but, in her senior year, she dropped out of high school. She became involved with a man who physically abused her. She is no longer with the abuser but she has two children and is currently receiving public assistance. Her younger brother is in jail.

One day, the mayor of the city visited my class to read a story. She explained why she had selected the story and shared that her accomplishments were the result of staying in school, working hard, and getting a college degree. The mayor asked the students how many were going to college. Out of 27 students, all but five raised their hands. Then she asked each one what they wanted to be when they grew up. Four boys talked about playing sports, but a female student said when she got to sixth grade she was going to drop out of school because her grandfather told her, “No one else in the family went to college what makes you think you can?” The mayor continued to encourage the students about the importance of working hard. She shared that she was the first person in her family to go to college and the first female mayor in the area. Again, she asked the students how many were going to go to college and once again, all but the same young girl raised their hands. The mayor asked her, “How will you take care of yourself?” The student confidently replied, “I’ll get a check in the mail like my mom,” expressing a disturbingly limited vision regarding her future.

On another occasion in one of my fifth grade classes I took three boys to the principal’s office for encouraging other boys in the class to “beat-down” some third grade students in the park (as a gang initiation). The principal talked to them, called their homes and suspended them

for three days. When they returned, the school police officer talked to them. Years later these boys were all sent to prison for a very long time (under the Racketeering/Rico Law) for participating in violent gang activities

These are examples of some of the students who attended BSH. These snippets from the life stories of several students represent a small sample of the population of urban students, encountered by teachers in city schools. I had very high expectations for each of the students, yet that was not enough. Clearly, many factors influence the outcome of those who are successful and those who are not. These factors include, but are not limited to poverty, ineffective discipline policies, inappropriate special education services and bullying. Those former students who are currently in jail showed a lot of potential when they were in fifth grade, but they had also displayed many problematic behaviors. Most did not receive the supports that they needed and deserved at school or from the community. At some point these promising young students grew up to become part of the criminal system. Could we as a school district and a society have made more of a difference in these young lives? These are the types of students that compel me to be a better educator.

My professional career as a teacher began in 2000. In the beginning I couldn't believe they were paying me to do a job that I thoroughly enjoyed and appeared to be good at, at least according to my own assessments of students' learning progress, as well as my students' results on the state assessments. Slowly, I felt my autonomy as a teacher slipping away as people in higher places began making decisions across the board on what topics should be taught in the classroom and how student learning should be assessed. I felt my professional judgment, about what was best for the students who sat in front of me on any given day, continually diminish. Within three years, I received my Master's Degree and was certified to teach pre-kindergarten,

Kindergarten and grades one through sixth and special education. I continued my instruction of students' moving back and forth between teaching fourth and fifth grades. I returned to school to attain a PhD in education to satisfy my desire to be one of the best educators in my field. My goal was to achieve a doctorate in special education.

It was during the beginning courses of my doctorate program that I felt I had done a disservice to my students. I remember sitting in reading classes thinking seriously about what I had been teaching. Although I knew how to initiate general reading strategies, I did not know how to apply the appropriate strategies to address the students reading gifts or challenges. After speaking with other educators in the PhD program, I found there were others who shared the same feeling of failure and guilt over inefficient educational time spent in the classroom. It was at this point I took one year off from my job as an elementary teacher to take on an assistantship at the university where I am pursuing my doctorate.

During this year, I decided to do volunteer work at my former place of employment, the school I call Brick School House (BSH) for the purpose of this study. My former administrator asked if I would work with four to five boys who she described as being "always in trouble." This was the first year that BSH was transitioning from a pre-k to sixth-grade school to a kindergarten through eighth grade school. The administrator informed me that these particular boys were more often than not removed from their homerooms, before they began their first academic class of the day. These students were all new to the school and we therefore did not know one another.

I formed a literature circle where I met with these students in a small conference room three times per week for 45 minutes. Of the five boys, only one was reading on grade level, which was seventh-grade. Consequently, I would read to the boys and we would stop and

discuss different sections of the book. I worked with these boys from September through December. During this time, we read the book *Tookie Williams and Three Brothers*. The students were enthusiastic about the book and based on our conversations they would go home and share different sections we read with their mothers. During these mornings there were no incidents with these students and it was a very enjoyable and teachable time.

As per the agreement with the administrator, I escorted the young men back to their classrooms to ensure they arrived. On several occasions other educators often addressed one young man who is included in the referral section of this study, quite harshly. They would ask, “What are you doing in the hall?” or, “What did you do now?” I remember several teachers asking him, “Why can’t you behave?” or saying, “I see you’re in trouble again.” Even though he was walking with me, all the educators who spoke to him assumed he was in trouble. And some educators never spoke to him at all; they simply walked by with a smirk on their face or refused to acknowledge him. I will introduce this young man later on in my study.

Ultimately what a person says is usually a glimpse to what they believe and/or how they think. As educators walk through the halls of any school, conversations are usually very professional. But when students are not around, you can hear frustration, anger, anxiety, sarcasm, excitement, accomplishments and even fear from educators – either behind closed doors or in whispered exchanges. Even off – comments reveal underlying perceptions that promote the stereotypical thinking of some educators about the students they teach, the families and parents they serve and their personal feelings about teaching at BSH. As the participant/observer in this study during my time at BSH, I would often take notes of comments made in the halls and staff meetings. The following remarks were comments that I documented related to student behavior.

Disparaging Comments Referencing Families of Students at BSH

“Oh my God, they’re breeding!” This was said about a mother who was pregnant and whose multiple children were perceived as problem students. She also had a reputation of being an unreliable parent. Another teacher quipped, “Have you met their parents? Now you know where they get it!” These kinds of comments often referenced a student who was exhibiting inappropriate behavior – perceived to be similar to his or her parents. When a parent would come to school and cause a commotion by cursing, screaming, or threatening an educator, administrator, or another parent, teachers would often react by saying, “The apple didn’t fall far from the tree.” Sometimes teachers would get defensive with such comments as: “I didn’t give birth to them!” This was often heard from educators who took offense at being blamed for anything that had gone wrong with a student or their class. A teacher also might say, “taxpayers’ dollars at work.” This comment was often directed at something given to or done for an individual, groups of students or families that the educator felt did not deserve or appreciate. In each of these instances, teachers made remarks that revealed an underlying lack of respect or regard for certain students and their families.

Comments That Reveal the Frustration and Fear of Some Educators

Other comments from teachers revealed fear. It was not uncommon to hear a teacher say, “I’m concerned for my safety.” Another might say, “I have been called everything under the sun,” referring to being cursed at or called names by a student. Many of these responses are the teacher’s reactions to the stress of their job, verbal abuse from some students, or the lack of training when handling challenging behaviors. It was obvious that fear sometimes hindered educators from responding in proactive and positive ways. At times, at the peak of their frustration I documented comments directed at particular students.

Disparaging Comments about Some of the Students at BSH

“Can you say ADHD?” This comment was made in relation to a student who was not medically diagnosed as having attention deficit disorder but was perceived as showing the same symptoms. Another teacher referred to a student who was behaving in a bizarre manner as “two fries short of a happy meal”; while another student was described as being “a perfect reason for sterilization!” These problematic statements were said about students who were perceived to have challenging behaviors. Still another teacher asked, “Can I be unprofessional right now?” before making an off-key comment that was inappropriate and disrespectful. One teacher claimed that a student said and did things just to agitate her. Her frustration led her to interpret the student’s actions, behaviors, choices and comments as being a personal attack. “He is a royal pain in my ass.” Her comments made it clear that the student that was a constant annoyance and she and the student had not established a relationship. I also documented multiple instances when teachers disregarded the HIPPA privacy rule and publically announced the absence of medication when students acted in an inappropriate manner, saying “They didn’t have their meds.” According to HIPPA an individual’s health information is private and should only be shared by permission of the individual or guardian¹

Many educators would refer to students who were known to exhibit challenging behaviors as “heavy hitters or frequent flyers.” This reference was used for students who often received an in-school suspension, or were suspended for inappropriate behavior on a regular basis. These comments could be heard throughout the building in the halls, in team meetings and in the office about students who had a reputation for being in trouble. “He is immature, he whines, I don’t know, I don’t understand, I can’t do it, I need a pencil, I need paper. WELL, I

¹ (www.hhs.gov/ocr/privacy).

NEED AN ASPIRIN!” said one teacher, mocking a specific student who totally frustrated her by acting immaturely for his age.

A teacher’s negative attitude and expectations can have a damaging effect on a student’s academic success (Ferguson, 2001; Skiba, 2001; and Townsend, 2000). It is important that educators do not stereotype students, their abilities or their families. Negative perceptions tend to lock students into categories that are seen as unchangeable, which obstructs the educator’s ability to view these students as being full of potential and promise (Gay, 2000; Harry & Klingner, 2006). Perceptions are not easily hidden and can demean and humiliate the student, which in turn will hinder the educators’ ability to successfully meet their academic needs.

Teachers have been challenged by students perceived as disrespectful and uncooperative since colonial times and the days of the one-room schoolhouse (Danforth & Smith, 2005; Marzano, 2003). When schools were originally established, they were created with a very different purpose. Schools today do not serve the same purpose as they did at the turn of the century and therefore function very differently. What also has changed are specific behavioral issues teachers confront, as well as the severity of challenges students demonstrate, the diverse population of students, the complexity of cultures in any one school; and the ever-evolving mission of public schools in the 21st century (Cornell & Mayer, 2010). I begin this study with the historical background of how public schools developed in the United States.

Historical Background of Public Schools

Schools were not originally established for diverse populations. In the early 1900s public schools were built with tax dollars to serve middle class white students (Danforth & Smith, 2005). Political leaders founded them for the purpose of teaching middle class values and the democratic process. In the early part of the 20th century, which brought an influx of immigrants,

unique challenges emerged. Educators were not equipped to teach students from diverse backgrounds, including students who spoke foreign languages at home and English at school. As industry continued to evolve, schools and society were pressured to change. Along with the arrival of people from other nations, Americans migrated from the country to the city and from the South to the North to work in factories. As the influx of immigrants grew, opportunities for employment decreased. This resulted in many unemployed youth and was accompanied by an increase in incidents of juvenile delinquency. Additionally, many children faced social prejudices, unfair laws and poverty (Butts & Cremin, 1953; Danforth & Smith, 2005).

As the educational field began to develop, educational leaders rose in prominence among politicians and businessmen. They made decisions based on their scientific and professional training. And since many educational leaders were influenced by wealthy businessmen, the priority for educating working class students shifted to accommodating the need to train workers for jobs in factories. “Early forms of ability tracks were designed to instill in working-class and poor students the limited aspirations and efficient habits needed for a life of manual, industrial labor with low pay and little opportunity for advancement” (Danforth & Smith, 2005, p.19). These special classes were developed for poor, immigrant, and delinquent children.

The mental health field also began to grow in the United States and young people who refused to conform were considered juvenile delinquents. Their character was described as defective (Butts & Cremin, 1953). The problem was commonly described as, “the juvenile delinquent ... the disrespectful and dangerous child (typically a boy) of urban factory worker parents. The juvenile delinquent was seen as wild and menacing, a threat to the social order” (Danforth & Smith, 2005, p. 17). The new mission of public schooling was to correct the “perceived weaknesses in the child-rearing practices of working-class families, approaches that

reformers viewed as failing to instill the values of cleanliness, obedience to authority, and hard work” (p. 17). Consequently, the new mission was teaching submission rather than independent thinking.

In the beginning of the 20th century the mental health community’s response to deviant and nonconforming behavior led to the creation of a federal agency aimed at preventing juvenile delinquency. It was established on the premise “that social problems in the community were manifestations of mental disease and could be prevented and/or treated if qualified mental health professionals were available” (Danforth & Smith, 2005, p. 21). The commonly held belief was that if mental disease was addressed, social problems in the community could be eradicated. Child guidance clinics began to appear in urban areas to work with poor families. Many of them were affiliated with the juvenile court system. As the roles of the child guidance clinics began to shift from treating urban lower working class and immigrants to treating children of middle-class businessmen, the juvenile delinquent was now coined “the problem child” (Danforth & Smith, 2005, p. 22). New rules began to surface for compulsory attendance in schools. Therefore, the new guidelines required a minimum attendance period. “Thousands of recalcitrant or slow-witted children who would have formerly dropped out were now the responsibility of the schools” (Butts & Cremin, 1953, p. 415). The problems assisting children considered abnormal, violent, anti-social were not only shifted to schools, but to the courts, police and the army.

In the middle of the 20th century federal legislation was enacted to support special education. As the special education field began to develop, the number of students who were labeled as seriously emotionally disturbed increased. As a result, the term ‘Emotional Disturbance’ (ED) became a common label: ED has remained an uncontested explanation for deviant or unruly behavior. That lack of critical analysis allowed ED programs to continue as

segregated settings primarily for boys of working-class, lower class, and / or minority group status, a state of affairs that still exists today ... in most school districts, ED is virtually synonymous with ‘angry black male or angry poor male’ (Danforth & Smith, 2005, p. 29).

Another label that is also highly correlated with behavior challenges in schools is attention deficit disorder (ADHD). Research shows that approximately one out of ten school-age children are diagnosed as having some form of attention disorder. For every one female there are approximately five males that are diagnosed with ADHD (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2011; Association for Youth, Children and Natural Psychology, 2012; Gurian & Stevens, 2011; & Stein, 1999). ADHD is defined by the American Psychiatric Association “as developmentally inappropriate attention and/or hyperactivity and impulsivity so pervasive and persistent as to significantly interfere with a child’s daily life” (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2011, p. 8). Students with ADHD have difficulty transitioning between activities and they struggle with initiating and completing tasks; they can be very disruptive and noncompliant in the classroom. As a result, “... family members and teachers who do not understand the neuropsychological underpinnings of ADHD may assume that the child with ADHD is undisciplined, unmotivated, or willfully disruptive” (Stein, Efron, Schiff & Glanzman 2002, p. 400). Impulsiveness and aggression are some of the commonly noted problems on discipline referrals (Hunsucker, 1993). In every classroom there are diverse needs and “best practice must come together to meet the needs of all” (Schwarz, 2006, p. 19).

One goal for 21st century schools in America is to create environments where American students excel in comparison to students in other parts of the world (Austin, 2000). However, there is a fair degree of disagreement on how to achieve these goals (Noguera, 2003a, 2003b).

According to Austin (2000) eight educational goals outlined under the Bush administration for our U. S. schools were:

1. Every child will start school ready to learn.
2. High school graduation rates would increase to at least 90%.
3. All American students in grades 4, 8, and 12 would demonstrate competency in English, math, science, history, and geography.
4. All teachers would be provided with preservice and professional development to increase their skills to teach with rigor.
5. The United States would be first in the world in science and math achievement.
6. Every American adult would be literate and possess skills to compete in our global economy.
7. Every school in the United States would be free from drugs, violence, alcohol, and unauthorized use of firearms.
8. Parent partnerships and involvement would be encouraged and increased in schools.

More than ten years later we have a new president, a new education commissioner, and new directives, yet many of America's prior educational goals remain unachieved. In this study I address one of these unmet goals: reducing violence and discipline problems in our public schools. Research shows that throughout the U.S., schools are punishing the students who have the most significant academic, social, economic, and emotional needs. Black and Latino males are suspended or expelled from the learning environment at a higher rate than any other gender or ethnic group (Gordon, Piana, & Keleher, 2001; Gregory, 1995; Losen & Orfield, 2005; Monroe, 2005, 2006a; Noguera, 2003b; Rocque, 2010; & Skiba, 2000).

Although legalized racial segregation no longer exists, “a fact that is difficult to ignore is that schools find multiple ways to segregate students along existing lines of inequality” (Ferri & Connor, 2006, p. 12) by the disproportionate labeling and disciplining of students of color, both of which function to undo many of the gains associated with school desegregation. Many times the environment is simply not structured to successfully accommodate the population that the school wants to help. Such inadequate environments are ripe for producing failure.

A Structurally Violent Society

An environment constructed to breed failure according to Watt and Erevelles (2004) is one that is structurally violent. Structural violence refers to “... an oppressive social condition that forces students to feel vulnerable, angry and resistant to the normative expectations of prison-like school environments” (p. 271). Additionally, structural violence, also referred to as institutional violence, is shaped by oppressive social conditions. Violence can also be masked by procedures practiced in institutions that adversely impact individuals or groups by burdening them psychologically, mentally, culturally, spiritually, economically or physically. In other words, violence is not always intentional physical contact; “institutions that fail to address problems, or perceived problems with humanistic interventions and violate student’s rights through punitive policies” can cause violence (Finley, 2006, p. 122). For instance, schools in the 21st century, particularly large urban schools, have begun to resemble prison-like settings. School buildings are now equipped with police officers, security cameras, metal detectors, and security wands. Random searches of lockers and bags are a routine part of the school day in many districts (Noguera, 2003b).

Prior to conducting this research, I would have summarized what I experienced as a teacher at BSH as an overall lack of support, with neither teachers nor students feeling

adequately supported by the disciplinary systems that were operating at the school. My rationale for the study is grounded in my own concerns about the disproportionate rate of African American males placed in special education in the areas of intellectual disabilities and emotional behavior disorders (O'Connor & Deluca-Fernandez, 2006; Harry & Klingner, 2006; and Harry & Anderson, 1994), as well as their overrepresentation among students who receive restrictive and harsh disciplinary sanctions, such as suspensions and expulsions (Skiba et al., 2011).

Given the number of students that I personally know who have ended up in the prison system, I also hoped to document a system of supports that could interrupt the school-to-prison pipeline (Welch & Payne, 2010), which I had personally witnessed. Over the course of this study, I switched hats between that of a researcher and an active participant. My initial hope was that I would be able to document ways that positive behavioral supports could have been a positive force at BSH and a way to support more affirming outcomes for students who struggled in school, particularly for students of color. Specifically the purpose of my dissertation was to explore:

1. How are at-risk students understood and discipline procedures implemented within the context of one urban school?
2. How are males of color constructed on discipline referrals; and what are the implications of the disciplinary procedures they experience?

I further hoped that by focusing on what was not working for particular students I would be able to identify practices that would better support all students, in all types of learning environments. In this study, I utilize qualitative methods. As a participant/observer I focused on how individuals make choices and make judgments that are restricted within an educational institution.

I narrate how participants interact dependently and independently in an urban school community (Maanen, 1988). In my dual role as teacher and researcher, I carefully negotiated my role as insider and outsider. I learned the different aspects of the culture of BSH as I collected large amounts of data. I became familiar with and analyzed one urban school culture that was simultaneously familiar to me and yet, in some ways, totally new and strange. I made an effort to not take anything for granted (Alvesson, 2003). I increased the potential for gathering rich data by using participant observations, semi-structured interviews, and document reviews as a way to triangulate my findings (Alvesson, 2003; Wolcott, 1999).

Format of Study

A vital part of my dissertation that I brought to this study as a researcher was deciding what story to tell and how the story would be presented – ideally, without distortion (Maanen, 1988). In particular, I had to decide whether to focus on students for whom the behavioral supports seemed to be working or those for whom they were clearly not working. Additionally, I had to make a decision whether to focus on the students, educators or data collected from meetings and documents. I decided to start by disaggregating the behavioral referrals based on gender, type of incident, the referring adult and actions taken. My rationale was to look at the current systems of behavior, referrals, suspensions, and expulsions that did not work – particularly for the two highest referred students who were constantly targeted for disciplinary actions. The response to their behaviors at BSH appeared to escalate and in turn alienate these particular students from the staff. It is not my intention to place blame on any one group or entity. It is my goal to identify how these constructs are created to affect what we see in our schools and to find solutions that produce positive outcomes.

Throughout this study, the terms African American and Black are used inter-changeably since this is how they are referenced in the literature and semi-structured interviews, and all references to race are capitalized. I have included an appendix for some of the forms used in the school, but to preserve privacy, identifying information has been removed. The literature documents the connection between students of color being overrepresented in discipline and suspensions; therefore overrepresentation will be defined as when the identified population of a group exceeds the group by 10% or more (Rocque, 2010).

In chapter two, I discuss the difference between discipline and punishment. I also look at how culture, race, class, and gender help shape definitions of discipline. Also included in my review of literature is an examination of how zero tolerance policies were developed in our public schools and their impact. I look at how student success or failure is used as a predictor for the school-to-prison pipeline. Through the literature I chart what research tells us about the perspectives of educators and finally, new approaches some schools are using to respond to student behavior, including school-wide positive behavior support.

In chapter three, I explain how grounded theory was used as data was collected, analyzed and categorized. Also included in this chapter is a description of the selection process of participants, my role as a participant/observer, and the limitations of the study.

In chapter four, I present the steps The Brick School House (BSH) undertook as it changed from being a school without any formal discipline plan to one that employed a school-wide system of strategies called Positive Behavior Support, in order to change the learning environment. My findings demonstrate how a predictable structured environment helps support teaching and learning for typical classrooms. However, I also address how simply

implementing procedures does not necessarily support all types of learning environments or students.

In chapter five, I focus on how the Brick School House (BSH) used referrals to track inappropriate behavior. I list descriptive statistical information about student behavioral referrals at BSH. I also describe how forms and codes used to describe student behavior were revised. Finally, I summarize data from one full year of disciplinary referrals that I collected, categorized and analyzed that led to my decision to focus on the two highest referred students.

In chapter six and seven, I analyze data from referrals for Sonie and Sam, the two male students who received the most referrals of any attending BSH. In particular, I examined how the codes assigned by the administrators, and how the point of view from referring teachers further constructed these students as “problems.”

In chapter eight, I present how the findings of this study help to inform each research question. Specifically, I summarize my findings consider their implications. I also discuss additional studies that may prove to be helpful for parents, educators and policy makers. I examine how the structure of a school environment contributes to the success or failure of Students particularly those who struggle with behavior. I share how psychological, mental and cultural violence can be more brutal than physical violence. I also share ways to deconstruct the school-to-prison pipeline; and document ways that an established positive behavior support system can enhance opportunities to create more positive outcomes for students who struggle in school, particularly students of color.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

In this chapter, I review the literature beginning with the transformation of discipline through history. I address the distinction between discipline and punishment from a theoretical perspective. Next, I use the literature to explicate how discipline is defined by, culture, gender, race, and class. I present the historical progression of zero tolerance in 21st century schools, and trace how academic failure and out-of-school suspensions contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline. I then present literature on teacher perspectives and review some of the various behavior management techniques that are currently utilized in schools. Finally, I review several types of positive alternatives that aim to promote a safe and positive school environment.

Transformation of Discipline Through History

Discipline has changed dramatically from the early 1900s from corporal punishment as the primary approach to controlling student behavior, toward the more modern approaches we see in 21st century schools. Charles (2011) outlines the transformation of discipline in schools using a timeline that tracks how school discipline transitioned from corporal punishment to a more democratic approach.

In the 1900s, based on the practice of B. F. Skinner, educators began utilizing his idea that, “our voluntary actions are influenced by what happens to us immediately after we perform a given act” (Charles, 2011, p. 63). Examples of “reinforcing stimuli that are now commonly used in the classroom include: ... peer approval; awards, free-time, smiles, nods, and praise. Teachers used rewards such as candy, popcorn and other tangible objects” (p. 64). However, educators soon discovered that intrinsic learning was not influenced by external rewards. In other words, once the reward was attained or removed, the undesirable behavior often

reappeared. Nonetheless, behavior modification based on the work of Skinner remains very popular.

Additionally, several alternatives to behavior modification emerged. Redl and Wallenberg (1951) for example studied how students behave differently when socializing in groups compared to how they behave as individuals. Their work sparked a more progressive approach to modern discipline because they believed that if educators understood group dynamics they could more effectively deal with individual behavior. In 1969, Glasser (psychiatrist and educational consultant) wrote the influential book *Schools without Failure*. From his work, three new ideas regarding behavior emerged: 1) Failure reduces a student's motivation to persevere; 2) student behavior is a choice and educators' must help students to make better choices; and 3) classroom meetings were integral in helping students reflect on any difficulties encountered in the classroom environment. Many of Glasser's ideas such as classroom meetings continue to be influential, particularly in early childhood education.

Kounin (1970) an educational psychologist conducted one of the first studies of classroom management. His findings suggested that four critical attributes were needed for teachers to run an effective classroom.

1. "With-it-ness," which is an awareness of behavior in the classroom, and the ability to give attention to, prevent, or stop inappropriate behavior immediately.
2. Momentum in presentation of curricula or the appropriate pacing of instruction.
3. Clear expectations communicated to students; and
4. Rigorous lesson planning for whole-group and independent seatwork.

More studies followed that placed more of an emphasis on teaching practices as a way to influence student behavior. For example in 1971, Kounin concluded that students behave more

appropriately when the class is organized and lesson delivery is engaging. Teacher consultants, Lee and Marlene Canter (1976), instructed educators in how to be kind but firm. They suggested that teachers demonstrate the right to teach and students' right to learn without disruption.

In 1988, Curwin, a teacher educator, and Mendler, a school psychologist, taught the importance of maintaining order in the classroom in ways that students were able to maintain self-respect. Educators Harry and Rosemary Wong, in their book *The First Days of School*, taught the importance of spending time in the first month of school teaching student procedures in order to create and maintain an orderly classroom, so that effective practice could take place.

In 1996, Payne an educator and consultant introduced the idea that students from low economic backgrounds act in ways that are different from higher economic groups. Payne advocated for children to be taught a separate set of behaviors for school. She believed that, many behaviors exhibited by students help them survive in their home environment but create challenges in school. Since schools are structured in ways that reflect middle class values and expectations, when students exhibit behaviors that are not aligned to middle class contexts they experience negative consequences. According to Payne, effective discipline strategies teach students self-governance of structure and choice as they learn the expectations in the school setting. Students also learn the consequences for choosing to ignore those expectations.

Although Payne's deficit-based approach has been criticized for its focus on viewing the problem

within the student, rather than within the school context, BSH encouraged all of their staff to participate in workshop training that promoted Payne's philosophy.

In more recent work, Borba (2001) encouraged educators to teach students intrinsic values to highlight the importance of distinguishing right from wrong, and to act in an ethical

and honorable fashion. Also in 2001, Kohn a consultant advocated for treating students as vital contributors to the classroom community. Crone a psychologist, and Horner, an educator, coauthored *Building Positive Behavior Support Systems in Schools* (2003). Their book offers educators strategies that help students to be successful. Crone and Horner's book includes instructions for how to use functional behavior assessments (FBA) and behavior support plans (BSP) in schools. Finally, Sugai and Horner (2009), encourage a school-wide approach that implements preventative measures while acknowledging positive behavior. The more recent works of Crone and Horner, (2003) and Sugai and Horner, (2009), are also used for staff training at BSH. The educational philosophy for discipline must be predetermined and settled in every school. Is the focus to punish or to discipline?

A Theoretical Perspective on Discipline vs. Punishment

Yang (2009) describes the distinct difference between discipline and punishment. Yang defines discipline as “an act of rigorous physical or mental training” (p. 49). In other words, discipline is a learned behavior in response to specific situations; thus, discipline provides learning opportunities. Yang, also describes discipline as “part of a rigorous craft that demands intensive work and painstaking creativity towards a common goal, it should be transformative” (p. 53).

Yang (2009) describes punishment as “retribution for an offense” (p. 49), i.e., consequences for failing to respond in an expected manner. In a school setting punishment often involves removal of the individual from the learning environment, such as the practice of sending students to the office or in-school suspension. Although physical punishment may stop negative behavior in the short-term, the most effective outcomes are produced when children are

encouraged to exercise self-discipline, and are able to internalize desired expectations (Oshner, Bear, Sprague, & Doyle, 2010; Ward, 1998).

Gregory (1995) suggested that when corporal punishment is used, it unfairly targets male students, particularly African American males. The research also shows that African American and Latino males are 16 times more likely to be physically disciplined and suspended than their White male peers (Dupper, 2010; Gregory, 1995; Gregory, Russell & Noguera, 2010). In linking these data to the “school-to-prison pipeline.” It was revealed that African American males represented 13% of the American population but represented 50% of the prison population (Gregory, 1995). Statistics show that “some states are said to predict the number of prison beds they will need in a decade based on 3rd grade reading scores” (Darling-Hammond, 2010, p. 24). There is also a circular relationship between behavior and learning. If students are suspended they are missing valuable opportunities to learn while students who struggle academically are more likely to receive disciplinary sanctions.

According to Crone, Horner, and Hawken (2004), it is imperative that the entire staff supports the behavioral philosophy adopted by the school. Administrators should ensure that procedures and expectations are reviewed regularly and taught to new staff. In addition to building-wide discipline procedures, an effective system also plans and implements for building-wide consequences. However, the literature suggests that prescribed building-wide consequences are often implemented as a one-size fits all approach, which today takes the form of zero tolerance (Skiba, 2000).

Discipline in schools began as a harsh response to society’s perception of unruly behavior. Initially, many strategies used in schools took on the form of punishment. As behavior philosophy transformed, so did our schools. Some schools have taken a democratic

perspective using character development and positive behavior supports, while others follow more behavioral approaches. Some adopt school-wide plans, while others do not. The literature shows that discipline works best when it is intrinsic and provides learning opportunities (Yang, 2009). However, the data shows that schools are increasingly relying on zero tolerance approaches.

Many schools are increasingly using behavioral referrals to isolate students through suspensions and expulsions. Students who struggle in school settings should have many options available to them. Effective educators access multiple methods of interventions. However, we should expect that certain learners exhibit behavior challenges based on their environment, personal experiences, and learned coping skills, as well as the availability of positive supports in the school. These are the students that tend to receive multiple referrals; and these are the students who need extra attention and support. In this study this type of student is described as 'At-Risk'. "At-Risk" is defined as any student who is in danger of completing his or her education without an adequate level of skills" (Slaven & Madden, 1989, p. 4). At-risk conditions are not always clearly defined but, educators always have the ethical responsibility to take immediate and appropriate action (Manning & Baruth, 1995). It is my desire that through this research, valuable information will be gained and used to assist in finding positive ways to help all students become successful adults.

Empirical Perspectives

Twenty-first Century Tracking

In today's schools, behavior referrals are used to document what administrators and staff have identified as inappropriate behavior. Office referrals were once reserved for serious offenses. The research of Boynton & Boynton (2005), demonstrate that teachers with poor

classroom management skills will often over-use referrals and frequently send students to the office. Therefore, clear guidelines must be established, and administrators must closely monitor all referrals in order to provide over-referring teachers with resources and training to improve their classroom management skills.

Administrators respond to student misbehavior in multiple ways. Strategies vary school-to-school as well as within individual school buildings. For example, administrators may respond to student misbehavior with expulsion, or placement in alternative school programs; and in some states corporal punishment is still allowed. As Noguera (2003a) writes, many of the measures taken to secure schools are largely symbolic. They are intended to send the message that those in authority can maintain order and security we should not confuse security with a school environment that is safe, nurturing, and supportive of teaching and learning (p. 105).

Some schools respond to student's behavioral problems in ways that target particular students unfairly. Discrepancies between school responses to student behavior are "magnified when student gender and socioeconomic status are considered concurrently with students' ethnicity and race" (Monroe, 2006b, p. 163). Studies show that culture, gender, race and class are sometimes used to define what discipline is and what it should look like in a school environment. Over the past 25 years racial and economic biases in school suspensions and expulsions have been studied with consistent results (Skiba, 2000). Case studies from schools in different states all report similar outcomes in terms of the disproportionate number of African American and Latino males suspended or expelled from public schools. Studies indicate there is cultural, racial, and/or class bias in the referral process (Darensbourg, Perez & Blake, 2010; Dupper, 2010; Noguera, 2003a).

According to research studies, discipline is very subjective when the topic of discipline is combined with multiple variables for example: culture, gender, race, and class it only exacerbates the issues (American Psychological Association, 2008; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, and Peterson, 2002). In the following section discipline is defined by each variable independently. By defining discipline in this manner, I hope to bring understanding to the importance of applying discipline strategies to individual circumstances rather than using a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach.”

Discipline Defined by Culture

“Culture can be defined as the ideas, customs, or skills of a people or group that are transferred, communicated, or passed along, as in succeeding generations” (Neufeldt & Guralnik, 1997, p. 337). It is imperative that there are educators who are culturally sensitive, especially when they are working in diverse environments. When educators do not have “positive attitudes toward, expectations of, and interactions with students of color, problems ensue” (Gay, 2000, p. 46). Racial biases, ethnic stereotyping, cultural ethnocentrism, and personal rejections cause teachers to marginalize and even fear some African American, Latino, Native American, and Asian American students in their classrooms. Membership in an ethnic group is not necessary for an educator to be effective, what is important is their cultural acceptance and sensitivity (Gay, 2000).

There is currently a shortage of African American teachers and administrators. Additionally, many teachers lack cultural knowledge to understand and adapt to their classroom audience. When student behavior is misinterpreted by a teacher, it creates a ‘disconnect’ between that teacher and his/her student (Ferguson, 2001; Harry & Klinger, 2006; Monroe, 2006b; Monroe & Obidah, 2004).

The American educational system has created an environment that stereotypes Black children. This type of environment creates a foundation that is fertile for negative, self-fulfilling prophecies. Importantly, “Black teachers ... serve as role models to Black students, illustrating to young Blacks that such aspirations are attainable” (Meier, Stewart & England, 1989, p. 74). However, Black student enrollment is growing faster than the number of Black teachers acquiring teaching positions. Our educational system must train teachers and create environments where Black children are acknowledged and encouraged to thrive regardless of cultural differences (Harry & Klingner, 2006; 2005; Lynch, 2006).

Although admittedly a generalization, it is common for Black parents and Black teachers to tell children/students exactly what they want them to do (Delpit, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 2000). This direct and explicit style of discipline is sometimes described as an authoritarian approach. In other cultures, parents are more likely to negotiate with the child. Conversations between parent and child in a Black family may seem harsh and discipline too direct, in the view of middle-class White parents, or teachers who are unaccustomed to a Black-centric use of tone, verbiage or physical contact (Baumrind, 1972). In fact “one of the reasons White teachers have difficulty motivating and disciplining Black children is the cultural dissonance that occurs when the teachers behave differently from the way the children expect authority figures to behave” (Hale, 1982, p. 68). Moreover, “... European-American teachers may be unfamiliar and uncomfortable with the active and boisterous interaction demonstrated by African American males” (Skiba, 2000, p. 12). Fear may also play a role in how African American males are stereotyped as threatening, which only contributes to the misunderstanding of African American cultural and social norms (Harry & Klinger, 2006; Townsend, 2000).

In a qualitative case study, Monroe and Obidah (2004) focused on an urban classroom of 22 students led by an African American teacher with 10 years experience. The data included 26 field observations as well as interviews. The purpose of the study was to observe how an African American teacher managed her class (12 African American boys, 9 African American girls, and, one, White student). Specifically, the researchers wanted to see how a teacher's cultural background influenced her middle-school classroom. Monroe and Obidah concluded that cultural factors had a significant impact on the teacher's style and ability to maintain order and create an environment conducive for learning. The researchers stated that working within a culturally responsive framework creates an environment in which students can relate, feel safe and be successful.

Monroe and Obidah (2004) also noted that culturally responsive pedagogy is often incongruent with mainstream school norms (Gay, 2000; Harry & Klinger, 2006; Skiba et al., 2011). Harry and Klingner (2006) draw on Gramsci's definition of cultural hegemony, (culturally informed set of beliefs, and practices) that "infiltrate the values and behaviors of all sectors of society and are valued and privileged above all others ... that explicitly and implicitly favor the dominant culture ..." (p. 42). These findings demonstrate that whatever is considered the norm in all other cultures is accepted or rejected, based on how well those norms align with White, middle-class American values. The resulting discriminatory practices are not applicable to one group of people, but are implicated by all members, within and across races, classes and cultures. As a result, there is a need for culturally responsive educators who are trained to be sensitive and accepting of all students (Gay, 2000; Harry & Klingner, 2006; Skiba et al., 2011).

When teachers align their practices with student culture, less disciplinary action is required. For example, when educators provide a positive classroom environment and create

opportunities for collaborative and positive student-to-teacher and student-to-student engagement, the probability of success for everyone increases. This also decreases the number of students sent to the office and those placed in/out of school suspension, thus eliminating lost learning time. Moreover, the way a culturally responsive teacher reacts to student behavior plays a pivotal role in effective classroom management (Darensbourg et al. 2010; Gay, 2000; Noguera, 1995).

A quantitative study by Neal, McCray, Webb-Johnson, and Bridgest (2003) focused on how teachers perceived student movement styles. The study included 91% of the teachers in three different suburban schools, which were racially, ethnically and socioeconomically similar. Walking styles were observed and coded as “standard-European American adolescents who walked with erect posture, steady stride and a straight head, and nonstandard African American adolescents whose walking style was characterized as a swaggered or bent posture, head slightly tilted to the side, foot dragging and exaggerated, knee bend (dip)” (p. 50). Teachers perceived both African American and European-American adolescents who moved in a standard manner as high academic achievers. African and European American adolescents who moved in a ‘nonstandard’ manner were perceived as low achievers.

The results of this study revealed that teachers negatively evaluated cultural behaviors and perceived nonstandard bodily movement as being aggressive and in need of special education services. Similarly, perceptions of communicative styles of African American males by their teachers have also been attributed to high referral rates of African American male students, compared to other student groups (Darensbourg et al., 2010; Rocque, 2010). The different cultural styles of poor and minority students can result in a mismatch between these

students and expectations set by dominant groups leading to their alienation and marginalization. (Morris, 2005).

According to Gay (2000) having a diverse staff within schools provides role models for students of color. However, simply having a diverse staff does not guarantee that these educators will be culturally sensitive. As Gay states "... knowledge and use of the cultural heritages, experiences, and perspectives of ethnic groups in teaching are far more important to improving student achievement than shared group membership" (p. 205). Gay (2000) further explains:

All teachers, regardless of their ethnic-group membership, must be taught how to do, and held accountable for doing, culturally responsive teaching for diverse students, just as students from all ethnic and racial groups must be held accountable for high-level achievement and provided feasible means to accomplish it (p. 206).

Teaching from a multicultural perspective supports democratic values, beliefs and affirms cultural diversity (Thompson, 2004).

Gender

White female educators have historically dominated traditional classrooms. According to Hale (1982) "The behavioral expectations of the typical classroom are said to be ... more natural for girls. Although White males experience conflict in the traditional classroom, Black males experience even more difficulty" (p. 107). Research supports this assertion that African American males are more likely to be suspended from school based on the teacher's perceptions about their attitude, body language, or verbal responses because these kinds of infractions can be very subjective (Casella, 2003; Ferguson, 2001; Gregory et al., 2010). Conversely, a White male

is most likely to be suspended based on having a weapon or visibly causing bodily harm, which are all less subjective offenses (Skiba, 2000).

Skiba et al. (2002) examined the impact of gender, race, and socioeconomic status on the frequency and consequences of disruptive behavior documented in an urban middle school. The study found that boys, regardless of race were more frequently engaged in disruptive behavior, but that African American students were subjected to more punitive consequences. Furthermore, the findings showed that there was differential treatment at the classroom level where students received more referrals due to subjective decisions. These consistent disparities show that Black students are suspended at higher rates due to perceived threats that are more subjective in nature (American Psychological Association, 2008; Skiba et al., 2002). The research also shows that Latino males experience the highest dropout rates, explaining why they also exhibit the lowest college attendance (Noguera, 2008).

Noguera (1995) notes a teacher who fears their student(s) are more likely to resort to some form of discipline when challenged; or will likely ignore the behavior in the hope that the disruption will cease. Rather than handling a classroom disruption on their own, fearful teachers are more likely to request assistance from the central office (p. 204). Thus, teachers who perceive certain students as a threat are less likely to effectively manage student behavior than a teacher who regards his/her students as nonthreatening. Effective educators guide other people's children toward success by teaching them as if they were their own (Delpit, 2006).

Race

“Historical stereotypes contribute to the beliefs of some educators that certain students have inherently low intelligence, if they exhibit stigmatized behavior, live in conditions of poverty or have detrimental family circumstances” (Harry & Klingner, 2006, p. 40). When an

educator misinterprets the behavior of students, it often influences their expectations. Studies show that “high referrals may be contributed to racism, classism, or cultural hegemony” (Harry & Klingner, pg. 41). If teachers have racist beliefs, it is difficult for them to separate their personal prejudice from discriminatory practices. It is also evident in the decisions they make and the way they regard the students they teach; for example, failing to set high academic and behavioral expectations (Ferguson, 2001; Gregory, et al. 2010; Harry & Klinger, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Monroe, 2005; & Noguera, 2003a).

Studies show that prejudice, stereotyping, and racism have a stressful impact on immigrants and native-born students of color. It affects their self-esteem, mental health, and academic achievement. Individuals do not have to experience this bias personally; it can also affect them if experienced by the group(s) they identify with (Gay, 2000; Harry & Klingner, 2006). A teacher’s stereotypical beliefs and negative attitudes will cause them to “...devalue, demean, and even fear some African American, Latino, Native American, and Asian American students in their classrooms” Gay, 2000, p.46). These findings are discouraging, particularly since the “heart of the educational process is the interactions that occur between teachers and students” (Gay, 2000. p.46).

Ferguson (2001) was a participant observer in an in-depth three-year study in a medium-sized school on the West Coast. As a part of the study Ferguson visited the students in their neighborhoods and homes. She examined their beliefs, social relationships and practices that placed a disproportionate number of Black males in “punishing rooms” (in school suspension). Ferguson identified racial inequalities that manifest in two ways: 1) institutional practices, norms and procedures used to maintain racial order; and 2) cultural representations of racial differences that resulted in a racial hierarchy at the school. Ferguson described the staff’s attitudes regarding

discipline and how the behavior of African American male students was typically interpreted, regardless of the student's intentions. Ferguson stated that foolish or inappropriate behavior of White males was seen as developmental, whereas the same behavior exhibited by Black males was considered criminal, thuggish and disrespectful. Black male behavior was interpreted as the beginning signs of possible future criminality. Teachers also perceived some students to be unsalvageable. Ferguson stated, "These Black male students are adultified" (p. 83), meaning that their behavior communicated a "sinister intentional fully conscious tone that is stripped of any element of childish naïveté" (p.90).

When segregation was legally practiced in America, it was very common for Black families and educational leaders to convey to Black children that they "would have to be twice as good as Whites and ... be prepared to deal with racism and bigotry" (Lynch, 2006, p. 3). Conversely, post civil rights Black families are more likely to place the blame more squarely on racists and racism and therefore, do not believe that their children should accept racist treatment as a matter of course (Cosby & Poussaint, 2007).

Unfortunately, because racism continues to exist it "perpetuates cultural dissension and an atmosphere of mistrust" (Lynch, 2006, p. 5). It also necessitates young students of color learning a host of contradictory lessons. For example, young African American and Latino/a students must be taught about their heritage, and at the same time they must also anticipate and recognize racism. African American parents must prepare their children during their first 18 years of life to go to college, develop their vision, and accomplish goals that will pave the way for a successful future while facing racial disparities (Lynch, 2006).

As stated previously, U.S. schools have a longstanding and pronounced problem of students of color being overrepresented in special education and disciplinary actions. In fact

two-thirds of school districts across the nation had disproportionate suspension rates for African Americans (Drakeford, 2006; Dupper, 2010; Fenning & Rose, 2007; Schwartz & Reiser, 2001; Skiba, 2001). These reports also revealed that minority students experienced more severe consequences for misbehavior than White students. In fact, African American expulsions and disciplinary violations significantly exceeded their percentage of the entire school's population. The high rate of suspensions creates an atmosphere of despair causing some students to develop negative attitudes, which hinders their success (Lynch, 2006).

Research indicates that where populations for Hispanic students are highest, there is a corresponding under-identification for students who may need special education supports – especially in the early grades. Under-identification is also prevalent in the later grades, when Latino/Latina students no longer receive support as English language learners. They too are disproportionately placed in special education and/or referred for disciplinary actions (Losen & Orfield, 2005).

A summation of research gathered by Harry and Klingner (2006) concluded that teachers demonstrated a fear of minority students. Racial bias was also evident in the teachers' demeanor, tone and mannerisms as well as in low expectations for students of color. Among the 12 schools included in their study, poor and African American populations experienced institutional bias. This contributed to their high risk of failure. The researchers stated that the amount of learning that takes place in the classroom is determined by how much each student is actively engaged in learning. Furthermore, "... the quality of life in an institutional environment is likely to be important in terms of both what is accomplished and how people feel about being in those environments ..." (Oakes, 1985, p. 115).

A distinct trait in the classroom environment is the development of student-to-student and student-to-teacher relationships. They help determine what type of instruction is presented and how much is learned (Oakes, 1985). Teachers' beliefs also affect the way discipline is handled in the classroom. Three approaches that are prevalent are: 1) belief that behavior is caused by the way the student thinks, therefore the focus is on helping to change the students' cognitive thinking, 2) belief that behavior is developmental, and thus the approach focuses on modeling appropriate behavior, and 3) belief that behavior is a learned response to prior stimuli and thus the approach seeks to monitor antecedents and establish appropriate consequences (Payne, 2006b, p. 8).

Class

The research of Payne (1996) purports that students who grow up in generational poverty have a different perspective of the world around them. Therefore, they do not react to middle-class norms and behave in opposition to hidden rules that govern our schools and society. Payne identifies two actions that assist an individual out of poverty – education and relationships. Educators can teach students to be successful if they teach them the hidden rules that govern specific spaces – especially school and the work force. In other words, in Payne's model, it is the student who is compelled to change, not the larger school context, which disadvantages particular learners, especially when teachers assume that it is the student's responsibility to adapt.

Additionally, according to Harry and Klingner (2006) schools tend to socially reproduce inequality because they:

reproduce rather than change the societal status quo, by preparing the children to function at the same societal level from which they came. Of course ... some children will beat

the odds. Nevertheless, the figures on the Black-White achievement gap indicate that the majority does not. The fact that schools socially reproduce inequality means that children from higher SES contexts will get better schooling than those from low SES contexts (pp. 23–24).

Statistics show that most teaching positions are held by middle-class European-Americans. Consequently classroom policies and expectations reflect the perspectives of the dominant group, regardless of the type of students occupying schools or classrooms (Gregory, et al., 2010; Harry & Klingner, 2006; Monroe, 2006b). There are many lost opportunities when students are not in the classroom for instruction. The intersectional of being Black, male, and having low-income status only contributes to the cultural divide that exists in schools. Studies indicate that high rates of expulsion for poor minority students contribute to low educational and behavioral expectations and help foster negative attitudes.

Ali and Dufresne (2008) and Gregory et al., (2010) reported that schools in districts with lower socioeconomic indicators suspend at higher rates than schools in higher socioeconomic communities. The statistics from Ali and Dufresne's study indicated that for the 2006-2007 school year, a Connecticut school district showed that although Black students were 14% of the total public school population they represented 35% of all suspended students. Additionally, Hispanic students made up 16% of Connecticut's public school population but represented 29% of students who were suspended. In fact, Black and Hispanic students were three times more likely to be suspended in Connecticut public schools than White students. The findings from Ali and Dufresne (2008) also indicated the following:

1. There is a significant educational cost to missing school, particularly for children most at risk of educational failure.

2. Suspensions may increase the risk of involvement in the juvenile justice system.
3. Suspensions can lead students to higher dropout rates.
4. Overreliance on exclusionary punishments and disproportionate suspension of minorities send the wrong message to children and adolescents and may undermine their confidence in their educational futures.
5. Children need a safe and respectful school environment in order to learn. There is little evidence that excluding students is an effective method of promoting discipline.
6. Preventive measures and nonexclusionary punishments are more effective methods of ensuring a safe and positive learning environment.
7. There is a significant education cost to missing school, particularly for children most at risk of educational failure. Suspensions may increase the risk of involvement in the juvenile justice system. Due to the large number of minority students experiencing suspensions a new policy was implemented in Connecticut effective July 1, 2009. It states that unless the infraction is behavioral i.e. dangerous to individual(s) or property, students will serve their suspensions in school (pp. 3-5).

The findings in Ali and Dufresne's (2008) report are reflective not just of Connecticut, but the entire United States. Culture, race and class are very broad categories that are used to determine why students are referred and how students are reprimanded. Each category is complex and adds to the challenging decisions attributed to the behavioral process. Consequences for undesirable behavior is often very subjective in nature; however, if culture, race and class were considered when making decisions in schools and classrooms it would minimize judgmental and bias decisions. Subsequently, due to the many subjective decisions regarding discipline in schools

laws were implemented which can sometimes be described as the one-size-fits-all approach – zero tolerance.

Zero tolerance

Many schools have adopted zero tolerance policies. In an effort to create safer environments, particularly in response to high profile school shootings, zero tolerance laws were passed (Skiba & Peterson, 1999) to deter the use of drugs, weapons, dangerous behavior and disruptions. These policies did little to address overrepresentation of students of color and, in fact, the bulk of literature on this topic shows that these policies have a detrimental impact on students of color (Dupper, 2010; NAACP, 2010; Noguera, 2003b; Skiba, 2000). Zero tolerance has become America's answer to keeping schools safe. Unfortunately, it has also become a discrete way of removing challenging students, including students with disabilities, and those who struggle academically (Casella, 2003; Dohrn, 2001; Gregory, et al. 2010). As Koch (2000) explains,

Zero tolerance was implemented after 'The Gun Free Schools Act' was passed in 1994.

This legislation included fighting, drug or alcohol use and gang activity, as well as relatively minor offenses such as possessing over-the-counter medications, disrespect for authority, sexual harassment, threats and vandalism (p. 187).

By following zero tolerance policies "some schools have been transformed into fortress-like facilities, fully equipped with metal detectors, surveillance cameras, security guards, and police officers" (Noguera, 2003a, p. 104). The implementation and enforcement of zero tolerance differs from state to state (Gordon, Piana, & Keleher, 2000; Skiba & Peterson, 1999), however, they share many features. According to the Civil Rights Project (2000) for instance:

Zero tolerance policies, by their nature, do not provide guidance or instruction ... these policies focus directly on harsh forms of punishment, which are inherently unjust, they breed distrust in students toward adults, and nurture an adversarial, confrontational attitude (p. VI).

Moreover, "... zero tolerance is always exclusionary ..." (Robbins, 2005, p. 2). When discipline is harsh and controlling, it only perpetuates defiance and alienation (Morris, 2005). In most states, African Americans are expelled at a disproportionate rate compared to their peers.

Christle, Nelson, and Jolivette (2004) completed a study that showed how the ineffective use of discipline led to the disproportionate suspensions and expulsions of African American males. Koch (2000) conducted a research study on the pros and cons of zero tolerance and found that a large number of African Americans were disproportionately expelled as alternative schools increased. Monroe (2006b) led a research study on the diverse behavioral styles of students of color particularly African American males. The findings revealed that the mannerisms of African American males are compared to mainstream norms and leads to misinterpretation and contributes to the disproportionate number of suspensions and expulsions.

Skiba et al., (2002) examined data from a middle school in an urban district and found that although boys were frequently engaged in disruptive behavior, African American males were subjected to more punitive consequences, which usually resulted in suspension or expulsion. And finally, Noguera (2008) identified the many lost opportunities to learn due to the disproportionate discipline of African American and Latino males suspended and expelled. Not only are students of color more frequently suspended, they also receive longer suspension times. Data from studies conducted in Baton Rouge, Louisiana revealed that schools that were part of desegregation initiatives had the highest rates of suspensions (Thornton & Trent, 1988).

Zero tolerance is very controversial and researchers convey many different opinions about its effectiveness. Some educators believe this practice is too harsh while others feel zero tolerance keeps schools safe. Advocates for zero tolerance state that the disproportionate number of African Americans expelled may simply indicate that the students as a group are misbehaving more often than their White peers. Others state that although teachers refer African Americans more often, once out of the classroom the consequences they receive are the same as White students.

The goal of zero tolerance is to relay the message that specific behaviors will not be tolerated and will be punished. Thus, “zero tolerance in its execution defines and polices the parameters of permissible behaviors ...” (Robbins, 2005, p. 2). Initiating zero tolerance assumes that by removing the unruly student it will deter others from disrupting the school environment (APA, 2008). Proponents also argue that zero tolerance must be strictly enforced without allowing any opportunity for subjective interpretation. They maintain that failure to administer the policy uniformly will send the wrong message to violators (Skiba, 2000).

Opponents of zero tolerance believe it promotes exclusionary practices and is a violation of students’ civil rights (Dohrn, 2001). Despite the current push for differentiated instruction, zero tolerance is used as an indiscriminate, uniform approach to discipline, whether you are 5 or 18 years of age (Schwartz & Rieser, 2001). According to Armistead (2008), zero tolerance is “... solely punitive, and lacks any positive connection to schools’ primary purposes: learning and development” (p. 24).

Some argue that zero tolerance fails to meet the needs of the students it was designed to protect because it is not child-centered and does not result in equitable enforcement of consequences (Leone, Mayer, Malmgren, and Meisel, 2000; Skiba & Peterson, 1999; Verdugo,

2002). For instance, “Zero tolerance policies are part of a trend to treat younger children as though they reason and behave like adults” (Schwartz & Rieser, 2001, p. 130). Consequently, “... zero tolerance policies may negatively affect the relationship of education with juvenile justice and appear to conflict to some degree with current best knowledge concerning adolescent development” (APA, 2008, p. 852). These policies have not made schools safer, but have simply displaced the problem to the legal system. In fact a national survey indicated the schools that use more components of zero tolerance are actually less safe (NAACP, 2010).

In American society democracy teaches us that justice and consequences should be administered fairly and any action taken should be in response to the offense, and not simply based on a one-size-fits all policy (Boylan, & Weiser, 2002; Darensbourg et al., 2010; Schwartz & Rieser, 2001; Skiba, 2000). Critics say zero tolerance does very little to teach students about either democracy or tolerance. Some believe these laws lack flexibility and do not allow the child’s age or past behavior to be taken into consideration when determining disciplinary outcomes. Because 55% to 65% of students punished under these policies are simply children who have made poor choices, zero tolerance laws do very little to teach students problem-solving skills or how to make meaningful decisions later in life (Finley, 2006; Koch, 2000; Robbins, 2005). Studies also show that 35% to 45% of suspensions are given to repeat offenders, further demonstrating the ineffectiveness of these policies (Schwartz & Rieser, 2001). Since zero tolerance policies were implemented, the number of students in possession of firearms has decreased but expulsions, suspensions, and alternative school placements have escalated.

Students who are at risk for academic failure demonstrate behaviors that are strong predictors for experiencing expulsion and suspension from school. Fighting is the most frequent reason for suspension, but the majority of suspensions are for much more minor infractions.

Elementary students who function below grade level, and who are at risk for academic failure will often exhibit disruptive behavior and demonstrate poor social skills if they do not receive sufficient support (Gordon et al., 2001; Mayer & Cornell, 2010).

At the middle-school level disrespect and disobedience are the main reasons given for suspension. In middle-school the problem is exacerbated when students fall further behind in their academics and disengage from school. In time, the behavior of these students results in suspension or expulsion, which, left unsupervised increases their chances of getting into trouble and falling even further behind academically (Gregory et al. 2010; Page, 2009; Skiba & Peterson, 1999). Students who are suspended multiple times will have a higher likelihood of dropping out of school (Gordon et al. 2000). Therefore, suspensions, academic failure and dropping out of school can be exploited as a means to push-out troublesome students (Cornell & Mayer, 2010; Christle et al., 2004; Dupper, 2010; Gordon et al., 2000; Gregory et al., 2010; Noguera, 2003b; Noltemeyer & McLoughlin, 2010; Oshner et al., 2010; Page, 2009; Skiba & Peterson, 1999).

In what Noguera (2003b) refers to as “the triage approach to schooling” (p. 346) educators make predictions about who will and will not succeed based on whom they suspend and expel. These perceptions about students contribute to the marginalization of certain students, “often pushing them out of school altogether while ignoring the issues that actually cause the problematic behavior” (p. 342). Many schools get stuck in a reactive mode (Oshner, 2010) instead of implementing preventative measures for student behavior. Too often school administrators and teachers fail to “... respond to the students’ needs or the factors responsible ...” (Noguera, 2003b, p. 342). Instead, schools resort to suspension, which amounts to

punishment by loss of instruction. Due to many missed opportunities to learn, students fall further behind as work becomes more challenging.

Students lose their incentive to stay in an environment where they feel helpless. Some students seem to decide “to make the lives of adults and other students miserable as their way of obtaining retribution for a failed education” (Noguera, 2003b, p. 344). Zero tolerance has only worsened this trend. Many negative effects are correlated with suspension and expulsion such as academic failure and getting into trouble with the legal system (Arcia, 2006; Gregory et al. 2010; Noltemeyer & McLoughlin, 2010; Skiba & Peterson, 2000). Statistics indicate that there is a high incidence of repeat offenders, who eventually drop out and get into serious trouble with the law. This has been characterized as the school-to-prison pipeline (Hagen, 2007).

School-to-Prison Pipeline

The term school-to-prison pipeline has been used to highlight ways that many of our public schools are beginning to model prison settings, thereby priming students to enter the prison population (Advancement Project et al. 2011; Welch & Payne, 2010).

The school-to-prison pipeline is: A set of policies and practices that make the criminalization and incarceration of children and youth more likely and the attainment of a high-quality education less likely. ... The emphasis of punitive consequences, student exclusion, and justice-system intervention over students’ right to an education (Advancement Project, 2011, p.2).

According to Noguera (2003b) “disciplinary practices in schools often bear a striking similarity to the strategies used to punish adults in society” (p. 342). Over the past 20 years urban schools have acquired high security measures and tactics that are severely punitive toward students’ of color especially African American males. Under such punitive discipline policies,

African American males are treated more severely for lesser infractions than students from other ethnic groups.

Black students are now three times as likely to be suspended and three-and-a-half times as likely to be expelled as White peers. These racial disciplinary disparities are mirrored by disparities in academic achievement, as graduation rates continue to be far lower for students of color than for their peers (Advancement Project, 2011, p. 3).

Simmons (2009) for instance, found that suspensions

diminish students' opportunities to learn skills that could possibly lead to employment.

Students without a high school degree are not highly marketable, and many youths who have been pushed out of school also feel pushed into illegitimate and punishable labor markets, such as drug dealing (p. 218).

Since the reauthorization of the elementary and secondary act, No Child Left Behind and a revised version of NCLB there has ironically been an increase in the number of minority students and students with disabilities involved in the juvenile justice system. Current policies in our schools which include zero tolerance have forced students out of school into unsupervised situations where they get into serious trouble with severe consequences (Advancement Project et al., 2011; Christle et al., 2004; Cornell & Mayer, 2010; Krezmien, Leone & Achilles, 2006).

A major concern about the school-to-prison pipeline is the lack of proactive and preventive approaches that support students and assist them in making positive choices. Many suspended students can least afford the lost opportunity to learn new skills and expand their academic knowledge. Suspensions that lead to lost time from the classroom only contribute to students falling further behind, which further discourages them and creates a disparaging

atmosphere of hopelessness (Casella, 2003; Christle et al., 2004; Cornell & Mayer, 2010; Lynch, 2006).

The Advancement Project (2011) proposes that changes be made to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) to dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline. There is a strong correlation between the under-educated, unemployed and the incarcerated because it creates a vicious cycle that leads from school to prison (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Positive change is necessary to provide students the supports needed to increase their chances of graduating or, in some cases, earning their general education diploma (GED). Additional changes would include diminishing the emphasis of standardized testing, providing professional development for teachers on classroom management, decreasing the involvement of law enforcement agencies in schools and addressing the challenges of supporting at-risk students who wish to re-enter the education system. Finally, diversity training should be provided for all stakeholders to ensure that stereotypical beliefs are dispelled. This would create an environment where all students would feel safe and educators could identify any bias and misnomers regarding the students they teach.

Teacher Perspectives

Both experienced and inexperienced teachers are guided by their beliefs, attitudes, priorities and experiences. The research of Harry and Klingner (2006) found that teachers perceived that most students exhibited bad behavior and a lot of anger, regardless of neighborhood or school, but the teacher's perspectives determined how the behavior was handled. The work of Harry and Klingner demonstrated that a teacher's perspectives had more influence than any other factor. When teachers believe they cannot adequately respond to discipline challenges, they refer student(s) to an administrator. Educators understand that

suspending or expelling students may not be the best course of action for the student; but they may believe it is the best situation for the classroom environment and the remaining students who are perceived as wanting to learn (Darensbourg et al., 2010; Noguera, 2003a; Page, 2009; Skiba, 2000). Educators justify their use of suspension and expulsion by their desire to maintain a safe environment, one that is conducive for learning. Yet, according to Harry and Klingner (2006) removing a child for behavior does nothing to reinforce democracy, stimulate higher level thinking and problem-solving; teach effective coping strategies, build relationships with teachers or peers, or expose students to rigorous learning opportunities.

All educators exercise their own subjectivities in regards to what an effective classroom environment should look like. These beliefs become their foundation for forming specific rules and goals. Yang (2009) classifies different classroom environments:

1. Chaotic classrooms – have little structure and engagement and lack consistent protocol regarding classroom management. This environment is not conducive for learning.
2. Repressive classroom – have stringent behavioral rules and non-negotiated consequences if rules are violated. The focus is on managing student movement and noise and this kind of environment often stifles thinking and reflection. This is sometimes referred to as the reformatory approach. The hidden curriculum in this kind of classroom is designed to prepare students for high-stakes testing. Yang describes this classroom as a “dam waiting to crack” (p. 55). It also requires many resources to produce and maintain results (i.e. deans, security officers, detention, counselors, school psychiatrists, campus police, and security cameras).

3. Liberal classrooms – are child-centered environments where students create, explore, and receive privileges. The goal of the teacher is to avoid chaos and to be liked. The results are often low-risk and low return. The environment is enjoyable and there are often good relationships between student and teacher. However, students are not always challenged to reach their full potential.

Yang (2009) identifies problems with both liberal and repressive classrooms. Both share an objective to simply avoid chaos, but they do nothing to promote optimum success or high standards for student behavior. Both types of teachers are critical of each other. One blames the other for being too authoritarian and the other too easy.

An alternative to the above classrooms is Classroom X, which Yang describes as a highly structured environment that encourages rigorous creativity, free expression, and risk-takers working within a collaborative community. A Classroom X teacher encourages students to take risks and provides the structure to do so. The teacher in this type of classroom exercises authority without being authoritarian. These classrooms can be found in varying degrees across content areas, different grade levels, and teacher to teacher, between schools and across districts. According to Yang (2009) the Classroom X structure produces optimum results.

Teachers who have little experience and are less confident will typically administer discipline inconsistently and convey feelings of inadequacy to students and staff (Rimm-Kaufman & Sawyer, 2004). These findings are particularly relevant to urban schools, which experience higher teacher turnover and often have to rely on less experienced and less qualified teachers. Moreover, every student will respond differently to various discipline techniques (Darensbourg et al., 2010; Gay, 2000; Gulcan, 2010; Noguera, 1995). Effective teachers learn to think and react quickly to develop their classroom space to provide an environment that is

conducive for learning for all students. Effective teachers establish and communicate expectations consistently throughout the school year. Teachers who take time to develop relationships with their students, develop rigorous lessons, and minimize transition time, will see greater academic achievement and fewer behavior problems (Gregory et al., 2010; Noguera, 1995; Oshner et al., 2010; Rimm-Kaufman & Sawyer, 2004; Ward, 1998).

It may be an obvious point, but “teachers cannot teach and students cannot learn in a climate marked by chaos and disruption” (APA, 2008, p. 852). Therefore, what is being done to teach those students who need the most help (i.e. those who are consistently missing school or who have unmet academic needs). Many schools are beginning to take a proactive approach not only to making schools safer, but also to ensure that all students are successful. This proactive approach used in our 21st century schools attempts to address both academic and behavioral challenges before they become major problems. Two models used at BSH were Response to Intervention (RTI) for academics and Positive Behavioral Supports (PBS) for behavior.

Response to Intervention

Response to Intervention (RTI) is used to assist students who are academically functioning below grade level. RTI is “a model for providing early intervention, one that efficiently and flexibly delivers educational assistance to at-risk learners to close skill or performance gaps with peers” (Wright, 2007, p.2). RTI is implemented based on levels of intensity. Students identified as at-risk are eligible for three tiers of support, which might take the form of :

Tier 1: Interventions are available to all students.

Tier 2: Interventions are individualized, and are taught on the students’ present academic level.

Tier 3: These services are available through special education.

In conjunction with RTI, Positive Behavior Supports (PBS) was implemented at BSH as their RTI for discipline problems. Both RTI and PBS provide high quality instruction, which is matched to the students' needs. Together, they take into consideration environmental factors as the students' growth is assessed and modified (Wright, 2007).

Positive Behavior Supports (PBS)

Many school districts are initiating some form of character development to create environments where students can learn, be safe and internalize what it means to be good citizens (Christle et al., 2004; Leone et al., 2000). Research has shown that schools are extremely successful when the staff receives professional development in behavior management, especially when taught proactive strategies (Bickmore, 2001; Horner, Sugai, Lewis-Palmer, & Todd, 2001). In the literature Positive Behavioral Supports (PBS), School-Wide Positive Behavioral Supports (SW-PBS) and Positive Behavioral Intervention Supports (PBIS) are used interchangeably to refer to systematic and positive approaches to providing interventions and supports for students.

PBIS is a concept and strategy originally developed for individuals with severe behavior problems and developmental disabilities. PBIS is included in the Individual Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) as a research-based intervention to address behavior. This approach is now used in multiple settings and for various groups of students, which includes whole schools and individuals with and without individualized education plans (IEPs) (Sugai & Horner, 2002).

PBIS was a school-wide behavior strategy that was implemented during the time of this study at the Brick School House. PBIS is not a new idea, but its approach for handling student behavior is different than typical models. All PBIS goals are based on the premise that all children can act appropriately "if effective practices are implemented with supportive systems

that define clear goals, provide administrative support, allocate adequate staffing, provide adequate budgeting and deliver regular feedback” (Horner et al., 2001, p. 77).

PBIS is a problem-solving model that is used to prevent inappropriate behavior through teaching and reinforcing appropriate behavior. PBIS strategies when implemented as designed can create a climate that is conducive to a positive and successful learning environment. Its goal is to focus on positive behavior and help students develop problem-solving abilities and functional coping strategies. The philosophy of PBIS is to teach multiple strategies that can be applied to multiple situations using proactive rather than reactive methods that focus only on punishing negative behavior. Research shows when punishment and exclusion are the only alternatives for responding to inappropriate behavior, change in the behavior is unlikely (Horner et al., 2001; Todd, Horner, Sugai, & Sprague, 1999).

This approach works best when it is supported by at least 80% of the staff (Horner et al., 2001). A core team creates a matrix of what expectations the school would like to focus on. A matrix is designed to share with everyone in the environment. Expectations are developed from building surveys, staff meetings, and/or specific assessment of locations, and finally from the review of referral documents that record the time and place of inappropriate behavior (Kartub, Taylor-Greene, March, & Horner, 2000).

The matrix illustrates what the expected behaviors look and sound like in every area in which students’ travel. The school adopts short, easy to say, and easy to remember statements that focus on the preferred behavior (i.e., be respectful, responsible, and safe was used at BSH). It is the core teams’ responsibility to 1) decide on what the desired outcomes should be; 2) determine how the outcomes will be measured; 3) ensure the outcomes are achievable; and, 4) regulate how the expectations are taught (Todd et al., 1999).

PBIS practices are often organized and implemented based on a three-tiered model: 1) primary prevention; 2) secondary prevention; and, 3) tertiary prevention. Primary prevention techniques are taught in whole group settings and the focus is on modeling, managing, and maintaining positive expectations while teaching a variety of proactive choices. In secondary prevention, the focus shifts to reducing existing problematic behavior within smaller groups of students who are demonstrating at-risk behavior. In tertiary prevention, the focus is on individual students who are exhibiting high-risk behavior and are demonstrating severe emotional and social failure. Once a student is on the tertiary tier a functional behavioral assessment may be used to determine any antecedents and consequences that may be contributing to the behavior. Educators try to determine what response a student should receive as a result of the problem behavior, or what is referred to as the function of the behavior.

Designated staff conduct observations, collect data, and collectively decide what type of intervention might work best for the individual student (Crone & Horner, 2003). It is more effective to respond to the student's individual needs rather than reacting to the undesirable behavior. Following a proactive approach, educators are trained to analyze what triggers the student's behavior, which includes the setting and time of day that the behavior occurs. The team creates a behavior plan that focuses on achieving successful results. Finally, goals and progress are assessed and reassessed until a desired outcome is attained, limited growth is achieved, or growth is no longer evident. If the student does not reach desired outcomes after these levels of intervention are exhausted, the student is referred for formal testing to see if special education services are needed (Crone & Horner, 2003; Crone, Horner & Hawken, 2004; Horner et al., 2001).

Encouraging and fostering positive student behavior must be a major focus in schools. This can and should also be addressed through teacher preparation programs and professional development (Gordon, et al., 2001; Nichols, 2004; Noguera, 1995, 2001; Page, 2009; Skiba, 2001; Ward, 1998). In these troubling times, schools must be proactive and design curriculum that meets the needs of all students. Additional proactive measures include ensuring that teachers are well trained in classroom management and receive coaching in developing rigorous instructional plans.

Instead of attributing all misbehavior to students' lack of respect or disobedience, the teacher's instructional plans should be differentiated and supportive of diverse learning needs. Teachers must be taught how to build relationships with their students and how to respect cultural differences (Gordon et al., 2001; Monroe, 2006b; Rocque, 2010). Effective classroom management entails teaching/helping students to develop self-discipline. Implementing preventative measures would create less conflict and would likely produce more positive outcomes (Skiba & Peterson, 2000).

Conclusion

Discipline is on the minds and tongues of most superintendents, administrators and teachers. This is because "disruptive behaviors interfere with instruction, distract both teachers and students from learning and deleteriously affect acquisition of academic skills. Attention to student discipline often consumes a significant amount of time from school personnel" (Putnam, Luiselli, Handler & Jefferson, 2003, pp. 505-506). Student behavior is also a determining factor for schools' success or failure. Research shows students who follow directions and adhere to the schools' philosophy will generally do well in school. Students who are seen as disrespectful or

ignore school policies are at greater risk of being suspended or expelled and often do progressively worse in school (Noguera, 2003a).

The literature documents an overrepresentation of minorities in terms of suspensions, expulsions, failure, and most every negative aspect of schooling. The research indicates African Americans especially African American males, are the most overrepresented group in education, with Latino males next in line. (Dupper, 2010; Gregory, 1995; Krezmien, Leone, & Achilles, 2006; Monroe, 2005, 2006a, 2006b; Noguera, 2003a; Rocque, 2010; Skiba, 2000; Skiba et al., 2011). This is very problematic since according to Rocque (2010), “the phenomenon of racial disparity in the schools is comparable to that found in the criminal justice system” (p. 557).

According to Gregory et al. (2010), “males of all racial and ethnic groups are more likely than females to receive disciplinary sanctions” (p. 60). However, the research supports that African American and Latino males may be overrepresented because their behavior does not fit the accepted norm within the structure of zero tolerance and/or their behavior is interpreted as aggressive and does not fit within the cultural norm of our society (Ferguson, 2001; Monroe, 2006a, 2006b; Rocque, 2010; Skiba et al., 2011; Skiba, 2000). Suspensions and expulsions can also be linked to high dropout rates, delinquency, and crime. Students who live in high crime and high poverty neighborhoods are at greater risk to receive discipline referrals or expulsion from school. Some behavior may be attributed to the students’ inability to adjust between school and neighborhood settings.

Other challenges that may contribute to the overrepresentation of African American and Latino students are cultural hegemony, and bias judgments. These students usually differ from White middle class norms in terms of their dialect or language differences, economic situation, culture, and/or race (Gay, 2000; Gregory et al., 2010; Noguera 1995, 2001, 2003a). “Negative

teacher beliefs and expectations contribute to student/teacher conflicts ... and low achievement is highly correlated with aggressive behavior and disciplinary infractions” (Gregory et al., 2010, p. 61). In 1995 Noguera reported,

In every case where policy reflects positively on a student, Black students are underrepresented. In every case where policy reflects negatively on a student, Black students are over-represented. ... That a pattern similar to the one revealed here could occur without some discrimination is virtually impossible to believe (p. 202).

Although the question of overrepresentation has been researched for decades, there does not seem to be one single answer for these disheartening statistics. The problem of overrepresentation persists and is clearly evident throughout the literature. This study will contribute to our understanding by analyzing disciplinary referrals and teacher interviews, as they pertain to how educators understand and respond to student behavior.

This research is important because of its unique focus on what teachers say and the referrals they write, and what this tells us about the problem of overrepresentation of students of color in terms of disciplinary outcomes. I also look at whether the consequences given to students are consistent throughout the school and for all students. The adage “knowledge is power” may go a long way to answer the many questions and understand the struggles that students of color encounter and experience in classrooms.

Gregory et al. (2010) and Krezmien, Leone, and Achilles (2006) suggest that gaps in academic achievement may be due to the excessive practice of exclusion by expelling minority students. Expulsion means lost instructional time, which in turn exacerbates the cycle of academic failure. Research shows a strong correlation between time spent in school and academic success (Cornell & Mayer, 2010). Also, the research studies conducted throughout the

United States indicate that in our schools there is no distinction between discipline and punishment. Using my literature review as a guide helped me to read the referrals and consequences with a critical eye distinguishing whether students were being punished or disciplined.

Overrepresentation of Black and Latino males is a long-standing and persistent problem. Regardless of the reasons, the problem must be addressed and corrected. There comes a point where we must act upon the truth we know and stop merely talking about it. My research contributes to the literature on the topic of discipline by highlighting the dialogue and interactions that occur between teachers and teachers and students. The data describes the specific behavior that initiates referrals and how they are resolved by administrators in one urban school.

Chapter 3

Methods

Introduction

In this chapter, I outline the purpose of my research and describe the methodological approach and research design, which includes a description of the setting, demographics and staff. Then, I explain the selection process of my participants, provide a brief profile about each participant, and describe my role as participant observer. Next, I explain my procedures for data collection and my methods of analysis. Finally, I explain the limitations, and discuss issues of validity and reliability in relation to this study. The following research questions guided my study:

1. How are at-risk students understood and discipline procedures implemented within the context of one urban school?
2. How are males of color constructed on discipline referrals; and what are the implications of the disciplinary procedures they experience?

The research consistently shows that suspension of students from school can result in lost learning opportunities, which places them at risk of academic failure, acting out in school, or both (Ali & Dufresne, 2008; Arcia, 2006; Monroe & Obidah, 2004; Noguera, 2003a). I hope that in looking more carefully into how one urban school responds to student behavior, I can provide some insight into how to interrupt this cycle.

I used grounded theory to develop a conceptual framework for this study. Bryant and Charmaz (2007) define grounded theory as: “Theory that is originated from inductive analysis. The categories are derived from the data ... not developed from preconceived ideas and extant theories” (p. 608). I applied the four principles of grounded theory to guide my research and

used grounded research principles as I gathered and analyzed the data. I allowed the themes and categories to emerge rather than forcing the data to fit preexisting categories or variables.

Finally, my analysis of data proceeded from broad to narrow and advanced themes to categories (Stern & Poor, 2011).

I approached this qualitative study in an attempt to understand the frame of reference educators use to identify students they consider at-risk. Qualitative methodology was helpful in unpacking meaning gleaned from observations, interviews, informal conversations and field notes. For ten months I observed and collected data in one urban school as educators shared their perspectives, provided counter narratives, and shared their understanding about groups and individual students based on their past experiences with ethnicity, culture, gender, race, and family ties.

Research Setting

I use the pseudonym Brick School House (BSH) to describe the urban school that provided the setting of my study. This school has experienced many transformations over the years. BSH was built in 1918, and was initially used as a vocational high school. Years later it was closed due to deteriorating conditions, but eventually reopened as a pre-kindergarten–5th grade (pre-K–5) to assist with overcrowding throughout the district. Although the building was reopened the deteriorating conditions were not corrected. Instead, certain parts of the building were closed off, the auditorium was condemned, and certain water fountains and sinks were closed due to rusted pipes, which made the water unhealthy to drink or use (as indicated by barricaded tape).

As stated earlier, I as well as the participants in this study, use the terms African American and Black interchangeably. Also, because of the primacy of issues when referring to

race, I use capital letters. My data was collected from an urban school in a district that was identified in 2004 as in need of improvement for English Language Learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities (SWDs). The statistics for students in this district were as follows: 78% received free or reduced meals, 19% were students with disabilities and 8% were English language learners.

At the time data for this study were collected, the demographics at BSH (pre-k–8th grade) were 41% Black, 47%, Latino/a 10%, White, and other ethnic groups 2%. English language learners represented 28% of the population; 27% of students received special education services; and 90% received free or reduced meals. According to these demographics, BSH percentages for students receiving free and reduced lunch, as well as resource services, and students who spoke English as their second language, exceeded that of the entire district. Using Rocque's (2010) formula for overrepresentation of distinct populations, more than 10% of BHS students received free and reduced lunches and were English language learners.

The staff that worked in this building during the time of my research did not reflect the racial make-up of the student population at BSH, nor did they match the demographics of the neighborhood. Of the 30 content teachers only three were Black females who taught in the elementary grades (1st–3rd). There were 11 additional support staff members, including two social workers, two psychologists, one nurse, four resource teachers and two occupational therapists. Of this group, one social worker was Latina and the other 10 were White. There were seven specialty teachers: three physical education teachers, two art and two music teachers. In this group one music teacher was a Black male and the remaining six were White. Out of seven custodians two were Black, one was Latino, and the remaining four were White.

There were initially two administrators (both women), which later changed to three administrators, which included one Black female, one White female and, one White male. There were 12 teacher assistants: one Black and one Latina and the remaining 10 were White. Of a staff of 60 only four people in the building spoke fluent Spanish. This school of 534 students had one part-time city police officer (White male) and two full-time security officers (White and Black male sentries). The officer and sentries could be seen throughout the day taking students to the office that refused to comply with adults, or were physically combatant with staff and/or students.

Participants

Purposeful sampling (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Suri, 2011) was used to select informants to participate in semi-structured interviews. I personally recruited tenured (permanent status) and non-tenured (probationary) educators to interview. My selection criteria were:

1. Participants had to have some experience working within this district since my data was district specific.
2. Each participant was required to be actively working with students.
2. Participants should reflect a range of teaching experience (tenured and non-tenured)
4. Participants included teachers, support staff and administrators
5. Participants had some involvement in the discipline process or behavioral referrals.

Purposeful sampling also ensured that a variety of educators would be involved in this study; and that each educator worked in a different capacity so that their perspectives would match their expertise and/or training. As each participant shared from their level of expertise, I

was able to glean insight from multiple perspectives. This variety of participants helped ensure that any bias that may have existed within homogenous educational circles would be countered. Only three participants were working full time at BSH, although all had prior experience, either within this school or the district. BSH experienced a high turnover rate as many educators were placed there due to the entire district being labeled as in need of improvement. Many were under duress, some were moved from one school in need of improvement to another, and others were new to the teaching profession. All participants contacted agreed to provide input and were given a letter stating procedural guidelines (Appendix A, Appendix B). Included in the letter was my assurance of strict confidentiality and notification that they could withdraw from the study without any repercussions. All participants agreed to be interviewed for the study.

The participants interviewed for this study were all educators and pseudonyms were used to provide confidentiality. Out of the five educators, four worked or previously worked at BSH but, all educators worked in some capacity for this urban district. A list of participants are also described in Figure one.²

Suzie (African American) is a non-tenured special education teacher and has been teaching for one year. She was born and raised in this urban area. She attended elementary, middle and high school within the district and attended a university in the Northeast region. At the time of this interview she was teaching a multi-level class, grades three through five. After she completes three years at BSH she will receive student loan forgiveness because it is considered a low performing school. In the interim between student teaching and her current position, she was a reading tutor for three years at BSH.

² See page 69

Carol (White) is a tenured general education teacher and has been teaching for 13 years in the district. She has taught for three years at BSH. She was raised on the outskirts of this city and attended elementary through high school in the suburbs. She received her master's degree in reading and elementary education at a nearby university. She is a single parent who lives in the city; her home is approximately 15 minutes away from BSH.

Rose (African American) is a tenured administrator and has worked in the education field for 36 years. She worked her way up from being a kindergarten, first and second grade teacher to a principal and assistant superintendent all in this targeted school district. At the time of this interview she had just retired from this district and was working as a principal for a private school.

Helen (White) is a reading specialist and has worked in this district for 33 years. She grew up in this urban area and is married without children. She has worked in this quadrant of the city her entire career. Rose has worked at BSH for seven years.

Catherine (African American) is a non-tenured school psychologist and at the time of this interview was completing her 2nd year of employment in the district. Prior to employment as a school psychologist she worked at BSH as a substitute teacher. She is a retired army officer of 30 years. She is married and has custody of her nephew.

Shirley (White) is the SBIT coordinator and has worked in this district for 30 years. She began her career as an elementary teacher, became an instructional specialist in reading and currently works as a coordinator implementing interventions for students who are at risk of failing. At the time of this interview she was responsible for supervising 23 employees.

Figure 1

Participant Chart

Participants	Race	Title	Years of Experience	Job Description	Tenured/ Non-tenured
Suzie	African American	Special Education Teacher	1 year	Teaching multi-level grades 3-5	Non-tenured
Carol	White	General Education	13 years	5th grade teacher	Tenured
Rose	African American	Principal	36 years	Principal	Tenured
Helen	White	Reading Coach	33 years	Assists teachers in grades 1st-3rd	Tenured
Catherine	African American	School Psychologist	2 years	Psychologist for students in grades K-8	Non-tenured
Shirley	White	School-based Intervention District Coordinator	30 years	Coordinate SBIT team throughout the school district	Tenured

Sam and Sonie were selected due to the high volume of referrals they received at BSH. I did not interview them directly due to their age and uncertainty whether they would be at BSH long enough to complete this study. Information also was taken from school records.

The referrals I analyzed for Sonie, a Black male, were generated from his enrollment at BSH from sixth-through-eighth grade years. Sonie had an Individual Education Plan (IEP) and received outside support from a community agency. According to Sonie’s assessments, he was reading on a second grade level in sixth grade and was promoted to high-school still reading on a second grade level. He lived with his mother, a single parent. There were no significant male

role models in his life, although he did bond with a male mentor from the community agency. From sixth-through-eighth grade Sonie received 49 referrals.

The second student Sam was a Latino male whose parents were both active in his life although they lived apart. This student demonstrated strong academic skills based on the results of formal and informal assessments compared to his peers; (in spite of lost learning opportunities) however, he struggled with behavior issues. His referral records were tracked from first-through-fourth grade. In fourth grade Sam was suspended. Sam and his mother appeared before the hearing officer where the decision was made that he could not return to BSH (transferred to another school within the district). He was expelled for inappropriate behavior. From first-through-fourth grade, Sam received 74 referrals.

Data Collection

Collecting the documents and observations for this study took place during a period when the school contained students from kindergarten through eighth grade. As stated previously, the findings of this study are based on data collected from interviews, participant observations, memos, notes, and analysis of documents from one urban school district in the Northeast region of the United States. Since grounded theory research is conducted without a scripted theory in mind I began by following my interest in at-risk students by examining student at-risk referral forms. I checked to see if any particular teacher referred more than another, or if a pattern could be established based on race or gender.

I collected the data from 2002 to 2008 (six calendar school years), but I did not find evidence of any one teacher referring more than another. Checking on gender and race of the referring teacher was also not helpful, because most educators in this district are white and female and the vast majority of the students are either Black or Latino/a. Any educator in the

building can refer a student on an at-risk form, although the teacher usually refers the students in their classrooms. The at-risk form was district-created and was used to address concerns about academics, behavior, and emotional or medical needs. This procedure was implemented to limit the number of student referrals for special education services; and served as a preventative method to assist students who are experiencing challenges in any area.

The School-based Intervention Team (SBIT) referral forms are not used to refer students who have existing individual education plans (IEP). The criteria established by SBIT stated that interventions had to begin with base line data (pre-assessment), preceded by interventions implemented with integrity for six to eight weeks. All interventions had to be research-based measurable, observable, and monitored in increments. I found this level of analysis to be extremely limited since documents were not solicited or collected until the middle of October and were closed by the middle of April to ensure that all steps would be completed by the middle of June. Ironically, students who received the most referrals were not referred as at-risk. Since the information collected and analyzed was limited, this data is not included in this study.

My next step was to talk to educators using semi-structured interviews. The interviews began with two questions “Please share with me your experiences working with at-risk students” And the follow-up question was: “What criteria do you use to identify students who need extra academic or behavioral support?” The semi-structured interviews gave educators the opportunity to share their beliefs and experiences about working with at-risk students in an urban setting, as well as their views about positive behavior support and effective discipline for all students.

Semi-structured Interviews

Participants included in this study were interviewed on two different occasions, using semi-structured interviews and open-ended questions with each interview lasting approximately 60 minutes. Each interview was transcribed within 24 hours, while the content was still fresh in my mind. Using semi-structured interviews highlights a dynamic that is considered as problematic by Campbell and Gregor (2004) because research can sometimes emphasize a problem without resolving it. And reporting another individual's life experiences through the eyes and voices of others can be problematic, because personal perception is rarely another individual's reality. It is also problematic because it can create more unanswered questions. Sample questions for interviews can be found in (Appendix C). During the interviews participants focused on situations and experiences that were important to them. Although the interviews followed a set of guided questions, the participants sometimes referred to their personal lives. In other words, the informant's beliefs and experiences were the focus of our conversations. And regardless of the level of experience, the interviews confirmed that teachers are guided by their beliefs, attitudes, and experiences (Harry & Klingner, 2006).

What was prevalent throughout these interviews was the educators' concern for classroom management and academic achievement. Several broad themes emerged: race, culture, special education, academics, and behavior. I used these broad themes to create subcategories as participants shared their understanding of students they perceived to be at risk. Participants made assumptions about the students, their families and family lifestyles as they interpreted the choices made for and about urban students and their education. Misinterpretation by educators often influences their expectations (Harry & Klingner, 2006). At the end of each interview, educators shared their philosophy on education. Their beliefs had a strong influence

over what they felt was integral to a successful urban education. As you will read some of the information shared in interviews was factual, some was based on the participant's assumptions, developed from their personal, cultural values, and experiences. Portions of the interviews are interspersed throughout this study. Due to the overwhelming concern about behavior, I decided that my next step would be collecting behavioral referrals.

Behavior Referrals

Behavior referrals were written for students whose behaviors were described as unacceptable or inappropriate for a school environment. According to the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) only three disciplinary procedures should be reported: corporal punishment, suspensions for one day or more, and expulsions. "The most frequent form of discipline is probably a verbal reprimand or being sent to the school principal" (Meier, Stewart & England, 1989, p. 84). A significant part of this study is the analysis of behavioral referrals. I examined the types of behavioral referrals they received, the behaviors that initiated them, and how educators made meaning of – and responded to these behavioral challenges.

Categorizing students who experience discipline problems in school is often the gateway for identifying them as at-risk. It can also lead to testing and labeling for special education services. Behavioral referrals are district-level forms for identifying students with behavioral challenges that could result in disciplinary actions such as in-school or out-of-school suspensions. See Appendix D (initial referral) and E (revised referral) for the two referrals forms used in this district.

Discipline referral forms were submitted when any adult in the school considered a student's behavior unacceptable. I retyped referrals for easier reading and to ensure confidentiality of the referring teacher and student. On the referral form the following

information was completed by the adult referring the student: student's school identification number, grade of record, school identification number, school name, student's name, date of incident, time of incident, and referring teacher. The referring adult completes a description of the incident and is advised on the form to use additional paper if necessary. On the front page, the location of the incident must be checked off and there is a section inquiring if any prior action was taken by teacher/adult prior to writing the referral. The referring adult writes their perceptions of any possible motivation for the student's behavior and if any other individual/s were involved. Finally, the referring adult may suggest any desired actions they would like implemented, signs and turns the referral-form into an administrator. The administrator completes the bottom portion of the form with a behavior code and assigned consequences. The consequences range in intensity based on the administrator's discretion.

I collected discipline referrals from September 6, 2007, through April 1, 2008. Over this seventh-month period, I collected 2,391 referrals, but limited my analysis to referrals for students who had eight or more referrals (see Appendix F and G). This reduced the number to only 1,712 referrals for 103 students. In other words, 103 different students had been referred eight or more times. Of the 103 students 81 were males (42 Black, 27 Latino, 12 White and one Bi-racial); the remaining 22 were female students were similar in terms of racial makeup (11 Black, 7 Latina and 3 White).

After sorting all referrals, no single educator was found to have written significantly more referrals than any other staff member. Students received multiple referrals from various teachers involving office and teacher-managed behaviors. Due to the large number of referrals, I selected the two highest referred students. Sonie attended BSH from 6th through 8th grades and Sam attended from 1st through 4th grades. I collected all referrals during their enrollment at BSH.

Participant Observation

Participant observation was extremely useful in constructing the progression of this urban school from the beginning to the end of this study. I was also able to delve more deeply into these issues by exploring educators' experiences and beliefs in one-on-one interviews, where the participants shared their views based on their personal experiences. As participant observer, I was able to explicate information based on my understanding of the environmental setting and practices. These observations took place at the Brick School House in the halls, in meetings and through interactions with educators. I looked at how education as an institution enforces rules and regulations. Schools are social organizations by which students and educators interact in jovial and sometimes turbulent situations.

The social context of the school predetermines desired and accepted behavior. The decisions people make and their actions are coordinated with outside events, and create social relationships (Campbell & Gregor, 2004). Looking at this schools' environment through a researchers lens helped me understand how activities within a given setting can take place both independently and dependently, based on individual expectations. According to Campbell and Gregor it is extremely important to "... study how things are put into place to understand how they happen as they do" (p. 29). When describing the environment of this building, the conditions of teachers and students must be "mapped out" Something invisible that is happening behind the scenes can be made visible and easier to understand within an environment where others live and work. In other words,

Social relations are not done to people, nor do they just happen to people. Rather, people actively constitute social relations. People participate in social relations, often unknowingly, as they act competently and knowledgeably to concert and coordinate their

own actions with professional standards or family expectations or organizational rules. (Campbell & Gregor, 2004, p. 31).

As a participant observer, I collected data demonstrating how one urban school, through policy and actions, influenced the paths and outcome of its participants. I entered this environment in which I was already familiar. I acknowledge that my presence may have swayed the actions of others. The participant's actions or non-actions may have been different in my absence.

As the participant observer I position myself: 1) to observe and 2) understand what is taking place. It is the lived experience within the confines of an environment that drives how those in the environment react. Attention is placed on what goes on beyond the boundaries of what cannot be seen, but are just as real and very important (Campbell & Gregor, 2004; Sangasubana, 2011; Wolcott, 1999). Being immersed in the environment I was able to observe how educators responded to the stresses of the building and students in the classrooms. One way I have distinguished my role as both researcher and participant/observer was to write a detailed account about what I heard, perceived and observed in the form of researcher memos.

Working in this school during the course of this study placed me in the position of insider (Gee, 2011). An insider is someone who is considered knowledgeable about the situation, but who, as a researcher, must approach the situation as if it is new and strange. In order to manage my own subjectivity, I reported exactly what was said on the referrals and made every attempt not to infer anything. During audiotaped interviews if anything was unclear I asked for clarification. I kept memos and notes from committees that were related to this study (PBIS, Discipline, School Leadership Team and SBIT). Additionally, I kept researcher memos based on my own observations and findings.

From 2000 to 2005, I worked in this building as a full-time elementary teacher, switching back and forth from fourth-to-fifth grade. I took a year off to complete my doctoral course work but volunteered at the school, running literature circles for at-risk males who were selected by an administrator at the school. I returned in September 2007 and continued to teach at the school through June 2011.

I enter this study acknowledging my subjectivities. I believe for instance, based on my personal experiences, that students of color are often held to lower standards than their White peers. Many times educators do not expose students of color to higher level questioning. I also believe that educators allow what they anticipate students of color experience, to alter their expectations. It is my experience that educators make excuses for why students of color will not be successful. I am totally invested in the students in this quadrant of the city, as opposed to being invested in the school. I have learned over time that the people and students you work with are what make the school, not the building. Therefore, I am very interested in why certain things work and what changes can be made to make the environment optimal for learning.

Data Analysis

I utilized grounded theory to analyze both interview data and behavior referrals. In grounded theory, data analysis begins as soon as the first set of data is collected (Dey, 1999). Early on in my analysis, I noticed the absence of identifying antecedents regarding student behavior, although many of the at-risk referrals mentioned inappropriate behavior or below grade level academic performance. Therefore, I sought explanation from participants through semi-structured interviews and personal observations. Participants shared their experiences and I was able to employ the second principle of grounded research, which explains rather than simply describes. Thus, I sought to understand and be able to explain what I was noticing in the data.

Each subsequent interview was transcribed using verbatim expressions from the participants 'in vivo' (Stern & Poor, 2011). To analyze the interviews, I used Ethnograph 6, a computer program that coded the data effectively and efficiently.

After participants were interviewed their comments were initially divided into general categories based on the topic of conversation. Their responses included their beliefs, and topics regarding professional development, parents, race, culture, students, academics, behavior, equity, challenges, color blindness, special education, teachers, educational experience, curriculum, colleagues, and gender. Next, I sorted them again into subtopics: behavior, culture, race, class, gender, parents and academics. Behavioral referrals were also sorted into categories based on assigned consequences: interfering with the learning of others, time-out, reflection room, disruptive, failure-to-follow a simple request, bullying, persistent disobedience, fighting and assault.

I collected the data for BSH that was used to develop their discipline procedures. To ensure that valuable information was not overlooked, I analyzed the discipline plans from 2008, 2009, 2010, and 2011 and noted any changes made from year to year. After every meeting, I collected minutes, outside evaluations on the building environment, and surveys given to teachers. I compared discrepancies between administrators and educators based on referral comments and assigned behavior codes. I also looked for consistency between building rules and procedures implemented to redirect inappropriate behavior as well as consistency between BSH and the district protocol. I checked student attendance and assignments for those who participated in the Positive Alternative to Student Suspension (PASS) program to identify if this type of after school instruction was an effective instructional tool.

Conclusion

I used grounded theory with the understanding that similar circumstances will not necessarily guarantee similar findings. Some of the participants worked only at this school, while others worked at different locations throughout the district. All participants were currently working for City School District (CSD) except one who had recently taken another job in another district. I initially collected data for ten months, but due to the large volume of referrals, I reduced my analysis to the two highest referred students. This led me to collect data for two male students of color for their entire enrollment at BSH. The reliability of this study is supported because this is a typical school in this quadrant of the city (in terms of student demographics, size of student body, and the teacher to student ratio).

The limitations of my study are based on the fact that I am focusing on one urban school within one district. In addition, my informants were all females, and my referral data represents a short period of time in the life of two students. I am a participant/observer as well as an educator. Therefore, I acknowledge that my presence may have influenced the behavior of some during the actual interviews. Sangasubana (2011) calls this reactivity. I believe that being a participant/observer also served as a strength because it gave me access to certain documents, as well as people, who regarded me as a trusted colleague. Additionally, I was part of the fabric of the building, so my presence was less obtrusive than an outsider to the school would have likely been. The validity of this study is supported by the detailed information contained in the handwritten documents of educators, which I analyzed and coded using Ethnograph V6. The referral forms and codes were also consistent throughout this school district and not specific to this building. My findings are divided into four chapters (four through seven).

In chapter four, I use my position as a participant/observer to describe one school in the Northeast region within an urban district. I trace the history of the school's transition from having no formal discipline plan to putting a formal plan into place. I explain how The Red Brick School House responded to behavioral challenges by describing the creation, revisions and implementation provided by the school discipline committee, as well as behavior plans for three years. I explain how professional development was made available to the staff, and how it was implemented, and utilized. I also explain how school-wide procedures were progressively used to address behavior.

In chapter five, I explain the referral process at BSH. I describe the forms and the purpose they have at BSH and within the district. I explain how the statistical information is used to inform the administrator, district and state about the safety of the school. A description is given of the types of codes used and their meaning (Appendix H and I).

In chapters six and seven, I used substantive coding (open coding and constant comparison) as I analyzed two sets of behavioral referrals. The referrals were for two students (Sonie and Sam) who were deemed at-risk by virtue of their having the majority of behavioral referrals in the school. I use aspects of grounded research to examine referrals that will be grouped by the type of behavior exhibited. I also note the types of consequences that are assigned by administrators at BSH. Grounded theory will be used to unpack the ways that educators at BSH use language to describe males of color and construct them as at-risk students on referral forms.

In chapter eight, I summarize my findings for each question and discuss implications of this study. The research questions were:

1. How are at-risk students understood and discipline procedures implemented

within the context of one urban school?

2. How are males of color constructed on discipline referrals; and what are the implications of the disciplinary procedures they experience?

Finally, what are the implications and topics that should be discussed for further study?

Chapter 4

The Brick Schoolhouse Implements Behavioral Strategies

Using participant observation and document collection, I trace the cultural and social development of an urban school in its natural setting for three years. I share my point of view as researcher, active participant, staff and committee member. In this chapter, I provide a snapshot of where the Brick School House (BSH) began – the process of adopting a school-wide positive discipline approach, and how it transformed throughout the course of this study. Also included in this chapter are the district and school mission statements, which provide a window into the stated values of the district and the school.

Specifically, in this chapter I use my position as participant observer to document how the staff progressed from not having a written plan to having a coordinated vision, and implementing procedures to achieve that vision. I use the minutes and agendas from meetings, observations and personal notes to describe the relevant committees that directly influenced the formation and implementation of the discipline plan. The research question that guided this portion of the study was: “How are at-risk students understood and discipline procedures implemented within the context of one urban school?” Also included are data that explore the goals and functions of the relevant committees, the membership of the committees, as well as the process followed and the challenges and successes they experienced in instituting this reform. The terms teams and committees are used interchangeably.

Studying the process of change at BSH could also be used to inform other schools, particularly urban schools that are attempting whole school reform. In each section, following a description of the committee I include a statement about the “end of data collection” which indicates how the committee was functioning at the end of my study. Finally, I conclude with

looking at ways other areas in the building, as well as programs outside of the building, were affected in the process of adopting this reform.

BSH Under Review

BSH was identified as a school under registration review (SURR), due to low scores in English language arts (ELA) and math. Consequently, when the state visited BSH they found the school lacking in several areas. The state's written report addressed instruction, discipline, and qualifications of the teaching staff, parent involvement, administration, and maintenance of the building. The two main deficiencies in the report cited behavior management, the absence of a written discipline plan and school mission statement. The review mandated that BSH immediately write a mission statement that included all stakeholders specific to their school and address all other concerns in the state report. There were district guidelines in place for handling challenging behavior, but formal procedures were not in place at BSH.

CSD's mission statement did not support the needs of individual schools in the city. The district's mission statement focused on high academic achievement and shared responsibility, but it did not provide much guidance in regard to either discipline or behavior support at BSH. The district's mission statement read as follows:

We [CSD] believe that education is the shared responsibility of schools, students, families and other community agencies working together so that our students may realize their full potential. Accordingly, the mission of CSD is: To ensure that all students demonstrate mastery of defined skills and knowledge, appreciation of diversity, and development of character which will enable them to become productive, responsible citizens who can succeed in a rapidly changing world; this is accomplished, in partnership with our community, by transforming our educational system to respond to

the unique needs of each student through excellence in teaching and learning (CSD, 2007).

The school leadership team (SLT) at BSH was assigned the responsibility for writing the mission statement for the school. This team was comprised of administrators and educators elected by their colleagues. The goal of this team was to connect parts of the discipline plan to parts of the mission statement and to include all invested community members, students, educators, parents and guardians. The following mission statement was written:

Community is a place where all citizens are respectful, responsible, and safe ... our vision is to be a school community that creates a quality learning environment to achieve student success as high achievers on NYS assessments, lifelong learners, and productive citizens. This will be accomplished by collaboration between and among students, families, staff, and community to implement consistent instruction, assessment, and behavior expectations that address the unique needs and strengths of each student. (BSH, 2008)

Unlike the district mission statement, BSH addressed school-wide values of respect, responsibility and safety and specifically mentioned behavioral expectations, along with instruction and achievement goals. Although behavior or discipline was not included within the district mission statement, schools within the district were required to follow a district-wide procedure for handling behavior problems. This procedure was outlined in the City School District (CSD) written plan, which was distributed in pamphlet form. The stated procedure was as follows:

Established District's Behavior Procedure

Board of Education acknowledges that an environment in which a student can grow is impacted by their physical, emotional and social needs City School District (CSD) will work together with the district staff to prepare students to live in a multiethnic society as they help students develop a positive self-concept CSD agree to provide equal, quality integrated educational opportunities for all students throughout the district (2008).

(CSD replaces the school district's name to protect confidentiality)

Although this statement reflected the written behavior procedure of the district, it did not clearly define behavioral expectations.

Upon being placed on the SURR list, the school received many outside resources, including funds to pay for professional development and tutors to help students before and after school. Teachers were compensated for an extended day of an additional one-hour (7.5 hours), and were provided with additional resources such as technology and books. Educational field trips provided students with experiences connected to academic topics learned in school. After two years and improved test scores, the school was removed from the SURR list. At this time the supplemental funds were cut back, the school day reverted to 6.5 hours, and funds were no longer available for field trips.

Due to increasing enrollment within the district, the school was changed from pre-kindergarten through fifth grade to Kindergarten through eighth grade. Two years later, it was once again placed on the SURR list due to low-test scores in ELA and math. Specifically, BSH was once again cited by the state for discipline, which was identified as being a major hindrance to academic performance. It was also noted that BSH did not have written behavioral procedures to address the behavior challenges witnessed by the state representative. During the initial staff

meeting the state representative reported, “I would not want to be a teacher here and have to be exposed to some of the situations I witnessed today” (staff meeting, 2009).

In this second phase as a SURR school new staff were hired and current staff were interviewed (a prerequisite to staying at BSH). Some of the existing employees at BSH were reassigned to other buildings. The educators, who struggled in certain areas, were simply reassigned to other buildings instead of given instructional support or additional in-service training. During this time two reading coaches were hired. One worked with Kindergarten through third grades and the other with fourth through eighth grades. One math instructional specialist was hired for grades Kindergarten through eighth grades.

The new administrator at BSH required all teachers to be involved in at least one committee within the building. Although this extra committee assignment was not mandatory, (according to the union) it was strongly recommended. Indicative of the challenge that discipline posed to the school, quite a few of these committees were formed to deal specifically with discipline at BSH, including the Prescreening Team (PST), the School-based Intervention Team (SBIT), the Support Team for At-Risk Students (STARS), the Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS), and The Discipline Team.

BSH Establishes Teams to Assist At-Risk Students

Prescreening Team (PST)

This was the only committee in the building with committee members appointed by the administrators. The Special Education Director attended a staff meeting and informed the staff that BSH had a higher than average referral rate for students’ receiving special education services. It was also reported that BSH was among the few remaining schools with self-contained classrooms. In order to reduce the number of students referred for special education

services the administrator initiated a pre-referral screening process. All BSH students would be screened before referring students to SBIT or STARS. The PST team had the sole responsibility of deciding what steps would be implemented in response to academic, behavior, physical or mental health, and attendance concerns.

This team consisted of support staff and one administrator. The following information was collected from the staff procedure handbook. The PST committee met once a month and reviewed all referrals for students who were considered at risk. Classroom teachers initiated these referrals. The committee scheduled its calendar based on when referrals were received and on the severity of the problem that was being brought to their attention. The monthly team meeting took place in the middle of the school day therefore there were no certified teaching staff on this team. This was the only committee in the building with committee members appointed by the administrators.

To begin the PST process, any teacher involved with the identified student could complete the necessary forms to make a referral based on any existing or emerging academic or behavioral challenges. On the PST form teachers shared the student's strengths, weaknesses, and any interventions they had already implemented. The referring adult placed the completed referral form in a designated mailbox. PST would review the referral and make recommendations.

If outside services were recommended, a designated staff member would call the parent to inform them of assistance that was available. The parent had the option of declining or accepting any help that was offered. If the parent accepted assistance from outside agencies, local resources were then contacted. This could include counseling for the entire family or counseling for the student. For in-school resources, elementary students were referred to SBIT,

middle-school students' were referred to STARS. If in-school resources were recommended the student's information would be forwarded to the designated committee. There were also outside agencies that were located within the school to provide students with mentors, tutors and college-based support groups. Information regarding the number of actual referrals received and the steps taken was not shared with the staff. Once referrals were made, individual teachers were informed on a need-to-know basis.

By the end of data collection, the PST team had reduced the number of referrals at BSH for special education screening. Students received outside help expeditiously because parents were informed about out-side services, programs and school resources. Unfortunately, this process did not reduce the number of behavior referrals written.

School-based Intervention Team (SBIT)

The School-based Intervention Team (SBIT) consisted of elementary teachers (K–4), support staff, an SBIT coordinator, and one administrator. The following information was collected from participant observation and field notes. The purpose of this committee was to improve student behavior and academic progress for any student who was not already receiving special education services.

The committee's task was also to reduce the number of special education referrals and identify at-risk students before they failed at BSH. Students were referred to SBIT from PST. A SBIT referral was different from a behavioral referral as a SBIT referral is used to implement interventions in order to decrease unwanted behaviors or address academic struggles the student may be experiencing. Once the referral (Appendix J, Appendix K), was received, the SBIT coordinator scheduled a time to meet with the referring teacher to discuss their concerns.

Once a student was referred to this committee, a designated staff member called and invited the parent/guardian to attend the meeting. Parents or guardians were invited to participate and contribute ideas to help their child improve. Together the team looked at the student’s records, which included behavior referrals and academic performance in math and reading. If a substitute for the classroom teacher were not available the SBIT coordinator would substitute for the classroom teacher. Additional interventions were suggested and implemented by the classroom teacher or designated adult and progress was systematically monitored and assessed regularly. It was also the SBIT coordinator’s job to perform base-line tests on the referred student and monitor any growth. After six to eight weeks if the student showed progress, the plan would be modified and intervention would continue. If the student did not make measurable progress after six to eight weeks, the parents would be contacted, and with their signed approval, formal testing would begin. Testing would determine if the student was eligible for special education services. Table two represents the number of SBIT referrals submitted by educators at BSH over a period of six years. What is surprising about these referrals is that the highest referred student (Sam) was not included in any of these referrals. This information is supported by data collection (see page 84).

Figure 2.

Number of SBIT referrals by year ³

School Year	Number of SBIT Referrals
2002–2003	5
2003–2004	7
2004–2005	13

³ Information compiled from SBIT referral documents

2005–2006	12
2006 – 2007	21
2007 – 2008	14

After BSH extended its enrollment to include kindergarten through eighth grades SBIT was still used as a form of Response to Intervention (RTI) for all students. However, during an interview with the SBIT/STARS coordinator, she concluded that using SBIT on middle-school students was not successful. She stated “it’s trying to shove a square peg into a round whole” (Interview, 2009). As result, a second committee was formed. It was called the Support Team for At Risk Students (STARS), for students in grades five through eight.

Support Team For At Risk Students (STARS)

This committee was established at BSH in 2008. This team consisted of middle-school teachers (5–8), support staff, the STARS coordinator, an administrator and myself. This information was gathered from participant observation and field notes. The same process was implemented as SBIT but the difference was that interventions and incentives were specifically designated for middle-school students

Both the SBIT and STARS committees experienced similar challenges. For instance, students were sometimes referred without the necessary supports or interventions in place. Suggested interventions were not always implemented or consistently monitored. After suggesting interventions, both the SBIT and STARS teams would report feeling as though classroom teachers were not always invested in the process, because on many occasions the teachers did not volunteer to implement the interventions for their students. One teacher

reported for instance, “that they already had too much to do and could not handle another task.” (Interview, 2009)

The following example is indicative of the kinds of supports that were needed to identify root causes of student behavioral problems. John (pseudonym) an eighth grade White male student was referred by another member of the committee (his history teacher). The referral (2008) stated, “John contributes as long as the assignment does not require him to read or write. If reading or writing is required, John becomes very disruptive.” I was the only former elementary teacher on the committee and asked what his reading level was, but this was unknown. I volunteered to assess the student and found that he was reading on a second grade level. His current teachers were unavailable to tutor him so I agreed. I called his mother and introduced myself and shared the information about his reading difficulties of which she was not aware. I set up a schedule with the mom and we shared it with John. In the beginning John’s mother, would drop him off but he would not show up to my fifth grade classroom. I called the mother and she began meeting me at the door. I worked with this student 20 minutes a day five days a week from November through June. We worked together using a computer-based reading program called ‘Read Naturally.’ John worked 10 minutes independently and 10 minutes with me. In June the student was reading on a fifth grade level. Although, John was still three years below grade level he had improved significantly. During this intervention period John’s behavior issues diminished in his classes.⁴ This is one example demonstrating how assisting a student with an academic intervention can directly improve behavior (Danforth & Smith, 2005).

Both teams experienced difficulties in completing tasks within the given time constraints. For instance, teams did not always complete agenda items, interventions were not

⁴ According to data there were no referrals written during this time period.

completed with fidelity, follow-up appointments were not always kept, and students were often absent due to illness, truancy, or suspension, which attributed to incomplete and inconsistent interventions. Many times the same students would be scheduled on the agenda multiple times throughout the month due to unmet goals. Very often the PST committee was by-passed and referrals were given directly to the SBIT or STARS team (which also slowed down the process because the referrals would be sent to PST for initial screening).

Some teachers used interventions that were not researched-based and therefore did not meet the criteria for SBIT or STARS referrals. During this process it was also discovered that many educators at BSH did not understand what research-based meant, while others did not have access to research-based resources. The Special Education Committee required at least six-to-eight weeks of research-based intervention prior to referring any student regardless of results from baseline testing, or behavioral challenges exhibited. Additionally, special education guidelines mandated that students be taught based on their grade level performance and not according to grade of record.

Other problems also hindered the effectiveness of the process. Meetings were not always task-oriented and members did not always stay on topic. Parents who attended would sometimes go off topic and the meeting would become a sounding board for both teachers and parents to vent their frustrations. Teachers expressed difficulties with submitting referrals within given time constraints. According to committee guidelines for instance, referrals could not be submitted prior to October and no later than April. This was to ensure that teachers had strictly adhered to six to eight weeks of interventions; and teams had enough time to complete all paper work for special education screening if needed. Students with poor attendance or those who

received inconsistent implementation of interventions were not accepted due to lack of fidelity. For these students, the intervention process would have to be implemented all over again.

At BSH, the SBIT and STARS teams collaborated and designed a flow chart (Appendix L) to illustrate visually the procedure for how students should be referred within the school. As a collaborative team, they also identified research-based interventions that qualified for pre-referral interventions. The committee identified the interventions that would be implemented in Tier two (small groups) and Tier three (individual) aligning the process with the Response to Intervention (RTI) model. At the end of each meeting the SBIT/STARS committee members would complete a debriefing form (Appendix M). The following questions were answered yes, partly, or no.

1. Were the target behavioral and/or academic concern(s) clearly defined in observable terms?
3. Did the team come up with possible reasons/functions that support or help to explain the presenting student concerns?
4. Were ambitious but realistic goals for improvement clearly specified in measurable terms?
5. Did the team come up with at least one method to track student progress for each of the referral concerns?
6. Were the intervention plan(s) clearly and specifically defined? (e.g., persons responsible, when, where, how often).
7. Does the team feel that overall it closely followed the 7 steps of the initial meeting format.
8. What are some additional ideas that the group has for helping this particular

teacher to successfully carry out the intervention plan?

At the end of each year teachers who participated in the SBIT and STARS process were asked to complete a questionnaire (Appendix N). The following questions were ranked on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) or 6 (strongly agree).

1. How closely did the team follow the formal problem-solving process during typical initial meetings?
2. How well do you feel that your team got along interpersonally?
3. Do you feel that you have gained intervention ideas or knowledge through your membership on the SBIT/STARS committees?
4. Did the team typically experience little or no confusion about time, date, and location of scheduled meetings?
5. Did your team regularly rotate meeting roles?
6. Was the scheduling time for committee meetings convenient?
7. How is the SBIT/STARS team regarded in your building?

According to the data reviewed by the committee, very few teachers from BSH returned the surveys. The district disseminated findings that showed schools that used the SBIT and STARS process had reduced the number of referrals for students who needed special education screening, compared to the schools that did not have SBIT and STARS committees. However, it was also determined by BSH that the STARS and SBIT committees did not address students who were capable of doing their classroom work, but were simply acting in an inappropriate manner (behavior).

At the completion of the study the SBIT and STARS team met district-wide to address many of the challenges both teams experienced during the school year. At this meeting a

consultative process was created for all of the teams to follow as well as guidelines for initial and follow-up meetings. An intervention integrity sheet was created to track the date, minutes and adults responsible for implementing interventions. Committee roles were also assigned on a rotating schedule and scripted procedures were read to everyone in attendance:

Our team and you have a lot to do today and only limited time in which to do it. To help us to work efficiently and not waste your time, we will follow a structured problem-solving model that goes through several stages. Together, our team and you will...

(SBIT, 2007, p. 2).

The timeframe to refer students was changed. The referral process would begin November 2 and would close April 9. This compressed time frame affected the number of SBIT referrals written. If students progressed to a certain level but did not meet time constraints, the options were to retain or promote and the next teacher would have to begin the six to eight week process over again (in the following school year).

The School Leadership Team (SLT), Positive Behavior Intervention Support Team (PBIS), and the Discipline Committee determined that teachers were not utilizing the services of SBIT or Stars effectively. After analyzing the discipline data many of the students who had received multiple referrals were not referred to either SBIT or STARS. This ineffective practice was noted by the state recording that BSH had many interventions in place that were not utilized.

Positive Behavior Intervention Support Team (PBIS)

BSH received a grant to fund PBIS in the first year of implementation. This grant afforded BSH the resources to purchase resources, supplies and incentives. These funds were also used to purchase a computer data program which generated a report that showed the status of all students: grade level, whether they had an individual education plan (IEP), total number of

referrals, and name of offender. Offender is actually the term used on this form—highlighting how embedded the school-to-prison pipeline is in school disciplinary models. This terminology is also contradictory to the PBIS philosophy, which looks for the positive aspects of every student and more humane ways to help students who struggle with behavior.

The Positive Behavior Intervention Support team met one hour before school. The committee consisted of the vice principal, PBIS co-coordinator, teachers and support staff. I also served on this team as member and participant/observer. All data collected for this portion of the study was drawn from participant observations, field notes, staff meetings, and computer-generated data along with document analysis of behavioral referrals.

PBIS was the only committee that was monitored by an outside coordinator who had no affiliation with the district. The PBIS committee also demonstrated the most fidelity, perhaps because it was under the constant scrutiny of outside evaluators. It also experienced the most longevity as the longest existing committee in the building. The goal of this committee was to extend the PBIS philosophy from how it worked previously as a pre-k–5 school to include kindergarten through eighth grades.

The entire staff at BSH was provided training on PBIS strategies. All staff in the building were instructed to use the same language to promote PBIS. The PBIS philosophy stated:

Brick School House students are respectful. BSH students' respect themselves and others by speaking and behaving appropriately (no put-downs). They respect property by not writing on walls, littering, or destroying bathrooms. BSH students are responsible. They go to class every day on time. They are prepared (pens, pencils, and paper) and they arrive ready to learn. Finally, BSH students are safe. They keep their hands and feet to

themselves; respect others' personal space by not pushing, play fighting or kicking.

(PBIS, 2008)

Banners in English and Spanish were hung in the halls. Additionally, a matrix was created for teachers to hang in their classrooms to refer to when needed, and to use as a reminder of what it looks like to be respectful, responsible and safe. Students were given contracts, regarding what it means to be "respectful, responsible and safe," which was also stated in a contract that was signed by every student, as well as their parent or guardian. The signed contract was returned and placed in each student's file. If students misbehaved it was referred to as a reminder of their written promise. Unfortunately, not all forms were returned.

If students demonstrated being respectful, responsible, and/or safe they were given BSH bucks (in one dollar increments). Students were eligible to spend BSH bucks at the school store. The school store sold small incentives (i.e. school supplies, toys, beauty supplies, gloves, and hats, time in the computer lab or lunch dates with an adult). A Very Important People Day also was sponsored by PBIS to celebrate students who met certain criteria. Students were celebrated if they had one or no referrals, and fewer than three absences. At the end of the year, they were given a big party in a local park with the opportunity of winning a variety of prizes.

Despite all of the planning and school-wide initiatives, the PBIS committee experienced many challenges during their first year of implementation as a K-8 school. For instance, many middle-school teachers found the incentives too "elementary" for the middle school to buy into the PBIS philosophy. Some adults did not give out BSH bucks, while others gave them to students in large quantities or gave them to students without referencing the matrix chart. Some classrooms did not display the matrix, which reinforced why they were eligible for BSH bucks. One way for students to demonstrate being responsible was to wear the BSH uniform shirt,

however most of the middle-school students refused to wear them. Many middle-school teachers conceded, “this was not a battle they wanted to fight” and therefore, did not enforce the wearing of the school uniform (staff meeting, 2008). With a larger student body, the committee experienced difficulties in keeping the school store stocked with incentives. Many parents and guardians did not attend student celebrations.

After the first year of implementing PBIS as a K–8 school, the outside evaluator made several recommendations: 1) A panoramic size poster of PBIS behavioral expectations should be displayed in the main foyer in both English and Spanish; 2) The behavioral expectations should be displayed in all classrooms on an 11 x 14 chart, so all who enter could read; and 3) Segments of the matrix (based on location) should be posted throughout the school. The evaluator noted that although students knew the behavioral expectations, very few demonstrated them, especially in the halls. Finally, the evaluator suggested that a plan was needed to review and support appropriate behavioral expectations.

In the second year, the PBIS Team also made some recommendations; for instance, students at BSH were asked to participate in a competition to design a new BSH dollar. Also, middle school students were asked to design a uniform shirt they would want to wear to school. Middle school students designed, voted and with the approval of the principal began wearing the middle-school designed shirts. In addition to VIP celebration at the end of the school year, celebrations were scheduled to coincide with quarterly report cards. A variety of activities were also added to celebrate VIP students. Students’ were now eligible to participate in breakfast celebrations, skating parties in the gym, ice-cream socials and an end of the year party in the park with opportunities to win raffles that included i-Pods, movie tickets, bikes and gently used items donated by the staff.

At the end of the second year, the participation of middle school students and faculty in the PBIS process had increased. Middle-school students were wearing their newly designed shirts and spending BHS dollars. Staff, parents and student participation increased. The shirts were so popular with the middle school students that some PBIS committee members suggested that the newly designed shirts should become the uniform shirt for the entire building.

In the third year of the study a game room was created exclusively for middle school. This room had video and board games, an electronic basketball hoop, and table tennis. Middle school students could go during lunchtime to enjoy games with educators, support staff, administrators or other students. They could buy time in the game room only by using their BSH dollars. The room proved to be an effective strategy and middle-school students' behavior immediately improved due to the possibility of earning time in this room. Parents were also now eligible to win prizes contingent upon their attendance at PBIS celebrations. The committee recruited donations from the local dollar store for prizes that would accommodate middle-school students. Having the matrix displayed (Appendix O) on classroom walls was now included as part of the administrators checklist for teacher evaluations. The matrix was also displayed in the halls, cafeteria, bathroom, and stairwells. The newly designed Brick House bucks were now available in increments of one and five dollars. During quarterly celebrations students also had the opportunity to purchase reward room time with their BSH bucks. These reward rooms included a manicure room (teachers would volunteer to do students' fingernails), a movie and popcorn room, board game rooms, an arts and crafts room, and face painting. Students who received three referrals or more or who did not have enough BHS bucks were required to go to 're-teach' rooms to review the matrix and school expectations.

At the end of data collection, parent involvement in student celebrations had increased. Student attendance also improved on half days (celebrations were scheduled on half days, which prior to the program were marked by high absenteeism). Most students in the building participated in at least one celebration. The number of participants increased to the extent that the celebrations had to be scheduled in intervals due to lack of space. Unfortunately, once the newly designed shirts were open for the entire school many middle schools students stopped wearing them.

The PBIS committee also created a subgroup, which was coordinated by the school psychologist. This group consisted of two students from grades one through eight (16 students). The students that were chosen for this group included students who did not receive referrals as well as those who did. It was the decision of the committee that the students who struggled with behavior would also participate, because they might see themselves as role models and possibly correct their unacceptable behavior. The group was called the ACES (Agents for Change in an Educational Setting). The ACES shared their ideas regarding: rewards, incentives, worked in the school store, and escorted guests who visited the school.

The next course of action was to develop some universal behavior interventions specific to BSH. A professional developer from the local teacher center met with the team once a month to discuss what was working at BSH and what needed to be revised. Using this data helped the committee identify patterns in student behavior e.g. specific groups of students being sent to ISS.

The PBIS committee suggested that because many of the students had developed trusting relationships with some adults in the building a check-and-connect procedure would be beneficial. This is a procedure in which adults check referral lists and identify students they have developed a relationship with over time. Many of the middle-school students had close

relationships with teachers in the building from their elementary school years. This was extremely helpful, since the middle school was experiencing a high turnover rate among the middle-school teachers. Students were invited to meet with specific teachers at the start, or end of the day for a pep talk, or get a hug before heading to class or talk with someone about their day. These relationships were also used to deescalate volatile situations between students or other adults. All data and ideas were shared with the Discipline Committee.

Discipline Committee

The final committee that was formed was the Discipline Team, which consisted of the principal, a representative from district office, teachers and support staff. I joined this team in its second year as a member and participant observer. Data was collected from participant observations, field notes, staff memos and meetings. Meetings were conducted in an organized manner with a facilitator, scribe, timekeeper and peacekeeper. Agreed upon rules (by the team) stated that changes would be implemented by consensus and committee roles would be rotated at every meeting. Topics at the meetings were based on a preplanned agenda.

The agenda for the following meeting was determined at the end of every meeting by the team. The Discipline Team also received support from the local teacher-center, which supplied professional development. The PBIS and Discipline teams had different roles and responsibilities. The PBIS team focused on prevention and rewards, whereas the Discipline Team focused on inappropriate behavior, consequences and classroom management. The goal of the Discipline Team was to create a written discipline plan, which included classroom management strategies, and reduce behavior referrals. These initiatives were strongly encouraged by the state review.

In the first year of the team's existence (2006–2007), there were grumblings from staff who reported feeling that their opinions were not being heard or honored by the Discipline Team and administrators as BSH (staff meeting, 2009). Throughout the first year attendance at the meetings dwindled and procedures and consequences put in place were not consistently followed by administrators. Data was also not regularly analyzed and consequently, not much was accomplished. Most importantly, discipline referrals did not improve which is why the team was formed. Moreover, several reported altercations with students resulted in educators being injured. When students were returned to school an increase in grievances followed. There was noticeable animosity between educators and administrators for not following district' zero tolerance policies' resulting in an increase in teacher absenteeism.⁵

At the end of the first year the overall goals of the Discipline Team were reviewed and the consensus between the team and staff was that something different needed to be done for the following year. One of the biggest complaints from staff was the inconsistency of consequences by administrators and the lack of behavioral data analysis. During the summer the staff had the opportunity to participate in a book study to discuss *Bridges Out of Poverty* (Payne, DeVol, & Smith, 2001), a book recommended by administrators at the school. The administrators believed this book would be helpful since 90% of the school population received free or reduced lunches. This book targets professionals who work with those who live in poverty. It is written to teach how to open lines of communication by understanding and relating to those who are affected by various economic levels.

In the second year, the Discipline Team consisted of the principal, support staff and a few teachers, myself included (as a participant observer and committee member). The principal

⁵ Data collected from staff meetings and recorded minutes.

served as the facilitator for most of these meetings. The team met regularly twice a month for 45 minutes to one hour. Discipline data was analyzed on a regular basis and the information compiled was used to make changes throughout the building. In reviewing disciplinary data it was determined that a number of students were “repeat offenders. Again, this term is indicative of the way school discipline terminology often mirrors prison discourse and was used by the team to refer students who habitually got into trouble.

During this second year (2007–2008), the staff was trained using Discipline with Dignity, a model created by Curwin, Mendler, and Mendler, (2008). A consultant was hired to observe the middle school classrooms for two days. Due to the cost and minimal available staff time, the administrator elected to have the consultant spend the majority of his time with the middle-school staff. The consultant wrote a four-page report on observations and recommendations without naming any individual teacher or class. An e-mail address was given at the end of the report for any educator who wanted to receive specific feedback about their classroom. Confidentiality was promised and administrators were not given specific details regarding individual teachers or classes.

At the end of the second year, the committee concluded that there was too much inconsistency in terms of what constituted a reason that students would be sent to an administrator’s office. The team decided that a survey would be sent out to every adult in the building regarding what should be considered office-managed vs. classroom-managed behaviors. The survey was presented to all staff, including the custodians. The survey consisted of three questions:

- 1) What behavior requires an out-of-room time-out?
- 2) What behavior requires a written referral?

3) What are your suggestions for managing challenging behaviors?

(Responses to this survey are included in Appendixes P, Q, & R, respectively).

A teacher compiled all the survey results, which were returned by an impressive 95% of the school staff. As expected, many inconsistencies were revealed in this data. Some of the examples of behaviors that teachers believed should be referrals for the office included talking back to an adult, inappropriate language, and refusing to complete any class work.

Administrators clearly disagreed and overruled these behaviors as they determined them to be teacher-managed. After multiple staff meetings, consensus was reached that the age and grade level of each student should determine consequences for behaviors. Therefore, consequences were divided by kindergarten through third grade, fourth through sixth grades, and seventh through eighth grades. Many teachers shared at staff meetings that their classrooms were being disrupted because they were being over-used as time-out partners. Therefore, the Discipline Team decided that each classroom teacher could have only two time-out partners. Since the survey took place at the end of the school year, the Discipline Team decided not to enforce a new policy regarding classroom vs. office managed behavior until the following year

In the third year (2008–2009), BSH implemented progressive discipline, which was designed for those students who were experiencing significant behavioral problems. When the administrators determined that a student's behavior had escalated and that the student did not accept responsibility for his/her behavior, the first step would be in-school suspension (ISS) followed by one to three days of out-of-school suspension (OSS). If inappropriate behavior persisted (persistent disobedience), the student would be suspended out of school for five days, which would require a hearing before the student would be admitted back into any district public school. This procedure was implemented district-wide. These hearings are closed meetings that

are only open to the hearing officer, district psychologist, school administrator, classroom teacher, the student and their family. All files generated from this meeting were placed in a locked cabinet in the administrator's office.

With grant funding from the local teacher center, three of the committee members on the Discipline Team participated in an online course for Effective Discipline Practices. I was one of the three members who participated in this online, twelve-week three-credit course. The administrator solicited all staff to participate however, she did not receive any responses. The administrator encouraged my participation because the grant required that a minimum of three educators from each building had to participate in order to receive funding. The final product for this class was a collaborative discipline manual with procedures to implement into the BSH community. Thus the three members (including myself) created a discipline manual for BSH that was distributed to every classroom teacher. Finally, BSH had a written discipline manual. According to the unit contract any discipline procedures had to be voted and accepted by the majority of the staff in order for it to be used. The Discipline Team revised certain parts of the manual and the entire staff voted to accept the discipline manual; therefore, it was implemented in the following school year.

Near the end of data collection the staff shared their opinions about what they felt was working, as well as what procedures needed to be changed. For the following school year included in the written discipline plan was: The guidelines for behavioral expectations (rewards and consequences). Suggestions were included in the plan for managing challenging behaviors; as well as behaviors that required an out-of-room time out or written referral.

After compiling the computer-generated data it was determined by the School Leadership Team (SLT), Positive Behavioral Intervention and Support (PBIS), and the Discipline Team that

50% of students receiving referrals were receiving special education services. All data for the school year was reviewed based on the new district computerized system. The previous system funded by PBIS was no longer available. The difference between the PBIS generated data and the new district computerized data system was that the committees could no longer distinguish what time of day or where the referrals were occurring.

In the school survey many staff requested professional development in classroom management. An outside agency provided professional development to the entire teaching staff. The staff learned how to assess students using a Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA) and how to extract information from the FBA document and write a behavior plan. An FBA is a process completed by the teacher or support staff. It describes the behavior, and identifies patterns, antecedents, consequences and possible reasons for the behavior. Information from this document is shared with the parent/guardian and student. Interventions are then developed. All interventions must be identifiable and measurable. Written interventions are included in the behavior plan. A behavior plan is an individualized written plan of agreed upon behavioral goals and objectives. Included in the plan are the educators responsible for helping to implement it and date by which each goal should be reviewed. Educator, parent/guardian, and student sign the behavior plan. There was no follow-up training to this workshop, consequently, teachers were not fully trained on how to execute and modify a behavior plan.

All committees/teams were very transparent to every staff member at BSH. Meetings were open to all staff including parents and guardians. Minutes of every meeting were sent to every staff member. All teams operated under rotating roles with the exception of the Discipline Team. On the Discipline Team more often than not the administrator would take control of the meeting by not following protocol (raising hands and waiting to be acknowledged by the team

facilitator). Although I was an active participant on the STARS, PBIS, and Discipline Teams I did not have any more influence than any other educator in the building. Due to the multiple committees at BSH most staff members served on two or more.

Opposing Philosophy to Positive Behavioral Supports

In-School Segregated Areas for Students Experiencing Challenges

Time-out areas, reflection room, and in-school suspension are described in context to create a visual of places where students were sent. BSH had several designated areas to separate students for the purpose of maintaining order within the building. The logic of having separate or segregated spaces for students who were experiencing behavior problems is the same logic given for segregating students with learning challenges in self-contained classrooms. Ferguson (2001) called these segregated spaces ‘punishing rooms’.

The time-out area and the reflection room were the only assigned places students could go where they would not receive a written referral or a call home to their parents or guardians. These were areas where students could calm down and reflect. In contrast, the in-school suspension room, and the administrator’s office would constitute a written referral and a call home.

Time-out Areas

Time-out areas are not specific, and can be any place where an adult can supervise a student away from his classmates. Generally, time-outs are given in a classroom or office. For primary and elementary students time-outs are generally set at approximately 15 minutes. Middle school students are usually sent to time-out for the remainder of their academic block and then proceed to their next class. Students can return to their classes after time-out without any other consequences or written documentation. The problem with this strategy is the student is

separated from their classmates, they lose instructional time, which goes unrecorded, and there is an increased risk of stigma.

The expectation at BSH was that time-out arrangements were made ahead of time with other colleagues. It was suggested by the discipline team that every teacher should have only two time-out partners preferably within their same grade level team. Time-outs were to be utilized for the following situations:

1. A student is disrupting teaching/learning opportunities
2. The student is demonstrating anxiety or frustration
3. The student is using profanity
4. The student is hitting other students (but not a fight) or is demonstrating disrespectful behavior.

Situation four is in direct violation of zero tolerance policies. Although zero tolerance is structured so that it is not subject to personal interpretation (Skiba, 2000).

There were several challenges that were evident in the use of time-outs at BSH. Teachers, for instance sometimes used the office as a time-out area. Students who were sent to the office were frequently interrupting the secretaries and creating a chaotic atmosphere in the office. Visitors would come into the office and would not be immediately assisted because the secretaries were trying to calm down unruly students (direct observation). Teachers who were identified by their peers as having effective classroom management were interrupted multiple times during the day to assist with time-outs. Teachers did not always plan or communicate with their colleagues to assist with time-outs and students were sometimes sent to rooms where the teacher was at lunch or unavailable. Consequently, students were sometimes left unattended and would be found wandering the halls or causing further disruptions. This is another example of a

strategy that is in conflict with PBIS philosophy. This is a reactive rather than proactive response to behavior. Time-out simply removes the student and does not address the root cause of the problem.

At the end of the data collection, the staff determined that time-outs needed to be better organized, implemented and recorded, because students were absent from their classes for prolonged periods of time. Teachers would now be required to record any time-outs. As a result, the Discipline Team would be informed when students were sent to time-out.

Reflection Room

The Reflection Room was monitored as an assigned duty. Middle-school teachers and teacher assistants supervised students who were sent to this room. The room was designed as a place for students to reflect and write how they would refrain from repeating the behavior. Students would be required to fill out a form (Appendix S) explaining what they should have done differently to avoid the conflict. Students were also sent to this room for lunch detention when they demonstrated inappropriate behavior in the lunchroom. This room was designated as a short-term consequence (unless the ISS room was full), or to separate students involved in altercations. If a student did not act appropriately in the reflection room they were then given additional time, sent to ISS, or sent to the administrator's office.

The initial location for the Reflection Room was in a minimally renovated bathroom. Construction workers took out the sinks, the toilet and the urinals and put up a wall to transform what was a bathroom into a small classroom. On very hot days, the room smelled of urine. A wall was built to separate the students from the urinal space and the teacher's desk was placed behind the wall where the urinals were once located. Due to complaints about the stench a small table was placed in the room for the teacher, and the back room was no longer used. Here is

another example of a situation where practice at BSH did not align with established protocols. This practice clearly does not support the school's mission statement to provide a quality-learning environment.

In the first year of implementing the Reflection Room there were numerous challenges. First, the process was largely perceived by the middle school staff to be ineffective. Rules and expectations were inconsistent and did not align with school policy. The individual supervising the room was responsible for determining the procedures. Therefore, expectations varied and the room was often very chaotic. Many middle school teachers voiced their opinions to members of the PBIS and Discipline Teams regarding the loud and sometime profane talking that could be heard coming from this room. The noise emanating from this room was distracting to classes and staff walking through the halls.

In the second year the Reflection Room was moved to a classroom and, any available adult, teacher, or teacher assistant was sent to supervise the students. Students were sent numerous times per day, and students were reportedly (staff meeting, 2009) overheard scheduling times to meet in the Reflection Room. Eventually, cardboard cubicles were put on desks in an unsuccessful attempt to keep students from socializing with one another. It was proven unsuccessful because the cubicles were not stationary; the students simply knocked them down.

All students in the entire school could be sent to this room from kindergarten through 8th grades. The person in charge would advise administrators when there were no more seats available. Observing the room from the hallway, it would often sound and look as though students were having a party. There were no written guidelines and students were admitted in without a pass. Students were also using the reflection form to vent rather than reflect. The

following is a sample comment taken from a completed reflection form (2009) from a female student (nine years old) in the fourth grade: “This girl was annoying me so bad and I wanted to do my work so I took my scissors and snipped a tiny piece of her hair but I really did not want to cut her hair.” After completing her reflection she turned it in to the reflection monitor who initialed its completion and sent her back to class. There was no follow-up to review or process her reflection form. Consequently, this was a lost opportunity to teach what the expectation was for completing the form and what it means to reflect.

In year three, after reviewing a questionnaire sent to those monitoring the Reflection Room the Discipline Team determined that many of the staff assigned to the Reflection Room did not have any written procedures to follow. For example, middle school teachers were supervising the reflection room as one of their duties and students were being sent to the room for long periods of time, even though it was designed to be a short-term alternative. Students also were being sent and admitted to the reflection room without a referral from the administrators.

At the end of data collection the name of the Reflection Room was changed to “The Reflect and Connect” room. Initially, teachers managed the Reflect and Connect room as part of their duty (a supervised assignment), but the staff decided unanimously that consistency was important to make this room more effective. The administrators decided that a full-time teacher assistant rather than an ever-rotating group of staff should supervise the Reflection Room. A list of procedures (teacher/student expectations) was created by the Discipline Team, shared with the entire staff, revised then implemented. Written rules/guidelines were prominently displayed on the walls.

In School Suspension Room (ISS)

A full-time teacher-assistant supervised the In-School Suspension Room (ISS). This was a multigrade level room for students who have acted inappropriately. Only an administrator could assign students to this room. Students had to have a pass to be admitted, although administrators would sometimes notify the adult in charge by radio that a student was headed to the room.

Teachers from all grade levels kindergarten through eighth grade were required to supply age and ability appropriate work; where students completed worksheets for the duration of their time spent in ISS. Students were usually assigned approximately one to two days, but could be assigned for as little as a few hours. If students refused to go to ISS, or if they refused to comply with the posted rules they would be suspended from school. Sometimes students were sent to ISS as a holding area until parents could be reached to arrange transportation home.

Positive Alternative to Student Suspension (PASS)⁶

Positive Alternative to Student Suspension or PASS was implemented for students who were suspended from the traditional school setting. Students assigned to PASS were sometimes in transition between a scheduled hearing and completing out-of-school suspension time. Students assigned to PASS attended their home school after typical school hours. Elementary students attended one hour and middle school students attended two hours. They would meet with a designated educator to complete grade-level assignments, which were often in the form of worksheets or end of the chapter questions. PASS staff was made up of certified teachers who would be paid to work after-school hours with students who had been removed from school due to inappropriate behavior. Any certified teacher was eligible and did not have to be certified or

⁶ Data gathered from minutes at staff and committee meetings

highly qualified in any particular subject area. When parents were notified that their child was suspended out-of-school they were given the option of having the student attend PASS.

However, transportation was not provided, so parents/guardians were responsible for transporting their child. There were no consequences if parents decided not to send the student to PASS. Students' were scheduled to arrive one half hour after school ended and go immediately to the office where an assigned staff person would be called to escort them to the PASS classroom. The students' grade level teachers' were responsible for providing work for students' assigned to PASS.

There were several challenges in implementing PASS. First, students often arrived early to see their friends. Some students would arrive, but then refuse to go with certain staff members to the PASS classroom. Other students would go to class, but refuse to complete assignments or become disruptive. Also, teachers were not always able to give students the support they needed if the work was outside of their certification area. The room would sometimes become disruptive if students were in PASS with friends. Frequently the same disruptive behavior that resulted in their suspension would be repeated in the PASS classes. At times, teachers would have to deal with disruptive behavior alone, during after-school hours, because administrators had after-school meetings.

Students who were struggling academically would become frustrated and students who excelled academically would become bored. Teachers did not consistently supply work for the students in PASS. Consequently, often at the end of the school day there would be calls over the public announcement system requesting assignments from particular teachers. On a number of occasions students received their work 30 minutes after they arrived which shortened their already abbreviated academic work time.

At the end of the study, teachers who worked with the PASS students perceived PASS as ineffective. Teachers brought up the challenges they had experienced at a staff meeting (2009) and suggested that PASS be discontinued. This was not possible because PASS was a directive from the district office to provide students with an alternative for instruction. Many of the same problems that teachers had experienced before the student was suspended occurred during PASS. On several occasions parents thought students were attending PASS; only to discover that the student had not shown up in weeks. There was no follow-up with attendance and little to no communication with parents or guardians. Although the school began keeping attendance after the notification of missing students; the staff was not required to call home if a student was absent. Again, this demonstrates how schools create programs that react to inappropriate behavior instead of implementing proactive and corrective measures.

Off Premise Locations for Students' Experiencing Challenges

Out-of-school- Suspension (OSS)

When students acted in a manner that was difficult to control, the final option was to separate them from the school environment. OSS refers to when students are removed from school for serious offenses (e.g. fighting, sexual harassment, drugs, theft, possession of a weapon and assault). If students were given a five-day suspension, they would also have to go to a formal hearing prior to returning to a traditional school setting and schedule. Parents or guardians were notified by certified mail and a phone call that their child had been suspended from school and would also be notified by mail of the hearing date. Students were not permitted back to school until they attended the hearing. If parents or guardians missed the scheduled hearing date, they would have to reschedule before their child could return to school. In some

cases five days turned into weeks and there were no consequences for the parents or guardians for missing scheduled hearings.

If a student who received special education services was given an out-of-school suspension, there were specific steps that had to be followed to ensure that the child's disability was not the cause of the problem. Prior to a formal hearing, all students with an Individual Educational Plan (IEP) would have to attend a Nexus meeting to determine whether the student's behavior is connected to their disability. This meeting had an appointed school district official who represented the district, a psychologist, a parent advocate, teacher, school administrator, and the parent or guardian of the student. If it was determined the behavior was connected to his/her disability the student would be returned to their class. If it was determined that the behavior was not due to the child's disability the student would then go to the formal hearing. The student only attends the Nexus if they received five days OSS. On some occasions students were suspended for one to four days; therefore they would return to school with their parent or guardian for an informal hearing. Many times the student was re-admitted back into school without any new strategies or guidelines to follow.

A formal hearing resembled the procedures of a courtroom, and the hearing is audiotaped. In attendance would be a school district official, school representative (often a school administrator), the child's parent or guardian, and the student. Before the meeting would begin the student would be sworn in. The hearing officer would listen to the facts and ask questions. The district-appointed hearing officer would have the jurisdiction to return the student to the current school, send him/her to a different school, send him/her to an alternative setting, or place the student on homebound instruction or PASS. If the guardian did not report for the

hearing, the student's OSS time would be extended. At times what should have been a five-day suspension extended to four to six weeks.

In many ways the terminology and process was similar to what a defendant in prison would experience. The violation, consequence, waiting for a trial date, postponement, scheduled court date, appearance in court, pretrial hearing, sentencing, time served, release, probation, or segregation from the community. All of these steps strongly support the school-to-prison pipeline. This process did not include teaching the student different strategies to deal with challenges, which would help them, return back into the school community (Noguera, 2003b).

At the end of data collection, district procedures were mandated and every student who had an Individual Educational Plan (IEP) was required to come to the Nexus meeting with a current functional behavior assessment (FBA). This new protocol reflected the high incidents of students receiving special education services and reporting to Nexus meetings without any new strategies to assist the student and/or teacher. In past practice the school staff would report to the meeting without a plan to implement anything different that would help the student, therefore the Nexus meeting became a revolving door.

Homebound

Originally reserved for hospitalized students or those with any health issues, which prevented them from being able to attend school. Homebound instruction is also used for students with behavioral issues. In homebound instruction a student meets with a designated educator (any certified teacher currently working in the district and paid an overtime rate) outside of school (i.e. a neighborhood library or community center) and completes assignments for one hour (elementary) two hours (middle-school) five days per week. The teacher sits with the student and assists them with assignments given by the students' teacher of record. The

homebound teacher is responsible for returning assignments to the teacher of record and picking up additional work. This cycle continues until the student is returned to the traditional setting. Students' are typically placed on homebound for 45 days, which is a significant amount of time to spend away from school. A major challenge with this procedure was that student work was not always returned in a timely manner and students' academic progress suffered from lack of instructional time and limited access to the curriculum (Ali & Dufresne, 2008).

Alternative School

An alternative school refers to a separate school setting with traditional school hours. Students are assigned to particular alternative school settings or programs according to type of offense and whether their behavior was violent or nonviolent. Again, the resemblance of school to prison pipeline can be seen. Students are placed in locations based on the offense, probationary, minimal, or maximum security and attend grade-level classes. Programs were available to teach students how to handle their anger or difficult situations. Additionally, at times student behavior would escalate at the alternative setting and the student would be expelled and placed on homebound for the remainder of the year.

Once a student completes the assigned time, they are reassigned back to their home school or placed at another school within the district. One challenge with this procedure is the lack of real transitional support to help students re-enter the traditional school setting. Sometimes students would do well at the alternative school, but once they returned to the typical school setting they would repeat the same undesirable behaviors.

Conclusion

At BSH I served on PBIS, STARS and Discipline committees. The structure of the committees allowed me to participate unobtrusively. The protocol that was in place was very helpful to me as a participant-observer, as I had no more or less influence than any committee member. All roles were assigned on a rotation basis and included: a recorder (note taker); a timekeeper (keeps track of allotted time); a facilitator (leads the discussion with guided questions from a planned agenda); and a peacekeeper (maintains protocol, ensures discussion is not monopolized and that hands are raised to request a chance to speak). Final decisions were determined by consensus. The only role that was not rotated regularly was that of facilitator on the Discipline Team (usually run by administrator). Due to the protocol in place most procedures that pertained to discipline had to be voted on by the faculty unless the administrator used her executive privilege (overrides the staffs' decision). Because I had no more influence than any other member on the committee I was able to objectively observe, take notes and record my findings.

It is not enough to know where you want to go; you must know how to get there. Until BSH developed steps to reach their disciplinary destination, the school and staff wandered aimlessly.⁷ Every action, reaction, or non-action affected every part of the school, creating a snowball effect. A community is everyone working together toward a common goal. BSH saw some results when written protocol was followed. However, many of BSH goals and procedures did not align with their district office. Some procedures followed by the administrators were in conflict with the district office and with BSH written procedures. BSH introduced multiple behavioral models each year—from PBIS; to The Ruby Payne philosophy; to Discipline with

⁷ Conclusion supported by initial discipline plan and progressive improvements in subsequent plans

Dignity; and finally the Progressive Discipline model. There was a lack of coherence between some models. Also, the goal of PBIS seemed to be lost in implementation as it was reduced to giving prizes as a reward rather than teaching students the intrinsic value of doing the right thing.

At the end of my data collection on the final visit from state representatives, BSH was cited for “having excellent plans in place, but not following their own procedures.” As stated in the literature review, a major concern regarding the school-to-prison pipeline is the lack of proactive and preventative approaches teaching students how to make positive choices (Casella, 2003; Christle et al., 2004; Cornell & Mayer, 2010; Lynch, 2006). Students knew the appropriate PBIS response, but did not demonstrate the appropriate behavior when confronted with challenging situations. PBIS proved very successful for tier one and tier two students. However, tier three students in this school needed additional support that was not made available to them. In the following chapter I present how referrals are used at BSH, the infractions that occur and how they are coded.

Chapter V

Twenty-first Century Tracking

Referrals

In this chapter I describe in context the purpose that referrals serve throughout the City School District (CSD) and at BSH. Included in this chapter is: 1) The reason BSH was listed as a dangerous school; 2) Data that shows the number of students who attended formal hearings, the consequences of the hearings and data disaggregated by race and gender; 3) The circumstances that led to the revision of behavioral referrals and the analysis of four sets of discipline referrals, which led to my final analysis of the two highest referred students at BSH. All data were collected from participant observations, committee meetings, staff memos, interviews and school documents.

Many districts create a paper trail for students who exhibit inappropriate behavior and have chronic discipline problems (Tobin, Sugai, & Colvin, 1996). Referrals are often the best tools used to track this data: “an effective way to identify students for a targeted intervention is by regularly tracking discipline referrals” (Crone, Horner, & Hawken, 2004, p. 33). Research shows teachers with poor classroom management skills often use referrals inappropriately and excessively and frequently send students to the office (Boynton & Boynton, 2005). According to Boynton and Boynton “An effective office referral system has a critical impact on the overall building-wide discipline system . . . referrals should be used for the most serious and visible issues” (p. 69).

In 2005, BSH was cited for writing too many referrals. The population of students at that time was approximately 600 and 274 referrals were written—affecting almost half of the student

population. The data following this designation are listed below. The first chart shows disaggregated data by race and gender:

Figure 3.

CSD Hearings by Race and Gender 2005–2006

Black Males	Black Females	White Males	White Females	Hispanic Males	Hispanic Females	Other Males	Native American Males	Total
140	71	22	14	16	7	2	2	274

The next chart lists the outcome of the 274 referrals. Disposition refers to the outcome or how the hearing was resolved. If student were returned to school, the disposition would indicate that they went back to their school of record. If a lateral move was indicated, the returning student could be sent to a different school within the district at the same grade of record. Alternative settings are non-typical locations where the student receives instruction. It is significant that the largest number of referrals sent students to alternative settings, which is one of the most restrictive placement options. If a student receives special education services they attend a Nexus meeting prior to their discipline hearing. The Nexus team (school psychologist, special education teacher, school administrator, and hearing officer) determines if the student’s behavior is caused by the student’s disability. If a student is found ‘not guilty,’ all information regarding the hearing is expunged from the student’s school records. If the hearing leads to expulsion, the student is banned from attending any school within the district and homebound support is offered. As stated in chapter 4, many of the features of these hearings parallel the discourse of a criminal court hearing. The data revealed that 35% of the total student population referred was African American—which according to Rocque fits the criterion for overrepresentation.

Figure 4.

CSD Hearings 2005-2006

Number of Students	Disposition	Code
121	Return to School	
4	Lateral Move	
129	Alternative Setting	Homebound or Alternative Location
9	Special Education	Nexus
9	Expunged	Not Guilty
2	Expulsion	
274		

In 2006, discipline referral forms at BSH were revised. The original form featured a section where specific behaviors (infractions) could be indicated. The new policy required teachers to explain the behavior as they observed it, and the administrator would then assign a code. As explained by the principal:

The forms were revised district-wide because teachers were checking too many infractions for one incident. According to New York State Board of Education, each infraction checked indicates a separate incident, even though the behaviors described are happening at the same time. If there are too many infractions reported, the state identifies the school(s) unsafe (Interview, 2009).

Two types of behavioral categories are used to complete a written referral form. One is CSD. Codes within this category are used on referrals for students who do not receive a full day of in-school or out-of-school suspension; and for those whose behavior does not disrupt the educational process (Appendix H). The second category is for violent and disruptive behavior or (VADIR), and is used to report behavior that disrupts the educational process. Any behavior coded within this category must be reported to the state (Appendix I). The referral data is used to identify whether applied behavioral approaches are effective.

For the 2007/2008 school year, I collected data generated by the School Wide Information System (SWIS) report, which reflected a total of 2391 discipline referrals from September 2007 to April 2008. However, the SWIS report only reflected referrals by date, time, place, student, teacher, and identified behavior. For the 2008/2009 school year the district began using a new program to chart referrals. Therefore, using the new computer-generated program called E-school I looked up referrals from September 2008 to June 2009. The data generated included information that coded the grade, student identification, student's name, up-to-date number of referrals; whether the student had an individual educational plan (IEP) and finally a chart recording the time of incident.

Figure 5 illustrates the infractions, identifies the grade of record, the number of students per grade, whether the student received special education services (IEP) and how many referrals were written for each grade. The chart also shows how the referrals increase at the higher grades.

Figure 5.

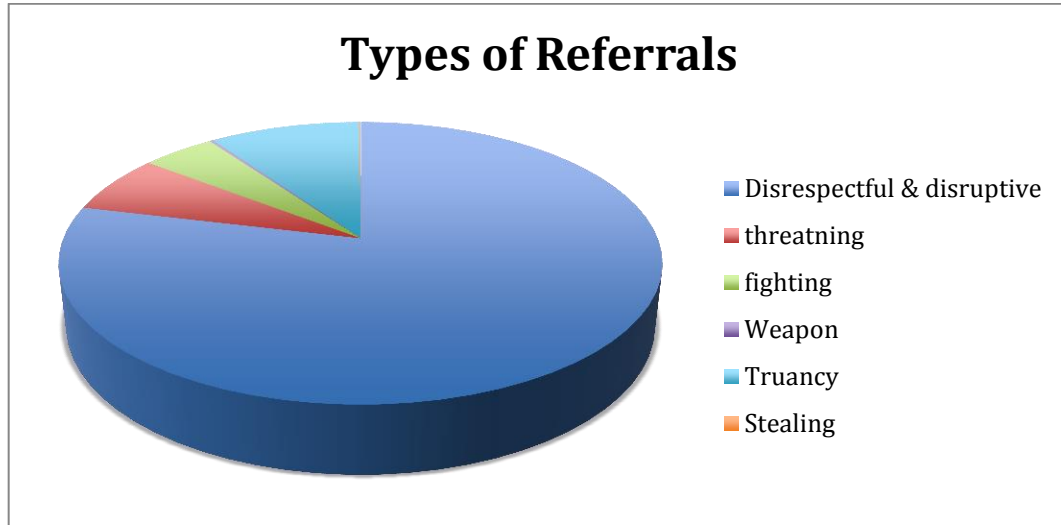
Total Discipline Referrals at BSH from September 1, 2008 to April 21, 2009

Grade	# of Students	IEP	# of Referrals
K	6	3	31
1	15	8	76
2nd	12	2	45
3rd	27	7	171
4th	17	6	114
5th	25	8	227
6th	57	18	388
7th	63	18	611
8th	56	15	542
Elementary	102	34	664
Middle	176	51	1541
Total	278	85	2205

The initial data collection for referrals totaled 2,205, generated from September 1, 2008 through April 21, 2009. Because of the sheer volume of the data set, I decided to focus my analysis on students who had received eight or more referrals during the same time period. This reduced the number to 103 students for a total of 1,712 referrals. The following graphs show the breakdown of referral types:

Figure 6.

Students at BSH with Eight or More Referrals



There were 103 students who received eight or more referrals that totaled 1,712.

Figure 7.

Students at BSH Categorized by Grade Level

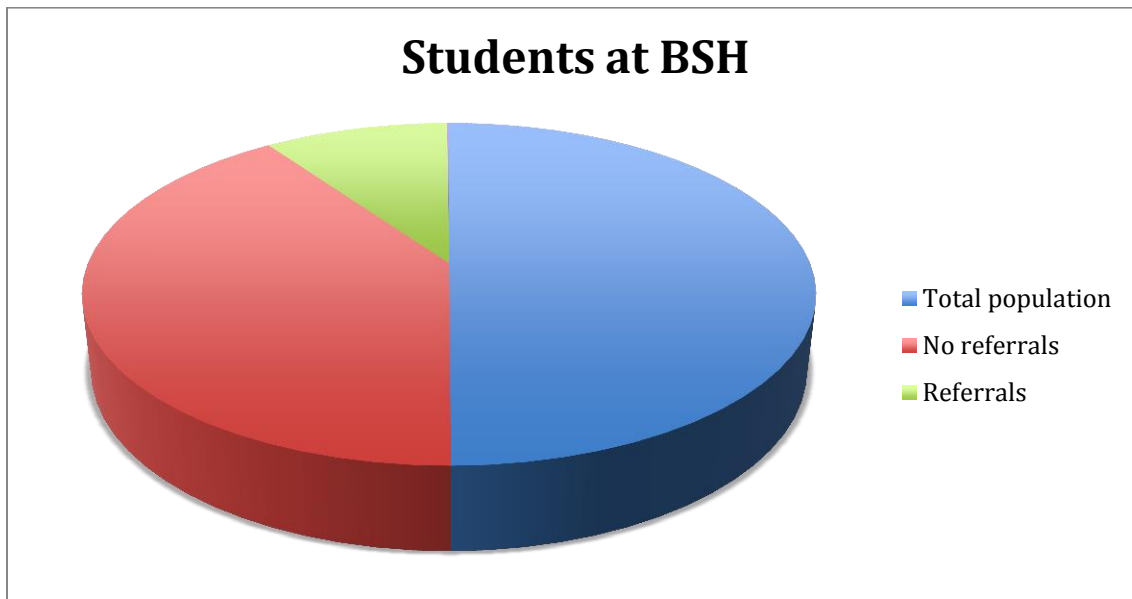
Number of Referrals	Females	Males	Elementary Grades K-4	Middle School Grades 5-8
1712	22	81	22	1690

The elementary grades had fewer referrals where there were more experienced tenured teachers with a low turnover rate.

The population at BSH at this time was 534 students. Thus, these referrals represent approximately 19% of the students who had all been coded with similar violent and disruptive incident report codes on their referrals (VADIR).

Figure 8.

Referrals at BSH Compared to the School’s Population



I used the BSH building census to identify students by gender and ethnicity. To confirm the number of referrals and the reasons given, I accessed the building’s School-wide Information System (SWIS). The important difference between the two forms of data was the SWIS indicated where the incident occurred and E-school recorded whether the student had an IEP. I analyzed these forms to see if there were any educators who were writing more referrals than others; where the inappropriate behavior was occurring; the time of day and type of behavior demonstrated. I also checked to see which students were generating the highest number of referrals. Of the 103 students referred, 82 were males (Black = 42, Latino = 27, White = 12, and one biracial). The other 21 students were females (Black = 11, Latina = 7, White = 3). The

school population at that time was 534 students. Most of the behavioral codes were used repeatedly, including insubordinate, disrespectful, and disruptive. It was clear, based on the number of students who received multiple referrals, to see that the initial consequences were not working. Additionally, out of the 103 students who received eight or more discipline referrals—not one of these students was referred to SBIT for intervention.⁸

Since 103 students was a very large sample size to complete an in-depth study. I identified two students who received the most discipline referrals. I collected and analyzed every discipline referral during their enrollment as BSH. These findings will be discussed in the following chapters. The Discipline Team also reviewed the data and found the total number of referrals to be extremely high for a school with only 534 students. The discipline committee reviewed the protocol every year to ensure that effective practice was in place. Data was collected and assessed yearly and changes were made to improve the environment at BSH. “As a preventive strategy, building-wide discipline should be regularly and proactively addressed ... every year staff should reevaluate their discipline system” (Boynton and Boynton, 2005, p. 49). All committee members agreed that it was imperative that every adult in the building complete a questionnaire about what they believed to be a teacher-managed vs. office managed behavior (see Appendixes P, Q, R).

The Discipline Teams’ review found a lot of inconsistency within the building between what was considered office-managed versus teacher-managed behaviors. According to the administrators at BSH, only office-managed behavior would now receive a written referral. Therefore, the new procedure stipulated that students with office-managed behavior would be sent to the office with referrals. Additionally, teachers would utilize their time-out partners and

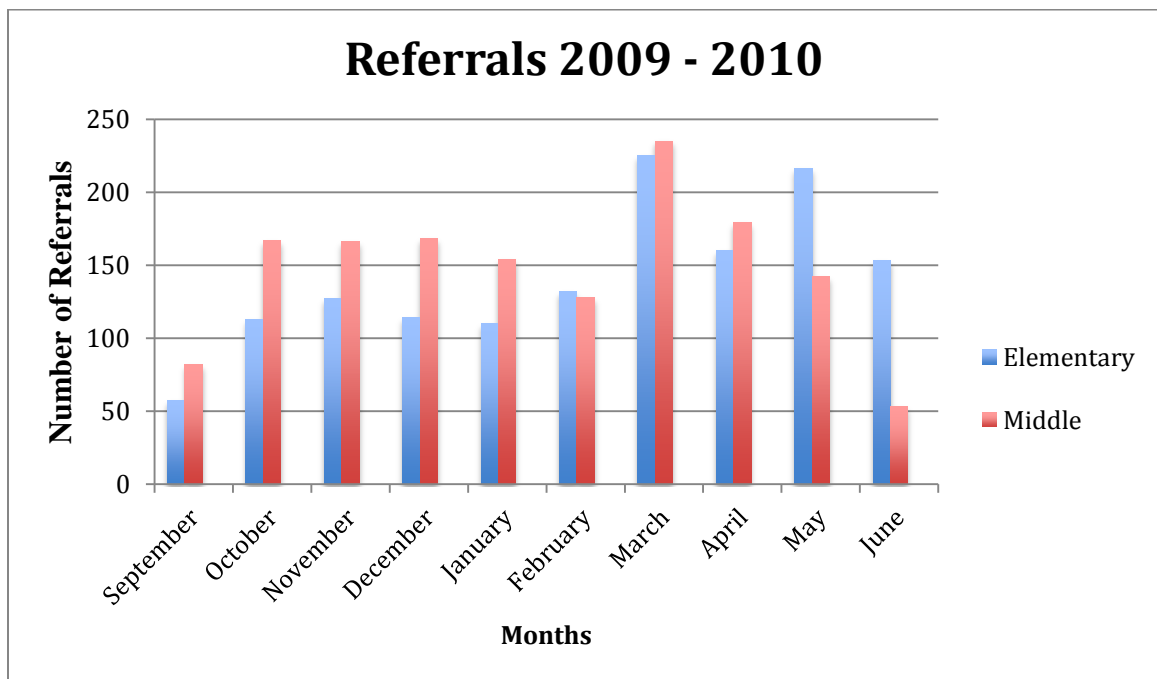
⁸ Conclusion made from analysis of SBIT referrals.

classroom management skills to handle all other (teacher-managed) behavior. Any persistent disobedience would be referred to the Prescreening Team (PST). The purpose of these changes was to reduce the number of written behavioral referrals.

At the end of the year, the Discipline Team determined that additional changes needed to be implemented. The consensus was that consequences for infractions were inconsistent and very subjective. Furthermore, they found consequences varied from mild to severe for similar infractions. In the 2008/2009 school year the Discipline Team decided that if specific infractions had predetermined consequences, the referral rate would be reduced. These new procedures were implemented in the following school year (2009–2010).

Figure 9.

BSH Referrals for All Students 2009–2010



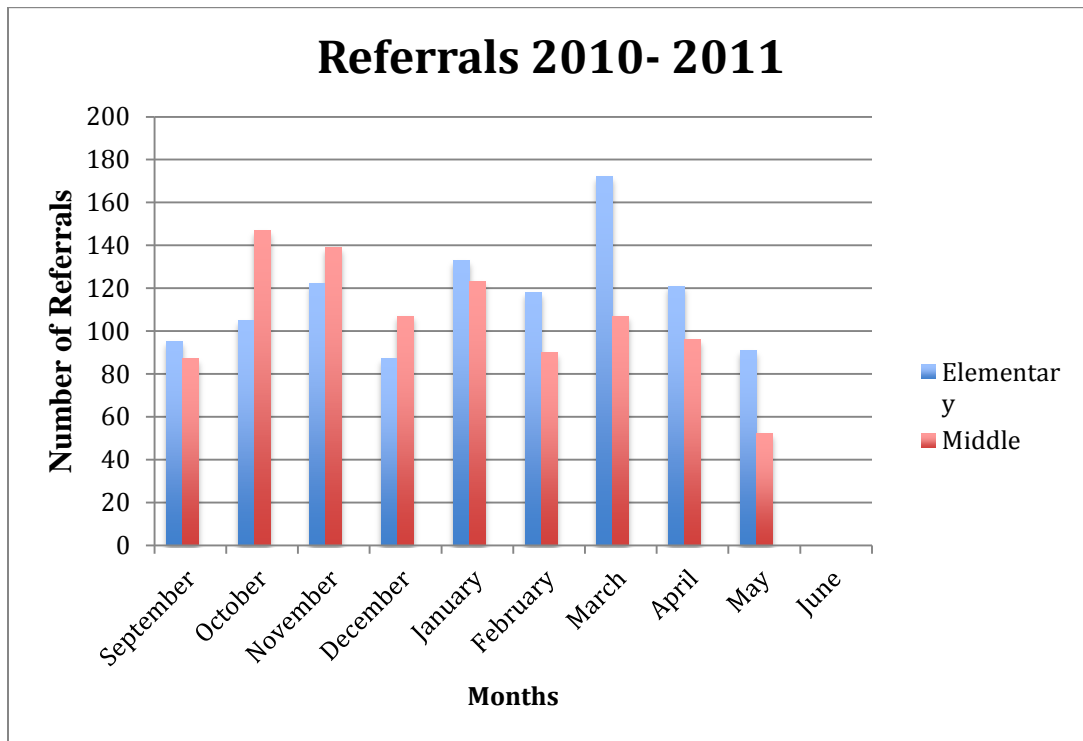
The preceding chart represents elementary students (K–6) who received a total of 1,389 referrals and middle school students (grades 7–8) who received a total of 1,474 referrals in 2009–2010. There were 2,863 referrals at BSH in the school year from September 1, 2009 to June 30,

2010. In June, the Discipline Team reviewed these data for the 2009–2010 school year. The data indicated that in spite of the changes—distinguishing between office-managed and teacher-managed behavior, using progressive discipline, and having predetermined consequences—there was an increase in behavior referrals.

In September 2010, administrators reviewed the correct procedures for completing referrals with the entire staff. The focus was on actions taken prior to writing the referral. Staff was instructed to completely fill out the form; to ensure that an attempt was made to contact the parents or guardians; and that every attempt was made to handle the inappropriate behavior prior to sending student to the office. The school administrator also gave staff the following caveat: “When you send your student to the office you have given up your authority to dictate what disciplinary action is taken” (staff meeting, 2010). This comment was made in response to complaints from the staff regarding students who were sometimes promised food from Burger King. Sometimes students were allowed to color, draw, play games, or were sent to another classroom instead of ISS or OSS.

Figure 10.

BSH Referrals for All Students 2010–2011



On record, it would seem that referrals decreased. From 2010–2011, there were 1,992; however, the data were only recorded through May 17, 2011.

This chart represents elementary students (K–6) who received a total of 1044 referrals in 2010–2011 and middle -school students (7th–8th) who received a total of 948 referrals in 2010–2011. The total number of referrals at BSH from September 9, 2010–May 17, 2011 school year was 1,992. The comparison between 2009–2010 and 2010–2011 appear to show a reduction; however, the referrals in 2009–2010 are from September through June and the preceding year’s are from September through May. According to these data, the protocol implemented at BSH did not seem to be effective.

When staff was given the opportunity to contribute ideas regarding the protocol process, procedures were easily implemented; but when protocol was not well received, some staff

members adopted methods that were not aligned to school-wide procedures. Examples of adopted methods include: sending students to the reflection room without permission from the office; sending students to time-out habitually, and sending students out to the hall for unsupervised time-outs. When staff is excluded from the planning of building-wide procedures, they do not take ownership of the discipline systems in place, policy will not be effective, and student misbehavior will increase (Boynton & Boynton, 2005).

Analysis of Discipline Referrals

Three data sets were collected in this study. The initial data set collected was the school-based intervention referrals (SBIT). These referrals spanned from 2002 through 2008 and included kindergarten through fourth grade. Analysis of this data found that not one teacher was referring any particular ethnic group or gender for referrals. In fact, it was found that most teachers were not utilizing this referral process at all.

From 2002 through 2008 a total of 72 students were referred as at-risk (see table 2 in chapter 4). Sam was identified as having the highest referrals at BSH with 72 referrals. However, Sam was not referred to any intervention teams, although he met the qualifications (i.e., multiple referrals, lost learning time, unsafe behavior).

Sonie the second highest referred student was not eligible for an at-risk referral because he had an Individual Education Plan and therefore did not meet the criteria. Furthermore Sonie's IEP never addressed his behavior. Sonie was eligible to be referred to the Pupil Service Team or receive behavior interventions (FBA and Behavior Plan); unfortunately, positive behavioral supports were never initiated.

In chapter five I used the following definitions to analyze behavioral referrals for Sam and Sonie. I created a chart using substantive coding (Birks & Mills, 2011; Stern & Poor, 2011).

EthnographV6 was used to code the comments written on referrals. I analyzed the data using BSH criteria to define the terms ‘disrespectful’ and ‘disruptive’—the most common terms on behavior referrals. Disrespectful refers to refusing a reasonable request. Disruptive refers to interfering with the learning process, causing a commotion (which includes making noises, i.e. drumming a pencil, or talking out of turn), interfering with instruction or the learning of others (while an adult is trying to teach, or other students are trying to learn), and responding to an adult using inappropriate language or gestures. All other definitions for behavior codes will be taken from Marzano (2003). He categorizes high-need students to better understand the challenges they may exhibit in the classroom and the behavior they may subject others around them to experience

Figure 11.

Terms Used to Describe Student Behavior

Category	Definition
Passive	Behavior that avoids the domination of others or the pain of negative experiences. The child protects self from criticism, ridicule, or rejection.
Aggressive	Behavior that overpowers, dominates harms or controls others without regard for their well-being.
Attention Problems	Behavior that demonstrates either motor or attention difficulties resulting from a neurological disorder.
Perfectionist	Behavior that is geared toward avoiding the embarrassment and assumed shame of making mistakes
Socially Inept	Behavior that is based on the misinterpretation of nonverbal signals of others.

(Marzano, 2003, pp. 104–105).

There were many instances of bullying behaviors therefore I used Figure 12 to describe a profile of bullying at school:

Figure 12.

Terms Used to Describe Bullying Behavior

Type	Situation
The Bully or Bullies	Initiate the bullying and take an active part.
Followers	Take an active part but do not initiate.
Supporters /Passive	Openly support the bullying but do not participate
Passive / Supporters	Like the bullying covertly
Disengaged Onlookers	Watch but do not take a stand
Possible Defenders	Dislike the bullying and think they should help but do not
Defenders of the Victim	Dislike the bullying and help or try to help the victim
The Victim	The targeted individual

Dan Olweus (2003, pp. 12–17)

The staff at BSH did not use the established terminology and descriptions determined by the school or the district when writing behavior referrals. I used Marzano (2003) and Olweus (2003) to determine whether the coding for the behaviors were subjective or based on established criteria.

Conclusion

Research shows that a teacher’s beliefs affect how he or she teaches and how any challenges faced in the classroom are handled (Harry & Klingner, 2006). In my analysis of the written discipline referrals, I found that many teachers were writing students up for behaviors that were identified as teacher managed. Although this practice was against BSH’s discipline procedures, administrators processed the referrals and based on the documentation collected, they did not initiate nor require the teachers to follow-up with an intervention plan. There were also many instances that information written on the behavior referral form was incomplete. Accordingly, the adult writing the referral did not take authority over the situation and simply

sent the student to the office without trying to personally contact the parent or guardian.⁹ The consequences students received were issued as a form of punishment and learning opportunities were not made available to them. BSH did not follow its school behavior plan, PBIS protocol or even classroom expectations. Thus, the response to the students' behavior did not match district or school policies. Also, educators did not position themselves to assess the behavior or to seek and attempt to resolve the root causes. BSH simply did not proactively assist these students to become academically successful.

The last data set collected was for the two highest referred students, Sonie and Sam, which spanned from September 2005 through June 2008. I selected Sonie and Sam in order to do a more in-depth analysis, due to the large volume of referrals they received; by far the most of any other students in the building. The school census verified their race/ethnicity and the district data systems generated a report that verified the number of referrals each student actually received.

Sonie an African American student in grade six attended BSH for three years. He was eligible for special education services and thus had an Individual Education Plan (IEP). Sam was in grade four and attended BSH four years. Sam was a Latino student enrolled in general education

The following chapters present documentation on the discipline history of Sonie and Sam during their enrollment at BSH. My focus was to examine how teachers used behavior referrals to construct these two students and how educators contribute to or detract from their learning process. The information collected helped me document how many missed opportunities were lost once suspended from the classroom.

⁹ As stated by educator on the behavior referral.

Chapter 6

Sonie

In this chapter, I present three academic school years of referrals for Sonie (pseudonym), a student who was enrolled at BSH. The referrals range from September 2006 through June 2009. I analyzed his referrals around the following major themes: 1) a failed behavior support system; 2) ineffective practices; 3) problematic connections between home, school and community; 4) lost instructional time and 5) numerous consequences. I also report Sonie's status at the end of this study.

I organized this chapter in this manner to show that in spite of all resources that were put into place, when practices are inconsistent, when supports are unavailable, or when rules are not enforced in a systematic way, an environment of failure results. I also explicate data from referrals with descriptions taken from school documents, interviews with CSD staff, and from participant observations.

Who is Sonie?

Sonie is a Black male student who was enrolled at BSH from 6th through 8th grades. He lived with his mother, a single parent, and had no siblings. Sonie had an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), which required that extra support be provided for his reading disability. He was also assigned a mentor from a local agency who met with him once a week during the time of the study.

Sonie's records also document that he was being treated for Attention Deficit Disorder with Hyper-Activity (ADHD). According to Sonie's assessments, he was reading on a second

grade level while in sixth grade. When he was promoted to the ninth grade,¹⁰ he was still reading on a second grade level.

A Failed Behavior Support System

Referrals Used as Behavior Deterrents

Sonie received a total of 49 referrals, making Sonie the second-highest referred student at BSH during the period of my data collection. During his enrollment at BSH, he accrued a total of 505 hours and thirty-nine minutes of lost learning time, which did not include any time missed due to inclement weather, sick days, or timeouts.

On one referral Sonie was described as, “a big kid in a man’s body who is loud, immature and intimidating.” Teachers, in fact, would often remark on Sonie’s size, saying, for instance, that Sonie was the same height or taller than most of the educators in the building. It is true that by 8th grade, Sonie walked throughout the halls of BSH towering above almost every adult. It is unclear why adults made notations on referrals regarding Sonie’s physical characteristics, but it was significant that so many did. Over time, Sonie was also defined by his behavior, which was repeatedly described as disruptive, disrespectful and defiant. The following excerpts taken from numerous referrals are representative of the ways Sonie was described by his teachers:

- “Sonie has been extremely rude and disruptive since specials this morning.”
- “ Sonie is talking back and having an attitude. He refuses to sit and do his work.”
- “ He is refusing to cooperate with all adults on the 6th grade floor.”

According to BSH policy at the time, acting in a disruptive or disrespectful manner, or failing to follow a reasonable request, were all considered teacher-managed behaviors. A teacher-managed behavior required the teacher to handle the situation, whether immediately or in

¹⁰ He was too old for his grade level, and therefore, he was automatically promoted to the next grade.

a follow-up with the student. In other words, these behaviors should not have resulted in office referrals, but were written up and processed by BSH administrators anyway. These kinds of referrals inflated the number of referrals that Sonie received.

Although individualized behavioral support was indicated for students who were struggling, Sonie was not included in any after-class dialogue with his teacher(s) to affirm expectations and problem-solve with him about exhibiting more appropriate behavior. Thus, there was a complete absence of documentation in his student file that Sonie was ever exposed to any behavioral supports or interventions other than disciplinary referrals and punishments. If a behavior plan had been created, it would have been written in conjunction with the student; it would also be signed and filed in the student's school records. In the absence of this documentation, it can be concluded that Sonie was never provided with this behavior support.

It is unclear why these district procedures were not followed; however, fear can be a contributing factor in how rules and procedures are enforced in classrooms (Harry & Klingner, 2006; Townsend, 2000). The way a teacher reacts to student behavior is crucial in either escalating or discouraging repeated inappropriate behaviors (Harry & Klingner, 2006; and Townsend, 2008). A teacher who fears a student will often either refer the student to an administrator or ignore the behavior (Noguera, 1995). Several of Sonie's referrals mention or allude to various teachers being fearful of Sonie's behavior. Thus, when an educator fears a student, he/she is more likely to remove the perceived threat from their classroom (Noguera, 1995, 2008).

As Gay (2000) states "the heart of the educational process is the interactions that occur between teachers and students" (p. 46). Relationship is very important to building trust and effectively communicating between student and teacher. Unfortunately, Sonie and his teachers

were often engaged in a power struggle that ended predictably with more referrals, more of the same consequences, and very little in the way of positive change on either side. Sonie continued to act out and teachers continued to respond by producing a mountain of documents that resulted in even more ineffective and exclusionary punishments.

It is possible that Sonie's behavior was a plea for help or the result of feeling helpless in a system that was designed to breed failure for those who struggled to conform? Clearly, this system claimed to support him; but instead, responded to his behavior with isolation and/or punishment. The rules and procedures that should have guided Sonie's behavior were not consistently enforced at BSH. In many of Sonie's classes, chaos was the norm and the typical response to Sonie was a written referral.

Ineffective Practices

Behavior Policies Disregarded

There were many interventions available at BSH through multiple behavior programs but many were never accessed. Despite the extensive training that took place at the school, teachers and administrators did not apply school-wide interventions and supports for Sonie. Neither the teachers nor the administrators at BSH worked within the parameters of the school or district's behavior policies. It is unclear why Sonie's behavior was handled in such an ineffective manner.

When I interviewed individual teachers the consensus was that teachers often felt unsupported in their dealings with students who were disruptive in their classes. This was also discussed at staff meetings where teachers stated that the referral process "oversimplifies and minimizes the situation of what the referring adult is experiencing when students fail to follow what is perceived as a reasonable request." (Staff meeting, 2009). One teacher described an ineffective response when she called for assistance in the classroom; the referral read:

- Sonie was yelling ... I asked him to leave the room and he refused. The sentry came in and asked him if he was going to behave. He said “whatever” and the sentry said, “Okay, then you can stay,” and the sentry left.

The sentry was clearly not supporting the teacher nor was he operating within his purview.¹¹ At BSH, a teacher or administrator may call the sentry. The sentry’s responsibility is to take the student to the office for the administrator to sort out the problem. I clarified this situation with the teacher who explained, “The sentry did not want to get involved in a confrontation with Sonie, which many times led to the sentry being verbally abused and requesting the assistance of the police officer in the building” (Interview, 2009).

This situation indicated that Sonie’s behavior was something that the adults had learned to accept or fear, which could be read as placing Sonie in charge. There were no procedures in place to handle this type of confrontation with Sonie. It seemed as though each individual involved created his/her own personal coping system but, in most cases, the response was reactive, not proactive.

Teachers also shared that “trying to teach, meet goals, and maintain order when students are exhibiting out-of-control behavior makes it impossible to teach anyone” (Staff meeting, 2009). Clearly teachers were often aggravated and used referrals to try to communicate their frustration with students to administrators, which was clearly, not their intended purpose.

On some referrals, teachers described Sonie’s behaviors that the administrators continued to code as disruptive, disrespectful, or defiant. The following referrals were typical:

- “Refuses to listen to a reasonable request.”
- “He is trying to start arguments with other students.”

¹¹ This information is provided by BSH procedure manual.

- “Sonie ... is disrespectful ... talks to teachers any way that he wants.”

Yet, an important part of implementing positive behavior support requires that we try to figure out why a particular student is behaving in particular ways by examining the antecedents and consequences and by considering the function of the behavior for the student. These referrals, like many Sonie received, failed to explain a number of things, such as why Sonie refused to sit in his seat or what he was arguing about with others.

More referrals revealed a pattern in which Sonie, rather than his behavior, was labeled as the disruptive force in the classroom.

- “He is a major distraction to others.”
- “Sonie was asked to quiet down but he continued to disrupt once again and starting shouting ...”
- “Sonie is being rude, disruptive, and disrespectful to adults and students ...”
- “Sonie has been disruptive since he entered the classroom this morning.”

One referral also indicated that after an administrator spoke with him, Sonie was sent back to class. Teachers expressed frustration when referrals such as these did not result in disciplinary actions that they perceived as commensurate with the seriousness of the infraction.

It is imperative that teachers understand the motivations and contributors that result in unwanted behaviors. Teachers must also define clear boundaries, while building positive relationships with students. Students often take on specific roles in the classroom and an effective educator will identify those roles and set up systems that will help students reduce challenging behavior. By identifying kinds of personalities and roles within any classroom, a skilled teacher can be proactive against troublesome situations. Although BSH was in the midst

of implementing PBIS, I saw little evidence of proactive strategies or problem solving in any of the referrals.

Instead referrals revealed that Sonie's misbehavior was routinely tolerated rather than actively supported.

- "He has continued this behavior every class for a month."
- "This is continuous behavior."
- "First thing this morning he is already starting with his disrespect."

Frustration was evident in the choice of wording, such as "First thing," and "already starting," indicating that Sonie's behavioral issues typically occurred every day and throughout the school day. For any classroom to run effectively, it is necessary that there are clearly defined behavioral expectations and consistent monitoring of skills and consequences (Boynton & Boynton, 2005). Rather than these, however, teachers were often a bit vague in describing Sonie's "continuous behavior." It may be that teachers allowed negative perceptions from past experiences with Sonie to color their expectations. Teacher consequences often served to escalate behaviors rather than diminish them. In one referral, for example, the teacher stated:

- "I was going to send him to time out in (the kindergarten room) but he walked out saying I'm going to the office."

If we think about the social consequences of being sent to a kindergarten room for a student who is Sonie's age, we must ask whether this consequence is intended to be a form of humiliation or truly a time-out?

Another theme in many of the referrals involved racist reactions or threats made by Sonie during violent eruptions. In reading these referrals, it was evident that Sonie might be using behavior to express feelings of alienation, marginalization, and isolation.

- “He [Sonie] also made a racist comment when I gave him a pass after timeout saying, “I’m not taking that pass because it’s white.”
- “... He told me that I can’t tell a black person how to talk ...”
- “He [Sonie] told me, ‘You always throwing black people out’ and slammed the door.”

During these outbursts it might have been helpful to solicit the assistance of a social worker or other support staff to help to determine what Sonie was experiencing and feeling.

Based on comments from multiple behavior referrals, Sonie’s behavioral problems continued to escalate throughout the year:

- “No directions can be given or lessons taught or learned.”
- “His behavior is affecting the learning of others.”
- “He has been disruptive since the start of class.”
- Loud, disruptive, disrespectful in small groups.”
- “Wanders around the room disrupting other why they are trying to work.”
- “Constantly talking over the teacher while he is trying to teach.”

The work of Charles and Senter (2005) and Oshner et al., (2010) support that effective discipline outcomes can be attained when students are taught how to exercise self-discipline and are able to internalize desired expectations. Strictly speaking, a positive learning experience can be achieved when teachers look at misbehavior as communication and an opportunity to teach social skills. If Sonie had ADHD, why would it be assumed that he would calm down by moving to a different part the classroom? Since no effective action was put into place, Sonie and his teachers repeated variables of the same behavior followed by scores of referrals, resulting in varying unpredictable and ineffective consequences. Time-out outside the classroom was just as

ineffective as other punishments. In a typical instance, for example, Sonie would spend the remainder of the class period in the reflection room and return prior to transitioning to the next class. According to the teacher's notation on one referral, Sonie came back more disruptive than before.

- “He continued to be disruptive. He also made disrespectful comments toward myself.”

Despite numerous referrals, there was every indication that the administrators at BSH were aware of the challenges both Sonie and his teachers were experiencing in the classroom, yet the problems were allowed to continue. Teachers at BSH often expressed their concern that Sonie was disrupting the learning of other students. However, these referrals did not document any follow-up interventions, team meetings, or student-teacher conferences to discuss alternatives or strategies. The referrals simply multiplied, implying that neither teachers, nor administrators were successful in intervening on Sonie's behalf. They also revealed many missed opportunities to implement PBIS strategies already that were already available at BSH, but not accessed.

The following example illustrated one of the few instances in which a teacher did try to intervene before sending Sonie out of the room. The teacher also gave him multiple opportunities to correct his behavior.

- “Sonie was given the option to change his seat to decrease distraction and issued five warnings. Unfortunately, this was not successful.”

The teacher also noted that the presence of an administrator had no effect on Sonie's response to an adult request,

- “He was very loud and disruptive in class. When an administrator came in he still refused to leave and began shouting out insults.”

On another referral the teacher indicated that it was Sonie’s second referral in one day, stating that his behavior,

- “seems to have gotten worse since our parent meeting.”

This referral was remarkable because it was one of the few instances in which a teacher documented reaching out to Sonie’s mother. Eventually, however, Sonie began to exhibit behavior that would likely be defined as more than disruptive:

- “He also repeatedly yelled at me to get out of his face.”

This should have been a clear indication that the responses by teachers and administrators were not effective for Sonie. Instead, Sonie’s behavior was escalating and the response by teachers and administrators was not effective. Yet, as I stated, alternatives were not sought out.

Although many behaviors exhibited by Sonie were very similar, administrators assigned multiple codes to very similar kinds of infractions. Moreover, staff used general terms that at the very least masked or mitigated Sonie’s problematic behavior and more importantly failed to get at the underlying causes and functions of Sonie’s behavior. At times Sonie’s behavior could be described as resisting authority or defiant. He might have also been described as quarrelsome or acting in a hostile or aggressive manner. At other times his behavior could be described as threatening bullying behaviors. Taken together, Sonie seemed to like being in control and did not necessarily respect authority.

On one referral form, an administrator stated that Sonie had to return to school after a three-day suspension with his mother [according to reinstatement procedure.]¹² It was also agreed that the teacher, Sonie, and his mother would develop a behavior plan. Although Sonie had attended BSH for three years by this time and struggled much of this time with behavior, this is the first documentation of a meeting scheduled for the purpose of developing a plan to assist Sonie in terms of his behavior. The documents indicated this was actually the second conversation in which a discipline plan was mentioned. Present at this meeting were six teachers, the vice-principal, Sonie, and his mother. During the meeting, Sonie's behavior was discussed [but not in detail] based on the documentation in his file. Sonie signed a statement saying he understood his actions were inappropriate and that he would follow PBIS rules.

Sonie's mother was in attendance without an advocate, social worker, or school psychologist present. A meeting such as this can make a parent feel uncomfortable and can be very intimidating (Payne, 2006a). Unfortunately, the meeting did not seem to have a positive effect on Sonie's behavior. In fact, three days later, Sonie got into trouble for assaulting a female student. Other than this meeting, there was no further reference or any action or follow up taken to actually develop or complete a behavior plan. Instead, the response to Sonie's behavior was a barrage of new referrals. Consequently, his behavior continued and his teachers clearly struggled to maintain a positive and productive climate in the classroom.

Because Sonie was seen to be the major cause of the chaos, his teachers often indicated that having Sonie in class made it impossible to teach.

- “He has disrupted the entire class and their ability to stay focused and concentrate.”

¹² After a student is suspended, it is a requirement that a parent or guardian accompany the student for reinstatement back to school [formal or informal].

Here, the educator blamed Sonie rather than consider how she might enact more effective management in the classroom. There was no mention on this referral of any interviews or steps taken to regain order in the classroom environment, nor is there any evidence of steps the teacher took to prevent the kind of chaos that she perceives as caused by Sonie's behavior. Instead, Sonie was seen as the sole problem in the classroom. There were no procedures in place to assist him in making better choices or to provide professional development for his teachers to try something different other than writing referrals and/or allowing disruptive behavior to continue and impede learning for all other students in the class.

From these referrals we also know very little about Sonie's actual behavior and even less about the teacher's expectations for his behavior. The above referrals and subsequent referrals revealed that Sonie suffered as a result of a failed educational system—one that was inundated with ineffective and inconsistent practices, as well as a consistent disregard for PBIS systems that were already put into place at BSH.

Another teacher mentions that Sonie regularly and continuously insulted and 'put down' adults and peers. The teacher writes,

- “His insults and put-downs greatly affect our learning environment and disrupt the urgency to learn.”

According to the teacher, “I wrote in the third person to avoid writing any names on the referral, because a copy is sent home to his family.” Interestingly, the teacher linked Sonie's behavior to the state-mandated 'urgency to learn' discourse. Urgency to learn translates into what is observable by any spectator in a classroom. It includes such things as no wasted time, quick transitions, and students who are all on-task. It also indicates that the teacher instructs with enthusiasm and every second in the classroom is treated as precious. This wording

on the referral is significant because BSH had been cited by the state as failing to display an ‘urgency to learn’ in its classrooms. The following are additional examples of Sonie’s behaviors, followed by a discussion of the inconsistent consequences that resulted from those behaviors.

- “He was unable to calm himself down. He was shouting at other students and he took off his belt and slapped the table.”

Sonie was again in a disruptive situation. Typically if a student has an object [such as a belt] and is using it in an inappropriate way, the item is supposed to be taken away. This protocol was discussed at a faculty meeting and therefore was a known and expected practice at BSH. But in this case, the teacher did not report or confront Sonie about this issue. The referral was indicative of quite a few that suggested that teachers were not feeling supported in dealing with difficult student behaviors. The adult language in this referral is very passive.

In the following referrals, Sonie is described as out of control.

- “He is also making a scene in front of [another teacher’s] class shouting abusive things to a student in there.”
- “I sent him to his locker and warned him to try and calm down or I’d send him to time out.”

Adults frequently used of the term “hyper” or, as in this example, “unable to calm himself down.” It was implied, although not explicitly mentioned, that Sonie was not on his medication for ADHD. Moreover, it is clear from these and other referrals that the school had not developed strategies to handle the situation or to help Sonie be successful. The school had not enlisted the assistance of the school counselor or other supports that were available at the school, including his mentor from an outside agency and the PBIS team.

Academics

Teachers often take behaviors personally forgetting that students will sometimes act out for any number of reasons, including when their work is perceived as too difficult for them to succeed. Students may find it easier to be disruptive than to expose their inability to read, write, or complete math computations (Danforth & Smith, 2005). Students who are at risk for academic failure very often demonstrate inappropriate behavior that leads to expulsion and suspension (Gordon et al. 2001; Mayer & Cornell, 2010). As stated, a key aspect of PBIS involves trying to determine the root cause of a student's difficulty so that one can more effectively address it. There were certainly clues that at least some of Sonie's behavior stemmed from academic issues. He, for example, often refused to complete academic tasks that were presented. One such referral stated:

- Since he [Sonie] entered the class he would not sit correctly in his seat, take out a pencil, or begin DIN ["Do It Now" or warm up activity], or stop drumming on his desk. When handed his test packet, he pushed it to the floor. We strongly urged him to pick up the packet and fill out the heading. He picked it up and threw it on the other side of his chair.

Based on this description, it would not be farfetched to consider that his actions possibly stem from frustration or a concern that he will not be able to do well on an instructional task or a test. As a middle-school student, he is well aware of what he should know how to do and may be resisting making his academic challenges publicly known.

Sonie's behavior problems also caused concerns about disruptions during tests, which is understandable given the pressures on teachers to raise student's performance on assessments.

- "He was excessively rude and distracting others during the science test."

- “I called mom to get him more medication before the ELA test next week”
- “He left the room knocking folders off my desk and slamming the door. He is missing the ELA test.”

It is quite possible that these behavioral outbursts were his way of demonstrating frustration as a result of his reading disability. If Sonie’s teachers were concerned about Sonie’s success, it would be expected, based on past experience and his disability, that the teachers would plan a quiet location for Sonie to take his tests. References to Sonie’s medication (or lack thereof) were an ongoing concern documented on other referrals. Again, if Sonie was disruptive due to lack of medication, simply sending him to another location would not likely lead to a more successful outcome, yet this was a common consequence given to Sonie.

Sonie also was obviously avoidant when it came to his class work, as evidenced by the following referrals:

- “He has refused numerous requests to sit down and do his work.”
- “He refuses to do his work and is bothering other students.”
- “Sonie refuses to sit quietly in the classroom and work on assignment.”
- “He has refused numerous requests to sit down and do his work.”
- “Refused to work or let anyone else do theirs.”

These referrals also raise questions about what work Sonie was refusing to do in class and whether it was completed during time-out, detention, or whether Sonie received any assistance to complete his assignments. There was no indication that Sonie received any consideration that his reading disability could have hindered him from successfully completing assignments – particularly without any assistance or accommodation for his disability. Since students often act inappropriately to disguise the fact they are not on the same academic level as

their peers, this should have signaled the need to ensure Sonie was receiving adequate academic supports. Sonie clearly acted in ways that could be characterized as both disorderly and disrespectful and presented a challenge to his teachers. However, none of these labels get at the function of his behavior. In other words, we do not know why Sonie was acting out or what supports might have been helpful in supporting Sonie's progress both academically and behaviorally.

Considering a pattern apparent in Sonie's referrals, he also showed evidence of avoidance during academic instruction. A possible intervention would have been to identify the source or cause of Sonie's behavior and provide necessary academic supports to help him be successful. It would have been important to consider whether Sonie's problems stemmed from his academic challenges or if particular events triggered his behavior. These kinds of questions are critical, because when teachers have difficulty managing behavior, all students will learn less than they should (Brophy & Evertson, 1976; Marzano, 2003).

Sonie's teachers continued writing referrals and no one questioned whether Sonie's behavior, which was often exhibited during classroom instruction or independent work, had anything to do with his difficulties with reading, his disability, his inability to complete grade level work, or an inability to cope with a lack of adequate academic supports. Although much work was being done in the school to set up systems of support in conjunction with PBIS, Sonie was left to fall through the cracks. In an interview, Carol shared what she learned in working with students who were at-risk for academic failure.

Education is a waiting game. You know you have to document. You've got to have research-based interventions. The data has to be looked at. I think it is a slow process. If

you want immediate intervention—(long pause) you must choose as an individual teacher to either do something or not. (Interview, 2009)

I recall hearing this comment and feeling a bit perplexed. Ensuring that students get what they need is not a personal choice. Yet, I also know that choices are often made regarding who will succeed and who will not and that these decisions are largely based on an educator's personal subjectivities and biases (Noguera, 2003b). Previous comments by Carol demonstrate how she often allowed her subjectivity, rather than data guide her judgments about students.

This pattern of behavior from Sonie, referrals from his teachers, and consequences for those behaviors all intensified his academic failure. Sonie had a documented disability in reading, as well as ADHD. Although he was eligible to receive services he did not have either a behavior plan or a 504 plan. Sonie did not receive quality resource assistance and, as a result, he missed valuable academic time in the classroom.

Zero Tolerance Policies Disregarded

In the district, as well as BSH, there was a zero tolerance policy for bullying, assault, and intimidation that was put into place. In the following incidents, BSH did not follow this policy when it came to Sonie's behavior. One incident documented on a referral stated,

- “He was told on three separate occasions, at the beginning and at the end of class, to keep his hands to himself. I told him he could be suspended for failing to do so. ... He had rolled up some papers and was hitting another student. The student's eye was injured. ... Sonie hit the student again.”

Despite the fact that bullying, assault, and intimidation were prohibited at BSH under the zero tolerance policy, Sonie was given three chances to stop hitting another student.

When teachers wrote referrals for Sonie, the codes administrators attributed to those referrals often did not reflect the seriousness of his behavior. In this instance, Sonie clearly hurt another student with physical contact. Yet, although it was noted on the referral that the injured student had to be sent to the nurse, Sonie's behavior was coded only as 'disruptive.' I saw this same pattern in many of Sonie's referrals, even when there was evidence that his behavior was escalating to dangerous levels. One referral stated:

- "At dismissal, Sonie and another student pulled a female student's hair, causing her to fall to the ground."

Although, he again physically assaulted a student, his behavior was coded only as disruptive. Moreover, the numerous referrals that were written in response to Sonie's behavior did nothing to deter his behavior, as demonstrated in the following referrals:

- "He [Sonie] verbally threatened another student" [the other student was removed to prevent altercation].¹³
- "Sonie grabbed another boy, lifted him a few inches off the floor and threw him down. The boy curled up and said, 'You know I have a bad knee. Why did you do that?' He thinks it was funny. He needs his meds!"
- "He ... even slapped two students in the face and head."
- "He was repeatedly asked to STOP --- He began bullying another student by threatening to "kick his ass—fuck up his face."

Multiple referrals documented how Sonie also threatened adults.

- "I told him I would have to write a referral [and] he said you better NOT or you won't want me in your room again. I asked if he was threatening me he said 'YES.'"

¹³ This was indicated by a note stapled to the discipline referral.

- “He made many disrespectful remarks to me including you’re ugly, hairy, stupid, dumb. He also has threatened me for several days.”
- [Sonie stated] ‘I wish I were a girl so I could jump you.’ I get very uncomfortable and nervous when he says this. I feel as though his anger is so strong that one-day he may actually follow through with his threats.
- “He refused to leave the room when asked by the sentry who came to get him. He told the sentry to stop ‘before I hit you.’”

Following this incident, the teacher was clearly upset. She reported that she did not feel supported because, “Sonie was allowed to return to homeroom after treating me this way.”

As stated in chapter five, only violent and disruptive behavior codes must be reported to the state. Teachers regularly described Sonie’s behavior as disruptive and increasingly violent, yet administrators consistently downgraded his behavior using codes that were less serious than those warranted by the infraction described by his teachers. It is unclear whether the administrators were trying to help Sonie or trying to ensure that BSH did not face negative repercussions by being labeled once again as a violent and dangerous school. In either case, this type of response by administrators began to affect the morale of the building. During faculty and team meetings (Discipline and PBIS), for instance, there were many conversations of teachers feeling unsupported regarding the discipline procedures in the building. Nonetheless, a revolving door of referrals continued without real change.

Sonie’s teachers increasingly shared growing concerns about his threatening comments and expressions of anger, but it was more evident that neither Sonie nor his teachers were being supported in helping Sonie to develop more adaptive and positive behaviors. Both seem locked in a dysfunctional cycle of inconsistently applied consequences and a limited repertoire of

strategies (including timeouts and removal from class and a barrage of referrals). In my conversation with Carol, she shared uncertainty regarding her safety at BSH:

To be honest with you, it is stressful for me to work here. I do not want to be the one who gets shot at BSH. I am all my son has. I wish the administrators would take me seriously. I am very uneasy, afraid of not being able to understand the student's conversations. Kids have easy access to things right under the mattresses of their homes. We should have a bilingual police officer, so we can know what the kids are saying about us [teachers]. (Interview, 2009).

Here, Carol relays fears that are unfortunately based solely from her perceptions and assumptions. When asked, she admitted that she did not go on home visits due to concerns for her safety. Although her concerns are troubling, so were her assumptions about her students.

Sonie's behavior was addressed in the same ineffective manner day after day. Over time, Sonie's behavior escalated and became more and more threatening. Eventually, others were called upon to try to intervene. The school sentry, school resource officer, and Sonie's mentor were all summoned when available, but not in any planned or coordinated way. There was also no documentation regarding meetings between Sonie's general and special education teachers about his behavior, which was becoming increasingly more and more serious.

Utilizing make-it-right meetings might have been helpful in building a connection with Sonie and developing a working relationship with him. A make-it-right meeting between Sonie and his teachers may have created opportunities to communicate and resolve any misunderstandings they might have had. However, there was no documentation of any make-it-right meeting ever taking place with Sonie. Instead, the school only reacted to Sonie's behavior only by assigning punishments, rather than responding with interventions or supports. Sonie

clearly needed to be taught strategies to manage his behavior and anger. But there was no documented evidence of any of these supports or instruction. Students were reminded daily over the public announcement system about the life skill of the day. Despite these announcements, Sonie's referrals show us that although BSH had begun to institute a range of tools to support student behavior, none were utilized for Sonie.

Research has found that the zero tolerance policy often is used to discreetly remove challenging students, including those with disabilities and who struggle academically (Casella, 2003; Dohrn, 2001; Gregory, et al., 2010). The main purpose of zero tolerance was keeping students safe in schools. The anger and violent behavior exhibited by Sonie, as described in his referrals, warranted some type of immediate action or response. Sonie's needs were not met at BSH and teachers and administrators failed to investigate the factors that led to his problematic behavior. Instead, teachers and administrators responded only in reaction to particular infractions, not proactively. As a result, BSH did not provide a safe environment neither for Sonie, for other students, nor for his teachers.

Sonie "Falls Through PBIS Cracks"

Although BSH promoted Positive Behavioral Strategies as part of the school philosophy, the discipline referrals I analyzed revealed that the educators were operating mainly in a reactive mode. Oshner et al. (2010) state that "school discipline entails more than punishment. It is complex and includes developing student self-discipline" (p. 48). Adults who have positive results with student behavior also have positive relationships. They provide opportunities for successful outcomes that encourage rather than humiliate and punish students for negative behaviors. According to PBIS protocol, the behavior described on these referrals would have been an opportune time for a make-it-right meeting. At these meetings the student would meet

with his teacher(s) and an administrator and discuss all concerns collectively; everyone would agree on some problem-solving strategies that would benefit everyone involved.

When teachers note a pattern of behavior, we might expect some evidence of a proactive plan, particularly since BSH was undergoing a school-wide PBIS process. Despite all the movement made toward PBIS at BSH and all the committees created as part of its school-wide positive behavior philosophy, Sonie was not referred as a candidate for any PBIS related interventions. Considering the multiple referrals written for his challenging behaviors, it is hard to ignore Sonie's need for more effective interventions and supports. It is also hard to understand why in a school where every staff member in the building was trained on PBIS, why no strategies were implemented regarding Sonie. After further investigation I found that PBIS was never introduced at BSH on the tertiary level, which was used exclusively for the most challenging students, but only at the universal level.

Determining antecedents can be helpful in developing proactive behavior support strategies, but despite the desire to set up a PBIS school, I saw little of the philosophy reflected in teacher responses to Sonie. A tier three support would have resulted in a systematic written individualized behavior plan to help Sonie be successful. Any school-wide discipline plan such as PBIS requires that all staff, including administrators, consistently support and provide staff training that promotes the philosophy and behavioral system set up by the school or district. In fostering a building-wide discipline plan, BSH did not utilize the systems they had put in place to address individual students like Sonie.

If the Positive Behavior Intervention procedures were implemented, the root cause of Sonie's behavior may have been identified or at least considered. These procedures would entail observing Sonie's behavior, documenting the time of day and the assigned task. Teachers and

support staff would have attempted to learn why Sonie was struggling with behavior and implemented strategies that would assist him in making better decisions. If any adult had initiated any of these actions, the root cause of Sonie's behavior may have been dealt with in an effective, efficient, and positive manner.

There was no documentation that Sonie's teachers sought any additional support or tried any behavioral supports or interventions on any of Sonie's referrals. The documented responses to Sonie's behavior showed that he was increasingly alienated from the classroom and school community. Frequently he was separated from his peers, through suspension or placement in lower grade level classrooms. There was no documentation why this practice was implemented or why other types of in-school supports were not accessed.

At this point Sonie was entering his third and final year at BSH (8th grade). He had not been assessed using a functional behavioral plan (FBA) nor was any behavior plan in place. Although BSH teams identified recurring infractions for specific students in the data, it was considered the grade level teams' responsibility to address problems, unless initiated by the administrators. Sonie was discussed due to the sheer volume of referrals, but no solutions were implemented or suggested. One teacher wrote that Sonie is refusing to cooperate with "all adults." This statement indicates that Sonie is having similar problems with all of his teachers. This also suggests that none of his teachers were particularly effective in finding a way to redirect his behavior. Given this frustration, it may have been really helpful to bring this difficult case to one of the behavior teams that were set up to support student behavior.

This statement could also reflect the teacher's perception that because all of the adults are experiencing difficulty with Sonie, therefore it is Sonie who is the problem. This is also a strong indication that additional professional development was necessary. At the very least

collaboration with special education teachers might have been helpful. The goal of teachers at BSH seemed to be focused solely on temporarily stopping the behavior by removing him from the environment. Yet, such ineffective procedures only reinforced Sonie's behavior and his resistance to the expectations at BSH. According to Watt and Erevelles (2004), this kind of environment that is punishment focused is constructed to breed failure. Administrators at BSH continually responded with punishments to sometimes very minor infractions. Without a behavior plan and with no functional behavior assessment, failure was a likely outcome. Initial planning, development, and implementation of building-wide strategies like PBIS takes a lot of coordination, training, patience and perseverance; however, when procedures and consequences are inconsistent disciplinary challenges are likely to increase (Horner, et al., 2001). It was frustratingly obvious that whatever was being done in regard to Sonie's behavior was not working for Sonie or for his teachers.

The Mishandling of a Student with ADHD

As stated previously, Sonie was diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyper-Activity Disorder (ADHD). There were many references to Sonie's medication for ADHD in his referrals, however, no other interventions were discussed or documented. Sonie's diagnosis of ADHD was not considered an impediment or a relevant disability. As a result, there were resources and interventions that were available that could have provided Sonie and his teachers with some assistance that were ignored.

Sonie's teachers also seemed very reliant on his medicine and often mentioned that he "needed" his medication. Other needed supports were not mentioned. According to Shore (2003) it is certainly true that:

... teaching a hyperactive student can be one of the most challenging management problems that teachers face. It can also be one of the most exasperating, especially if he/she is disrupting [the teachers] ability to teach and other students' ability to learn (p. 130).

Teachers cannot control whether or not a child takes medication—indeed, this is a family decision. Whether or not the child takes or needs medication is not under a teacher's authority or expertise. Many times it was noted on behavior referrals that Sonie had not taken his medication, which also blatantly violated Sonie's privacy. The fact that a student has or has not taken medication should not be on a discipline form. Despite this fact, the following are examples of comments that mention Sonie's medication, as well as a few attempts to communicate with Sonie's mother regarding his medication:

- “Called mother and she said she would check and get meds for him to have at school. She hopes this [medication] will help.”
- “HE NEEDS HIS MEDS...”
- “I called home and left a message he needs his meds.”
- “Mom states he is out of medication. He is disrupting the entire class.”
- “NO MEDICATION...”

Comments regarding the absence of medication were prevalent in all three years of referrals. Moreover, the use of capital letters suggests that teachers found the matter of medication an urgent matter. Again, although Sonie attended BSH during the same time that all the PBIS committees and strategies were in place, his teachers suggest that medicine was the only resource to address Sonie's behavior. More often than not, the focus was either to remove him from the class or to ensure that he took his medication.

Moreover, despite policies mandated by the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996¹⁴ (HIPPA), teachers repeatedly violated this student's privacy by mentioning his medication on his referrals. In fact, every time his teachers' referenced Sonie's absence of medication or the diagnosis that required him to take the medicine, they violated his rights by sharing the information with unauthorized people.

Although Sonie's ADHD was not listed as a disability label under IDEIA, as "other health impaired," a more proactive approach should have been used to address this challenge as well as his other special education needs. A functional behavioral assessment could have assisted his teachers in determining whether any particular situation triggered his anxiousness, agitation or distress and whether these instances were disability-related and should be accommodated.

Consideration should have also been given as to whether the work Sonie was asked to do was too easy or too difficult, or whether his behavior masked a learning need that could be addressed with appropriate supports. There are many strategies available to assist students who have been diagnosed with ADHD whether they are on medication or not. Some strategies his teachers might have considered include incorporating exercise into the day, providing him with a weighted vest, giving him tasks to help him release excess energy, or breaking up assignments or tasks (Shore, 2003).

Sonie could have also received assistance in learning how to interact with others (social strategies) in more positive ways and assistance with academic and emotional support through counseling and classroom supports. However, no additional strategies were offered to Sonie nor

¹⁴ www.hhs.gov/ocr/privacy

were there any evidence that they were discussed with his mother. Consequently, his behavior continued spiraling into more and more serious behaviors.

Lack of Special Education Supports

Although Sonie was receiving special education services when he enrolled at BSH, he did not show any academic growth for the next 3 years. He arrived at BSH reading on a second grade level and left BSH in 8th grade, still reading on a second grade level according to local and state assessments. The changes in his IEP were minimal. The focus on his IEP was his reading disability, but the lack of growth was attributed to poor attendance. Sonie's behavior was never addressed either as a cause for concern or as a factor influencing his ability to learn. Research shows that a quality education cannot exist where there is chaos and disorder (Marzano, 2003). Sonie was not given the optimum opportunity to be successful, which should be afforded to all students, especially those who have need of special education services.

Sonie was retained in his primary years and spent two years in an inclusion classroom. In Sonie's inclusion class there was a general education teacher, a special education teacher and a teacher assistant, who would suggest that Sonie received extra support. In spite of being identified as having a learning disability, I was not able to find any documentation from anyone specifically addressing Sonie's learning needs, whether accommodations or modifications were provided or whether Sonie's basic academic needs were met. The only hint of this student getting extra support was the presence of a consultant teacher in most of his classes. There was also little in his file indicating that his special education services were being utilized to support his behavior, despite the fact that his ability to receive a quality education was certainly impacted by the loss of instructional time.

During the (2007–2008) school year, (7th grade) the consultant model was used for the first time at BSH. A consultant teacher is a special education teacher who meets regularly with the regular education teacher to assist them in supporting students with IEP goals. The consultant teacher advised the general education teacher how to differentiate instruction and assists when possible. Consultant teachers are required to rotate in all middle-school classes. In Sonie's records there is little mention of how this consultant teacher assisted Sonie in his classes or with his behavioral challenges.

Sonie's IEP goals were not met and poor attendance was cited as the cause. There was no mention of behavior (suspensions) being the root cause or even a contributor to his poor attendance or lack of progress on his academic progress or IEP goals. There seemed to be little interest regarding Sonie's behavior other than referring, removing, isolating and punishing him for it. There were no documented attempts to modify his IEP or complete a functional behavior assessment or to implement a behavior plan.

With all the checks and balances in place at BSH, there were no inquiries made to the committee on special education or to the PBIS committees why Sonie's behavior might be escalating or why the same approach of referral and removal was not working. Instead, Sonie was constructed as disobedient, disrespectful and disruptive—someone to be punished, not understood. Sonie's IEP was updated each year, but the issues of behavior were never addressed in his IEP. Sonie's progress on his IEP was noted as minimal due to attendance, but it never triggered a functional behavior assessment, behavior supports, or a behavioral goal. It also did not suggest that the many lost hours of instruction due to punishments could be contributing to Sonie's lack of progress.

Problematic Connections among Home, School, and Community

No Connection to Home

Only a few examples of engagement with Sonie's mother were documented in his file. She was mainly consulted in regards to his medication. There was very little conversation documented between any teacher and Sonie's mother regarding his difficulties, or about how best to intervene with his progressively disruptive and increasingly dangerous behavior. Multiple comments were written on referrals, but there were no documented recommendations on how to better assist Sonie who was clearly having behavioral problems and who was failing academically.

An effective classroom strategy for developing a behavior support plan might involve soliciting the assistance of parents or guardians. However, not everyone at BSH agreed that parents were qualified to give any assistance in helping teachers prevent or deter inappropriate behavior. In my interview with a general education teacher, she shared her view of why one of her students demonstrated challenging behaviors. "He is struggling because in school he has to do what the teacher wants and when he is home he gets to do whatever he wants" (Interview, 2009).

A skilled teacher must accept that parents have different parenting styles and be prepared to accept whatever the involvement will be without judgment. In other words, the educator must have a plan to support the student regardless of parental involvement or lack, thereof. On many occasions, when attempts were made to contact Sonie's mother or request that she attend a meeting, she was working or otherwise unavailable or could not be reached at all. When she was available, the few documented conversations with her were related to his behavior and/or need

for medication for ADHD. Also noted in school records, Sonie's mother was readily available initially, but after three years at BSH her involvement became almost nonexistent.

No Connection to School or Community

Sonie was assigned a mentor through his participation in a neighborhood organization that assisted struggling students in the community. Sonie's mentor was a Latino male who was approximately six-foot-two-inches tall with a large frame. Sonie's mentors' physique was more dominating than Sonie's, which eliminated any possibility of intimidation by Sonie. In contrast, intimidation was a major complaint made by many of the adults who worked with Sonie in the school. Through personal observation, Sonie and his mentor appeared to have a trusting and respectful relationship. When available the mentor would help to deescalate situations between Sonie, his peers, and adults in the building. My observations support why it is not necessary to be of the same gender or race to establish a positive relationship with students of color.

Although he had attended BSH for three years, Sonie had not developed any positive relationship with any adult inside the school. Although he had a limited relationship with his mentor, no documented attempt was made by Sonie's teachers to schedule a meeting with Sonie or his mentor. Amazingly, in spite of the large number of referrals written, neither the teachers nor administrators asked the mentor for advice about strategies that might work with Sonie.

A documented article in the local newspaper reported how Sonie (who at that time was in 8th grade) had gained employment at a local supermarket through a special program. The article appeared at a time when Sonie was suspended from school. It showed him participating in the program and that he was doing well. In addition to employment, the program provided Sonie with a mentor. The program was designed to help students complete high school, gain work experience, go on to college, and have successful careers. Academic support, mentoring, and

part-time employment were also provided for the middle and high school participants who were in danger of dropping out of school or who were considered at-risk of not graduating because of academic deficiencies. Criteria for the program required that participants:

- 1) Live in poverty
- 2) Fail two to three levels of core subjects
- 3) Score a one or two on English language arts or math exams
- 4) Have a 71–83% rate of attendance
- 5) Be above the typical age for their grade level
- 6) Have a high suspension rate

Participants also had to be in seventh or eighth grade and meet at least two of the criteria. Sonie actually met all of them. Unfortunately, Sonie was dropped from the program because employment was contingent on maintaining passing grades in school.

Lost Instructional Time

In middle school, disrespect and disobedience are the prominent reasons for suspensions, which only increase the potential of the student falling further behind academically. When students are absent they miss many opportunities to learn through academic experiences and instruction, interaction with peers, and access to school resources. Students with IEP accommodations and modifications typically have limited or no instructional time while they are suspended.

In a typical school year, students attend school for 180 six and one-half hour days. Academic instruction consists of approximately six and one-half hours per day or 32.5 hours per week of actual instruction (minus lunchtime). The referrals collected for Sonie document three years of disciplinary actions from sixth through eighth grades. During this time, Sonie received

49 referrals and lost 505 hours and 39 minutes of learning time. This amount of lost instructional time can be devastating for any student, but particularly so for a student like Sonie who has learning needs.

The data on Positive Alternative to In-School Suspension (PASS) indicates how many hours Sonie was forbidden to participate in a typical school schedule as a result of his behavior (this could be up to 45 days per incident). During Sonie's enrollment at BSH he missed 14.5% of possible instructional time, which did not include absences due to illness or other non-behavioral reasons, or days off due to inclement weather, or times during the day that Sonie was sent out of classrooms or the reflection room (which are not recorded), yet resulted in significant lost learning time each time they occurred.

Sonie followed a middle-school schedule, which meant he was exposed to a number of educators. Educators who wrote these referrals varied and, although I examined them in terms of a variety of factors, such as gender, race, or years of experience, there did not appear to be any one teacher who referred Sonie more than others. Further, although multiple teachers wrote referrals, they all seemed to express similar experiences. The only significant pattern that I was able to identify was a stark contrast between referrals for content area teachers and his art, music, and physical education teachers. Of the 49 referrals that I analyzed in his three years at BSH, Sonie did not receive even one referral from his specialty teachers (physical education, art, or music). In these classes there was likely less required in reading and writing, which could have been a very important clue to a possible cause of at least some of Sonie's disruptive behavior.

The following chart shows the number of referrals Sonie received in each grade and the amount of recorded lost learning time spent outside of the classroom. This chart demonstrates the pattern of behavior exhibited by Sonie and the continued ineffective use of writing referrals.

The chart records the increase in referrals and loss of instructional time, particularly in eighth grade.

Figure 13.

Sonie's History of Lost Learning Time While Enrolled at BSH

Grades	Number of Referrals	Lost Learning Time
Sixth Grade	15	50 hrs. 35 minutes
Seventh Grade	12	32 hrs. 5 minutes
Eighth Grade	22	133 hrs. 5 minutes
PASS/8th Grade		290 hrs. 7 minutes
Total	49	505 hrs. 39 minutes

What would it have taken for teachers and administrators to respond differently to Sonie? What might have happened if teachers treated him as a learner who was struggling, rather than defining him in referrals as simply “disruptive and disrespectful?” What would it have taken to ensure that Sonie did not fall through the cracks? How could teachers have used Sonie’s strengths as a learner and a person, while supporting his areas of difficulty? What would it have taken to ensure that Sonie felt connected to someone, anyone at BSH? Instead, the school filled countless reams of paper with referrals and spent countless hours supervising him in time-outs, the reflection room, and in-school suspension rather than teaching him.

Instead, as a school, BSH supported institutional violence that created an atmosphere of failure for Sonie, by denying him the opportunity to learn and be successful. There were many supports available, but these were not made available to Sonie. Similar to larger societal patterns

in which we invest time and money to keep jails open rather than advocate for valuable resources and provide adequate training for educators (Darling-Hammond, 2010). BSH put their efforts in punishing Sonie rather than supporting him as a learner and a person.

This dysfunctional pattern of behavior and punishments served to intensify Sonie's academic failure. Sonie has a learning disability in reading and although he was eligible to receive supports and should have had a 504 plan, he did not have access to either. Instead, Sonie did not receive quality resource assistance and missed valuable academic time in the classroom.

Consequences

Consequences of a Failed Educational System, Policies and Practices

The story of Sonie, as told through these referrals, described him as a disrespectful, disruptive and insubordinate young man. As time went on, Sonie was also constructed as threatening and aggressive. Sonie's referrals were written by his teachers and coded by administrators. I referenced Marzano¹⁵ (2003) to establish consistent, terms to define Sonie's behaviors.

Using Figure 11, I categorized the spectrum of his behavior, ranging from attention problems, aggression, dangerous, defiant, disrespectful, and/or threatening behaviors. Different teachers might have interpreted his behavior as aggression or bullying, where another might have seen it as a manifestation of frustration or need for attention. An important finding of this research revealed that the codes used by administrators did not actually match teacher descriptions of student's behavior. Although Sonie displayed a range of behaviors, the codes [Appendix H and I] written on his referrals were inaccurate but surprisingly consistent across the referrals. The coding did not match the district violation codes; neither did the codes

¹⁵ See Figure 11 (p. 128), descriptions of student behavior.

consistently match the infractions. Many of the referrals signaled distress from Sonie's teachers, who seemed ill equipped to handle his behavior. Proactive plans were not implemented to help Sonie change his undesirable behavior or to teach him how to make better choices. Educators at BSH found ways to dismiss or ignore his bullying, assault, intimidation and insubordination behaviors. Most of the attention was focused on removing him from the environment and on imploring his mother to ensure that Sonie took his medication.

Without considering why a student is acting out, it is difficult to develop an effective behavioral plan, according to the principles of PBIS. The focus was on punishing rather than disciplining Sonie and there was no mention about how other students would be kept safe or how Sonie would be helped to make positive changes in his behavior, particularly towards others.

In some instances, teachers tried to intervene with Sonie, but not according to district protocol.¹⁶ If the referring teacher believed that a FBA was not necessary, they could still choose any of the following list of actions: 1) consult support staff, 2) assign detention, 3) make a home visit, 4) send a letter home, 5) modify instructional techniques, 6) initiate mediation, 7) telephoned parent, 8) conduct a parent conference, 9) conduct a student conference, 10) arrange student court, 11) assign time-out, 12) plan a team conference, or 13) use teacher-designed interventions. The only action typically checked off on Sonie's referrals was the use of time-outs, either in the classroom or with another teacher. Given this consequence was largely ineffective, it was surprising that teachers did not seek out alternatives.

The teachers at BSH seemed either ill equipped or uninterested in supporting students like Sonie and ensuring their academic progress. Sonie transitioned from classroom to classroom receiving a range of consequences for very similar behaviors. The referrals increasingly

¹⁶ CSD protocol prior to writing a written referral.

reflected anguish, frustration, and fear on the part of his teachers, and Sonie appeared to be either completely in or out of control of the situation; it is hard to tell.

The data also revealed vast inconsistencies between building and district policy, between BSH policy and implementation of those policies. This often resulted in inconsistencies where, for instance, Sonie received one day of ISS for refusing to sit in his seat, but received 50 minutes in the reflection room for picking a student up and throwing him to the floor! Teachers often expressed frustration at what they saw as administrators failing to provide adequate consequences for student behavior. It is likely that Sonie also was aware of these inconsistencies and saw consequences as arbitrarily assigned.

Although many of the behaviors were described by Sonie's teachers as disruptive and disrespectful, the consequences given to Sonie ranged from lunch detention to reflection room to in-school suspension. The consequences were not aligned with PBIS, nor did they reflect progressive discipline. Instead, the consequences were seemingly subjective and reflective of arbitrary choices made by the administrators. Progressive discipline at BSH was not meant to increase discipline, but rather to add additional interventions and slowly implement different levels of consequences. However, there was no documentation that progressive discipline was ever implemented with Sonie.

Again, the struggle for control was often evident between Sonie and his teachers. Sonie often became volatile after being continuously sent to kindergarten for time-outs. Perhaps, Sonie was embarrassed by this practice, but regardless of how Sonie felt about being sent to a kindergarten class, it was not an effective strategy. There was also no clear or consistent consequence for his inappropriate behavior—something that must have been confusing to Sonie and his teachers. Sonie received vastly different consequences for similar behaviors, likely

leading to these consequences being seen as arbitrary or even unfair. Moreover, Sonie's consequences appeared to be punitive rather than corrective. A rare referral written by the vice-principal described an encounter with Sonie:

- “He was sent out of class for disruptive behavior. I instructed him to go to ISS. He replied, ‘I ain’t going nowhere. You put yourself in ISS.’”

The consequence for this rather minor behavior was actually quite severe—leading to what could only be seen by teachers as a double standard. Instead, this behavior, which should have been coded as a teacher-managed behavior was coded as violent, disruptive and persistent disobedience when it was directed at an administrator. Sonie was suspended out of school for five days and was finally referred to Nexus (8th grade) as a result. The Nexus committee was charged, finally, with determining if Sonie's disability was the cause of his inappropriate behavior. The school psychologist explained,

If the student receives special education services and they are suspended out of school [five days], they must attend a formal hearing before they return to school. On the day of the formal hearing, they attend a Nexus meeting. If it is determined that the behavior is caused by the student's disability, the student is returned to school. If behavior is not caused by their disability, they attend the formal hearing. The hearing officer, who is appointed by the district, determines any consequences. (Interview, 2009)

The Nexus hearing resulted in Sonie going through the entire disciplinary process and being placed in the PASS program for 45 days. After the hearing, it was determined that Sonie would complete 45 days of positive alternative to student suspension (PASS) at his home school, resulting in an additional 290 hours and 7 minutes of lost learning instruction outside of the classroom. According to his teachers, Sonie's attendance during PASS was sporadic, at best.

Conclusion

A flawed structure, combined with ineffective and inconsistent policies, inaccessible resources, cultural bias, and fear all contributed to Sonie's lack of progress at BSH. Over time, Sonie became engaged in more than bullying behavior and actually began to assault others. Although Sonie's actions were inappropriate and unacceptable, he was not seen as a child who was clearly experiencing difficulties or one who was troubled, but rather only as troubling. BSH was so focused on the rules they never responded to Sonie's academic and emotional needs. As his behavior escalated, the staff increasingly positioned him as an aggressive young man. There was no record of his teachers meeting to discuss which strategies, if any, were working and what new strategies should be implemented. There were no requests from any teacher to meet with administrators or with support staff to collaborate and problem-solve. There were no documented attempts to develop positive relationships with Sonie or provide any proactive strategies for his success.

One administrator did recognize the disparities in the referral process at BSH, which is also supported by the relevant scholarship (Darensbourg et al., 2010; Gay, 2000; & Noguera, 1995). This administrator admitted that, "the referral process could be very subjective, based on racial bias, ethnic stereotyping, cultural ethnocentrism and fear" (Interview, 2009). Also in this interview, Rose cited disparities in the referral process involving young men—particularly African American males. She stated:

They didn't have pencils; they didn't have a notebook, or book. If they looked the wrong way at somebody (pauses). ... Elementary teachers appear to tolerate more. The administrators and the mindset of teachers in the middle school and high

school is different. They [middle-school teachers] don't want to hear it. So the referrals at the high school were much more stupid (pauses) ... as far as I'm concerned, and the referrals were for mainly African American males [very agitated]. I had one teacher that would write a student up if their whole body was not in the door—their foot was in the door but the rest of their body was not. Referrals would be written for not doing their homework, being too loud, being disrespectful.

(Interview, 2009)

Throughout my observations and interviews, I saw educators guided by their personal beliefs and misconceptions. I found very little evidence in these referrals or even in interviews that teachers saw the repeated referrals as any indication that they should be focusing on helping Sonie manage his behavior or support him in making better decisions. I also did not get the sense that teachers were curious about why Sonie acted the way he did, other than lack of his ADHD medication. Drawing on Yang's research (2009) these opportunities should have been used to provide training for a student like Sonie to internalize established rules and expectations.

Every year, Sonie continued to exhibit similar behaviors, which was met with the same ineffective practices. Consequently, Sonie spent years losing precious learning time due to suspensions and isolation from his peers resulting in exacerbated academic difficulties.

The school psychologist stated she sees a trend in student behavior and school responses:

I'm beginning to see more noncompliant behavior. Students are disrespectful to authority, aggressive. The procedure in place at some middle-schools is that if there is an altercation, the student sees the school counselor for mediation first. I see them if it is determined that they need a functional behavior assessment.” (Interview, 2009)

In this interview, the psychologist is demonstrating the inconsistencies in the behavior policy, not only at BSH but also throughout CSD [Catherine is part-time and travels to multiple schools in the district].

Sonie the System Never Knew

Although Sonie received 49 referrals at BSH during sixth, seventh, and eighth grades, according to district policy, he was not eligible for STARS assistance. He did not meet the criteria for a referral as an at-risk student in danger of failing due to academics or behavior because he already had an IEP. According to the SBIT coordinator, the purpose of “STARS/SBIT was to help students before they failed” (Interview, 2009). In other words, this process was aimed at decreasing the high number of students referred for special education—not to assist those already receiving services. Since Sonie’s enrollment at BSH, it is now district protocol for all students who receive special education services to have a FBA.

After analyzing all 49 referrals, two facts were evident: 1) Sonie did not have a relationship with any teacher or adult on staff; and, 2) the most successful relationship he had was with an outside mentor from a grant-based program. Unfortunately, as Payne (2006) writes “Rules without relationships breed rebellion and for the classroom to be successful there must be an atmosphere of mutual respect” (p. 9). In other words, it is likely that the lack of positive relationships with teachers and staff at BSH contributed to Sonie’s not feeling connected to the school. The school psychologist elaborated on the importance of role models from her personal experience:

All it takes is one Black teacher to inspire you. If there were more Black educators in the field more Black kids would be inspired to read. When I was in school I had the privilege of all my teachers being African American. They were my mentors, they were

my coaches, they were my counselors, and they loved teaching and they loved kids. My teachers inspired me to keep moving on. The main reason we need African American teachers just look at this school [BSH] ninety-nine percent of the teachers are White. Ask the kids if they are inspired, they will tell you, No! (Interview, 2009)

The school psychologist also acknowledged that something was missing in the environment at BSH. She saw the lack of diversity among staff as contributing to students not feeling connected to the school or inspired to achieve. She also expressed empathy for students of color at BSH. Rose shared a similar impression:

The highlight of being an educator in an urban area is that children want to learn and, being African American, I think that they saw that (paused). They knew. What I had they could also have and I think that as the positive side of it. (Interview, 2009)

Both the school psychologist and the administrator's beliefs suggest that a culturally relevant teacher and sensitivity to diversity supports learning and provides excellent role models for all students.

Early in the study, I first encountered Sonie in a literature circle I was leading that was formed by the principal. At the time I did not know any of the students in the group, including Sonie. During our discussion of the three books we read together, Sonie was able to richly contribute to our small group conversations. His cultural capital helped him make connections to the literature and he readily participated in the conversation about the three texts. I did not have to coax him to stay in the class and many times he did not want to go. So, I could not help but ask, what was the difference between the Sonie I encountered in this literature circle and the one I encountered as constructed on his disciplinary referrals? I do know that I valued what Sonie had to say and there was no threat of being exposed for what he could not do (read). I read to the

students and often stopped to ask questions or allowed the students to make comments. During the literature circle time, Sonie did not receive any referrals. At the time, I would have described Sonie as engaged and participatory. On the many occasions that Sonie was written up he was in classrooms in which there was a fair degree of adult support; however, there were also large groups of students.

Is it possible that Sonie did not work well in large groups because he was anxious about the greater likelihood that his disability in reading would be exposed? It might also reflect a lack of connection to his teachers and them to him. Such premises are supported by the work of Danforth and Smith (2005), who state that when students are fearful of making mistakes in front of their peers they may act inappropriately to avoid embarrassment.

Sonie's Status at the End of Study

As of the 2011–2012 school year, Sonie was enrolled in the local high school, but was not attending. He was considered habitually truant. I cannot help but conclude that BSH, CSD and the educational system all failed Sonie. In fact, BSH repeatedly positioned Sonie on the path that has been described as the school to prison pipeline. BSH failed to respond to his academic needs by positioning him as an “offender;” by instituting practices that continually excluded and alienated him and by failing to engage with proactive strategies to help understand and support his behavior. In the next chapter, I will discuss the referrals of another student who had very high numbers of referrals.

Chapter 7

Sam

In this chapter, I present three and one-half academic school years of referrals for Sam (pseudonym) during his enrollment at BSH. I report my findings by analyzing his referrals thematically: 1) a failed behavior support system; 2) ineffective practices; 3) problematic connections between home, school, and community; 4) lost instructional time; and, 5) consequences. I also report Sam's status at the end of this study.

I organized the chapter in this manner to show how Sam's behavior left unchecked also became more problematic over time. I also explicate data from referrals with descriptions taken from school documents, interviews with the CSD staff, and from participant observations.

Sam is a Latino male student (as per school census), who was enrolled at BSH from kindergarten through fourth grade. The similarities between Sonie and Sam are that both are male students of color, who lived with a single female parent. Both students also had very large numbers of discipline referrals. Similar to the previous chapter, Sam's behaviors also varied widely, but the codes attached to his behaviors were remarkably similar. In this chapter, we see how two very different students are handled in a very similar and ineffective manner, which led to both students failure at BSH.

A Glimpse of Sam

Sam, unlike Sonie, is from a multiethnic family; his mother is White and his father is Latino. Sam's parents were separated and his mother usually handled any school issues.¹⁷ Sam has an older brother and a younger sister, but there were no major incidents involving either sibling at BSH. Sam was an astute learner who demonstrated strong academic skills, based on

¹⁷ Information collected from school records.

the results of formal and informal assessments and despite large gaps of lost instructional time as a result of his behavior. Sam seemingly had difficulty interacting with others. He often exhibited various levels of anger and frequently expressed uncontrolled emotions. Sam was expelled from BSH and sent to another public school within the district, without ever learning strategies to manage and correct the challenges he experienced.

Sam received a total of 79 behavioral referrals, the most of any student at BSH during this study. During his enrollment at BSH, Sam accrued a total of 662 hours and 19 minutes of lost learning time, which did not include any time missed due to inclement weather, sick days, or time-outs. Unlike Sonie, the only contact I have had with Sam is when I wrote the following referral:

- [Sam] was pushing, shoving, and kicking another student. The police officer intervened to pull them apart. [Sam] became verbally abusive toward the police officer. He called the officer “a fucking pig” and [said that] if he didn’t take “his motherfucking hands” off him, he was going to smoke him.

As a participant observer in this study, I know very little about Sam except through the descriptions of him in these referrals. According to Sam’s files he had no relationship with any adult in the building and he often was described as being the catalyst for other students getting into trouble.

A Failed Behavior Support System

Referrals Used as Behavior Deterrents

When initially identifying the reasons for problem behavior, an important question that should be asked and answered is: What purpose does the behavior serve? Janney and Snell

(2000) state that problem behaviors often demonstrate how the individual has learned to bring attention to himself, to cope with difficult situations, or get to particular needs met.

The teachers labeled Sam rather than his behavior as being a problem, which would make it difficult for them to assist him because they had already developed biased opinions. Many behaviors were teacher-managed, but were written up by his teachers and processed by administrators as office-managed referrals. The following referrals describe some of Sam's behaviors:

- “[Sam] speaks disrespectful to the teacher. He is unable to sit quietly, and follow simple, reasonable requests.”
- “[Sam] has consistently been very disruptive in class to the point where it has been unsafe. The students cannot hear my directions or learn because of him. He has talked back to me a number of times also.”
- “They [Sam and another student] refused to stop this behavior and were very disrespectful and out of control.”
- “[Sam] has been making noises and being disrespectful to ME and his classmates.”

The capitalization of the word ‘me’ indicates that the teacher was extremely annoyed with Sam's demonstrated lack of respect toward her as well as his classmates.

- “While Mrs. N was conducting her math class [Sam] was not following directions and [was] being disruptive and disrespectful to myself [teacher-assistant] in and out of the classroom.”

Sam was written up for multiple incidents of what should have been considered teacher-managed behaviors, yet administrators continued to code his behavior as disruptive. The referrals coded as disruptions continued:

- While Mrs. N was talking to the students about respect [Sam] was being loud, yelling at her, out of his seat. While attempting to distract his fellow students, he was giving his opinion about respect very disrespectfully. Finally, he needed to be removed from the classroom [by the sentry]. He just kept getting louder and out of control.
- “Sam was very disrespectful and rude to adults in classroom.”
- He was taking his long rope-like erasers and pounding the desk with them. I was teaching and asked him to stop and put them away. He ignored me and pounded harder. I approached him to take them away and I took one but he started to fight me for them and told me to get my fat self away from him. I didn’t take the other eraser—I told him to go to the office. He has been disrespectful on several occasions.
- “Vocally, very disrespectful!”
- Sam has been continuously disruptive and very disrespectful all morning. He has interrupted learning many times, has talked back to me several times, refuses reasonable requests, and ignores classroom rules. Howling, yelling, mocking me, mocking grandma [classroom helper], writes smart-alecky answers to the questions on his papers. ABSOLUTELY INTOLERABLE BEHAVIOR. Threw his work out.
- “He informed me that I am not his mother so he doesn’t have to listen and to ‘shut up with your fat-self.’”
- Refused to sit down, tried to throw his work in the trash, and came up to the teacher snapping his fingers in her face. He threatened to tell his family on me [teacher assistant]. The students said he called the teacher a bitch in Spanish.

In each of these cases, such behaviors, although troublesome to the teachers, would not have been appropriate for a referral, according to protocol at BSH. Instead, these behaviors should have been under the teacher's purview. According to Darensbourg et al. (2010), the way an educator responds to misbehavior often determines the results. This is especially true when the educator does not implement discipline with fairness and/or consistency, because it shows a lack of commitment to the school's philosophy; as a result, students fail to learn about rules and consequences. Instead of receiving established parameters of acceptable behaviors, Sam was labeled as being disruptive, disrespectful and defiant by his teachers.

I noticed that Sam's behavior also extended to other settings in the school. Sam receives referrals in the lunch-room, library, and during special classes:

The lunch attendants wrote the following referrals:

- "He [Sam] said 'fuck you' to the lunch aide, to Ms. P and to me, and the VP."
- "He was very rude and talked inappropriately to Ms. J in the after-school program.

Then when I asked him to go to the office for time out, he swung his coat at Ms. J to intentionally hit her."

The librarian wrote referrals:

- "Sam's behavior had been ongoing."
- "When he saw that we were writing in library he became disruptive and argumentative."
- [Sam] had not been behaving appropriately or respectfully in library lessons for some time. To correct this I discussed the recurring problems with him and asked him to fill out the attached action plan. He refused and threw his pencil across the room. I went to retrieve the pencil as a female student was entering. She told me that he had

just called me “an UGLY BITCH” [in Spanish]. He was angry with her and said “I’m going to stick this pencil in your face.” I (the librarian) spoke to his teacher about this incident.

She deferred to the classroom teacher, instead of personally contacting Sam’s mother. It may be that the teacher deferred to a colleague because she felt unprepared to handle the situation herself.

The instructor during physical education class wrote,

- “Sam was fooling around and being unsafe in the gym.”

This referral was very vague and did not indicate what exactly Sam was doing that demonstrated unacceptable behavior in the gym.

Dr. Kenneth Shore (2003) states: “A disruptive student makes the job of a teacher very difficult and can take considerable time away from instruction. It only stands to reason that, “Disruptive students disturb the class and make it difficult to teach and difficult for students to learn.” (p. 85). A disruptive student may be uncooperative, disobedient, noncompliant, and oppositional defiant. It is easy to interpret how challenging it was to have Sam in some of these classrooms. However, it is also obvious that positive strategies should have been implemented immediately. Established protocol should have been followed, such as: referral to PST, consultation with colleagues or a grade level team, and a home visit. Some of these strategies may have helped to discover what Sam was experiencing and what was the source of some of his social and emotional outbursts.

Ineffective Practices

Behavior Policies Disregarded

On Sam's numerous referrals, it was noted that he was interfering with the learning of others. This was contrary to the mission statement, in which the district vowed to help all students be productive responsible citizens. Appropriate follow-up could have helped to reinforce any strategies implemented. Instead, Sam's teachers wrote more and more referrals complaining about his disruptions in the classroom.

- "I have already attempted to call home. He makes it very difficult to teach."
- He has been continuously disruptive and rude throughout the morning. He has been extremely disrespectful to adults and classmates after returning from time-out, he continued to make it nearly impossible to teach the class. Refused any reasonable requests.
- "While in the classroom [Sam] was disrespectful and uncooperative."
- "He is a constant disturbance in class."
- I was addressing the class and he made a negative comment towards my words. As a result, the class became disruptive and found him to be very disruptive and found him to be very humorous. He kept on w/the negative comments noticing the outcome of his words. He seems not to care about how he behaves how he distracts the class, and how he speaks to adults.

In this referral, notice the emphasis on "he." It appears that the teacher is placing all the blame on Sam. Yes, Sam was disruptive, but this presented an opportunity to implement PBIS strategies that the entire staff were trained to promote.

- Refused to get in line after asked 3X and saying the word motherfucker out loud for students to hear. Also, when walking him to the office with the referral, I asked him just to bring himself. He told me no!
- “He (Sam) had a time out this morning for disrupting class. ... he ran around, whistled, moved chairs around, and refused to follow any reasonable request. Sam said ‘go ahead you’re going to be writing about more real soon.’”

In many of his referrals, there appeared to be a power struggle between his teacher and Sam. There were many lost opportunities to try to get to the bottom of Sam’s behaviors and to work with him to meet expectations presented in class and at school.

- After lunch he refused to sit in his seat and shouted at me—shoved a chair into a table and went in and out of the classroom slamming the door each time. He refused to begin working. This behavior has to stop.

In this situation the teacher implies that it is not her job to stop the behavior. She has removed herself from being in charge of Sam’s behavior.

- “He kept getting out of his seat and yelling out during the lesson.”
- “He constantly interrupts instruction with sounds, making comments. He refuses to sit down. He will be disrespectful to the adults with his words. He says he doesn’t have to listen we’re not his mamma, etc.”

The following referral shows how a teacher has dismissed herself from all accountability for this student, yet demands that the administrator handle it according to their expectations.

- “He needs to stay after school with an administrator and realize I will not tolerate his rudeness.”

The following is another example of Sam exhibiting challenging behavior with a substitute teacher. This demonstrated that it was not just teachers working in the building who struggled with Sam. The substitute teacher stated that Sam was,

- “throwing himself and chairs. The class was all settled—he came in and threw one of the biggest attitudes I’ve ever seen—He said he hates me before I introduced myself.”

Instead of implementing a proactive strategy or making use of any of the supports set up at the school to deal with difficult behavior, teachers simply wrote referrals:

- Throughout math class he refuses to sit still, he would not stop interrupting instruction and distracting other students. He is unable to sit still, unable to not stop talking, and making noises. He says he doesn’t care. He is disrespectful. He makes noises all day in this class.
- Mrs. N was teaching math [and] he came into the classroom [and] disrupted the class. [He] was yelling out, where are you? —she told him where the “18” was on his paper. He then told her to shut up. She told him he needed to leave and go to the office. When he left he told her to shut her freaking mouth.
- [Sam] was asked repeatedly to go back to his seat ... I walked over to him while he was on the computer to tell him to go to his seat and he said, ‘Are you talking to me?’ I replied, yes, and then he proceeded to tell me to shut up. He needs to stay after school with an administrator.

The teacher clearly did not take control of this situation. Instead of personally keeping Sam after school, she requests that he stay after school with an administrator.

The educators wrote multiple referrals that described Sam as disrespectful, but there was no evidence of teachers considering the possible origins of the problem. Sam’s teachers seemed

to place all blame on Sam. On many occasions the objective of teachers at BSH was not to teach Sam self-discipline or to learn how to better support his behavior, but rather to remove him from the classroom and punish him for his actions.

Time-outs

An alternative to writing behavior referrals at BSH was to assign students to time-out. The purpose is to give them the opportunity to take a break and return to class without any further consequences. Unfortunately, when time-out is used excessively it results in many hours of unrecorded lost instruction. In many instances teachers followed the proper procedures by first sending Sam to time-out; but, because the time-outs did not stop the unwanted behavior, Sam's time-outs often led to his being sent to the office with a referral. The ineffectiveness of time-outs is documented in the following referrals.

- He was asked to go to T/O [time-out] for being disruptive. He had several warnings this morning. He refused to go to T/O and after 5 minutes he got his book bag and jacket and walked out of the room and said he was going home. He turned around after I told him he would be suspended. He turned around and threw his bag and coat back in the classroom. We should contact mom and have a meeting.
- "He was being rude and disrespectful in both English and Spanish. When asked to go to time out."

In this situation, Sam demonstrated his knowledge of inappropriate language in English and Spanish, though he did not speak Spanish fluently. The referral noted that Spanish-speaking students in the class interpreted the inappropriate language for the teacher. This type of situation causes divisiveness between Sam and his peers.

- “Sam was brought to me by the acting administrator for a time-out.” (The time-out teacher wrote this referral).
- “In time out he was drumming on the garbage can and being loud even after being asked to stop.”
- “[Sam] is refusing to follow directions and disrupts the class. He was timed out in another classroom, but continued to be disruptive.”
- “I tried to put him in time out with a reflection sheet but he refused to go to time-out and refused to complete the reflection sheet.”
- I was doing a whole group lesson; he was making noises, getting up out of his seat, and jumping on the beanbag chairs. He was laughing at another student and disregarding my repeated warnings—When he lost all three of his warning sticks, I told him he would have to leave the room. He told me to ‘shut-up.’ That’s when it went from an out of room time out to a referral. He told me he could do what he pleases, nothing happens to him—Too many referrals for the same behaviors.

In this example, the teacher attempted a proactive strategy, but when it did not work she reverted to the same ineffective practice of writing a referral. In the following referral, the teacher makes a notation that Sam is missing large gaps of time by being sent to time-out, but she does not suggest or implement any alternative.

- Sam has had two time-outs today. One was with Ms. R. the other was with Ms. B. He is unable to transition back to the classroom. He was rude to me and Ms. K—refused to follow a reasonable request and talked back.
- [Sam] had a difficult morning. I moved his seat. He continued to talk out and Interrupt. As we were in the hall at the bathroom, Ms. B came by and he was

- rude and uncooperative with her. She suggested a time out with her. I thought he had gone upstairs. (He was wandering through the halls)
- He had a time-out this morning. His behavior has not improved. When I asked him to sit down and be quiet he said, “Why don’t you sit down and be quiet” He then said, “Watch I’ll give you a reason to write a referral.
 - He refused to settle down and follow a reasonable request to sit down and stop talking back to me. I wrote a time-out pass and he ran away ... He came back telling me he wasn’t going to follow my directions.
 - Sam was given a time out in AM for refusal to follow reasonable request and disturbing class. After lunch he wandered in an out of classroom several times and would not stay in the room—ultimately told me he was not coming back in the room and he ran off.
 - He had a time out this morning. His behavior has not improved. When I asked him to sit down and be quiet he said, “Why don’t you sit down and be quiet.”

In the preceding referrals, Sam lost countless hours of valuable learning time, first in time-out and then due to consequences once his time-outs escalated to written referrals. It is apparent that Sam had significant difficulties in his classes, yet, there was no documentation regarding how he might be assisted or what might be causing his difficulties. These situations demonstrate many missed opportunities to teach Sam life lessons. The inconsistent and ineffective practices at BSH only exacerbated the problem and the root cause of Sam’s behavior was not explored. The preceding referrals all reflect an intervention strategy that does not work for Sam.

A pattern, seen in notes on the referrals, showed that Sam was removed without any positive resolution. According to Sam's teachers, he continued to act in a disruptive manner and his teachers continued to isolate and punish him. Although Sam's behavior was becoming very problematic, his teachers did not refer him to the Prescreening Team (PST), which was part of the protocol established at BSH. This is significant because it again offers evidence of many missed opportunities to initiate assistance for Sam. If Sam's teachers had followed proper procedure and had referred Sam to the Pupil Service Team (PST), or used a FBA to chart what events preceded Sam's behavior, they may have identified and established some strategies for Sam to implement before and during his classes. Sam could have been reminded of and/or retaught the parameters of behaviors that were acceptable in the classroom.

Social-Emotional Needs Disregarded

Ferguson (2001) explains that when students of color act foolishly they are seen as thuggish and disrespectful, rather than as immature children. Ferguson attributes this as the reason why students of color often receive harsher consequences for the same behaviors. Moreover, the behavior of students of color is typically compared to the norms of the dominant society and then misinterpreted based on those norms. If early interventions had been implemented for Sam, his behavior may have become more intrinsic as he matured. Sam's behavior should have warranted some type of intervention or follow-up: an FBA, home contact, or request for assistance through community liaisons; but instead he continued to be referred for acting in ways that were disruptive, disrespectful, defiant, and sometimes just reflected his immaturity.

When students are taught the difference between right and wrong, supported in making good decisions rather than simply being punished, pro-social behavior is more likely to become

intrinsic. This is what is meant by self-discipline. The following referrals show that punishment rather than self-discipline was the focus of how teachers and administrators responded to Sam at BSH. Hale (1982) believes it is extremely important that students are taught how to control their emotional impulses, especially when they are experiencing negative situations, so that they do not engage in self-destructive behavior.

- “He started kicking his backpack across the room and being unsafe.”
- He was very rude. He was asked to pick up a piece of paper—refused. He mocked me several times. He stood behind me and made bunny ears. When told he was not participating in centers, he stuck his tongue out. I told him to get up and go to time out and he refused. Very disrespectful and defiant.

In this referral, the teacher mentioned that Sam was prohibited from participating in centers. Centers are part of instruction at BSH. The teacher did not consider the function of the behavior, because she already interpreted it as defiance, even though it could have also been interpreted as immature behavior.

- Sam refused to stay in his seat making faces at me, and the students, laughing, not doing his work, walking behind me, and mimicking what I say and do. I asked in a reasonable manner to please sit down and do your work.

Although Sam was exhibiting very volatile and unsafe behavior, at other times he was simply acting silly. Regardless of the behavior, however, the strategies to deal with his behavior continued to focus on the same ineffective methods.

The following is another example of an educator responding to the behavior, instead of Sam’s social and emotional needs. Based on the following incident, Sam did not receive correction well and took it personally when the teacher rejected his work.

- He handed in morning work that was not acceptable [sloppy]. I asked him to do it again. He brought me another sheet that was unacceptable. I explained to him both times why it was not going to be accepted. He threw them on the floor and started stepping on them and ripping them.

In this example, it is unclear what exactly took place or what the procedure is in this classroom. However, this is the only incident where Sam is recorded as participating in a classroom assignment. Instead, the teacher rejected his work a second time for its failure to meet particular standards or expectations. The teacher did not mention offering any supports or additional instruction to explain how Sam should correct the work. We might conclude that Sam may act out when frustrated, so teaching him how to respond to frustration would have been an important skill to include on a behavioral plan.

- “He was spanking his butt and shaking it at other kids, saying rude things in Spanish.” Sam performed moves with graphic overtones that simulated sexual intercourse from a dance that was popular at the time, but highly inappropriate for a young child. There was no indication that Sam was instructed on why his actions were inappropriate.
- “Sam has run in and out of the classroom all morning. He and another student have laughed loudly, played with my materials and done no work.”
- “He has been disrespectful all day. When I am teaching he is mocking me and disrupting instruction. He refuses to sit appropriately and lays on the floor.”
- “He [Sam] was eating candy and refused to throw it away. [He] refused to do his work, was making noises, and being disruptive to the extent that others could not do their work.”

- He has become entertainment for the class.”
- “Speaking out in class, acting as if he’s trying to entertain the other students. He says he doesn’t care.”
- “When I told him that he can’t do that, he stuck his tongue and rasberried at me.”
- “BEING THE CLASS CLOWN, CRACKING UP THE WHOLE CLASS. He SASSHAYED TO & FRO PUSHED HIS CHAIR IN REPEATEDLY W/ HIS PELVIS (IT LOOKED PORNOGRAPHIC) [and was] SENT TO THE OFFICE”

It was significant that this entire referral was written entirely in capital letters, clearly communicating that the teacher was highly concerned about Sam’s behavior. Sam was using the chair as a makeshift partner to demonstrate dirty dancing—perhaps in order to get attention from his peers. The referral also noted, “Again, no working home number.” Here, the teacher seems to have lost control of the classroom and blamed Sam for the chaotic atmosphere. She responded to this student as if he were the adult in charge. Although, an attempt was made to contact Sam’s mother when she could not be reached the teacher reverted back to the same ineffective practice, which was isolate, and punish.

Neither Sam nor his teachers were held accountable. If BSH had fully implemented a proactive approach, they could have initiated a Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA), which may have identified Sam’s behavior patterns. As educators we have the responsibility of helping students like Sam to be successful. It might have also been useful to proactively attain the assistance of his mother, maybe a home visit should have been considered. Sam did not have any action plan in place and no agreed-upon expectations. Consequently, because proactive strategies were not pursued and implemented Sam’s behavior continued and so did the referrals:

- Sits back in his seat, pretends he is speaking to the class, says he doesn't care. He will answer back w/every comment she makes to him. He sits there and laughs and says he doesn't care. He will comment and wait for the others to laugh at him, like he's their entertainment. He's more vocal than ever." [teacher -assistant wrote this referral]

Imagine a minister in church delivering his weekly sermon while a heckler is in the audience. It seems this type of behavior should have immediately warranted a meeting with Sam, his mother, support staff, and an administrator to get to the root causes of these outbursts, which at least in these examples seem to support that he is looking for attention from his peers. Unfortunately, no behavioral plan was implemented for Sam; and, moreover, no additional peer or adult support was offered to help him to meet the classroom expectations or support his social needs. There was also no documented notation on Sam's referrals indicating that the teacher made any attempt to interrupt the behavior even when they stated that the behavior had occurred on many occasions. There was no indication that Sam received any explicit instruction on the expected behavior and teachers did not implement any of the school-wide positive behavior supports that were available to them [other than time-out]. This would have been a great opportunity to assign a check-and-connect mentor to redirect or to try to deescalate these outbursts. There was no make-it-right meetings conducted between Sam, his teachers and an administrator—as were required at BSH. The purpose of make-it-right meetings was to reestablish effective communication between the adult and student. There is no mention of his teachers pulling Sam aside and disciplining him privately or trying to figure out why he was having so many outbursts in his classes. Even after Sam's behavior became more problematic, the ineffective practice of writing referrals continued.

- I was beginning a lesson and [Sam] began running around the room. He began chasing ANOTHER STUDENT, now I had 2 boys running the perimeter of the room. I used a loud voice and told them to sit down. They ran back to their seats. I told him he was a smart boy and not to get a referral for not listening to his teacher, who was making such a simple request. He told me he didn't care and began to make noises, rolls his eyes. I tried ignoring him, but he got out of his seat and went over to the large bean bag chair put it on his seat and started jumping on it. I said, you're acting foolish—put the beanbag chair back please. At that point he said, "You called me a fool. I'm going to tell my mother. You'll be sorry." I told him to leave the room. He kept on threatening me, telling me in front of the class his mother said I shouldn't be a teacher because I'm bad and I have to deal with him. At this point I buzzed the office and told him his mom could call me.

In this referral, Sam referred to himself as bad, referencing a conversation he had with his mother. Notice that the teacher did not reaffirm him by explaining that he was not bad but that his behavior was unacceptable—a strategy that may have reinforced Sam's self-worth. The teacher's actions also did not reassure the class that she was in control and would keep them safe. This referral was much longer than typical; it was written on 2 sheets of paper and included an addendum. It continued:

- I went to transition to whole group, he refused to sit down and started running around the room. Taking my pointer from my chart and pointing it at other students. I told him he needed to sit down or I would have to send him upstairs with a referral. He then informed me his mother told him if I didn't want to have any bad kids in class then I shouldn't be a teacher, so he could do whatever he wants.

Consequently, based on the dialogue between Sam and his teacher, there was an atmosphere of animosity that was spreading from Sam and his teachers to also possibly including his mother. Again, this might signal a need to involve the parent in a more collaborative way to help Sam gain control over his behavior. The referral continues:

He then took his reading workbook and hid it in the reading center causing yet another disturbance and preventing me from teaching. It was at this point I buzzed the office and sent him upstairs. He also told me his mother gave him the gum to chew. So he didn't have to throw it away. He never did remove the gum from his mouth. I really feel like he is stopping instruction on a daily basis. He is not able to function in a classroom. Home school should be looked at as an alternate setting.¹⁸

The teacher and Sam were clearly in a power struggle and the entire class was the audience. The protocol at BSH stated that if a student was being extremely disruptive, the educator should remove the class and allow the disruptive student to stay in class. This possibly could have removed Sam's audience and diffused the situation.¹⁹ Again, this referral also shows how teachers were using referrals to communicate their frustrations to administrators and to try to control how the administrator should respond in terms of consequences. Although this is not the purpose of a referral, it does signal a need for teachers and administrators and also parents to have more open lines of communication and more direct collaboration in dealing with students who continually struggle in terms of behavior. These actions demonstrate a pattern of nonexistent, proactive strategies and lack of choices to teach Sam how to respond in a more pro-social way in the classroom.

¹⁸ It is important to note that the parent will receive a copy of the teacher's negative comments, which might also explain why Sam's mother is possibly becoming more frustrated with Sam's teachers.

¹⁹ Established protocol in school handbook

Zero Tolerance Disregarded

According to the zero tolerance policy at CSD, if a student intimidates, threatens, assaults, fights, or brings a weapon or any unauthorized item to school, he or she is to be suspended for five days with a formal hearing. Zero tolerance was initiated to reduce subjectivity in determining consequences and to ensure the safety of all students. Since Sam was not taught and held accountable to behave in ways that were acceptable in school his behavior exacerbated overtime. Olweus (2003) would describe Sam's behavior as bullying: one who initiates aggression or takes an active part in aggression toward a targeted individual or group.

Though Sam's behavior was witnessed by adults in the classrooms and described in his referrals, the teacher's descriptions of Sam's behavior did not match the administrators' coding. In some instances there were no assigned codes on Sam's referrals. Consequently, because the codes chosen by administrators (or the lack of codes on the referrals) did not signal that Sam's behavior was dangerous, it was not reportable to the state.

Sam was characterized as enjoying and often initiating altercations with others based on notations on his referrals. Various comments stated that Sam continued to laugh and refused to stop the aggressive behavior, even after adults intervened as demonstrated in the following referrals.

- Sam appears to be enjoying the attention he is getting from his classmates. [Sam] started out this AM by swearing in Spanish (mama bicho) at others while lining up to enter the classroom. A student was swinging her gloves and hit him in the face. He punched her in the chest and pushed me [teacher].

In the community where Sam lived, his reaction to anyone hitting him in the face—whether on purpose or simply by accident—would likely to be to respond in a defensive manner. Schools

expect students to seamlessly shift from home or community values to school values, which is sometimes referred to as code switching or the ability to behave, speak, or conduct oneself in a manner acceptable by dominant group and non-dominant groups depending on the environment or situation. Sam may have either not learned to negotiate the difference or responded in a reactionary way without thinking. After being struck by a peer, Sam punched the offending student in the face and pushed his teacher. According to district and school policy, his behavior (and likely his peer's behavior) was grounds for immediate suspension under zero tolerance. However, in this particular referral, the behavioral form was not completed and it did not show a behavior code; therefore, Sam was not suspended.

This is an example of subjective discipline procedures, which may or may not have been warranted in this situation. However, advocates of zero tolerance would be critical of subjective discipline as inconsistent and unfairly administered. If an administrator chose not to handle Sam's behavior according to district policy in this or other instances, it is equally unclear why his behavior did not initiate any PBIS or Discipline with Dignity strategies or a scheduled meeting with his mother. The parent was kept informed regarding Sam's behavior, but was not asked to assist with any coherent plan. When students see the inconsistent responses to breaking the rules, it teaches them that rules are not fair or predictable. Sam began to demonstrate behavior that was dangerous for him and others, which reflect the following referrals:

- “He escalated his behavior during book selection. He and another student were egging each other on. Yelling, climbing, and hitting others.”
- He was pushing students while standing in line. When everyone was asked to sit back in their seats and put their heads down. He mocked me and refused to stop talking. He said he didn't need to follow any rules. When I asked him to get his

things to go home, he told me I have my things right here and then he gestured toward his crotch and bottom.

- “He was defiant and threatened me. [teacher]”

Sam demonstrated unsafe behavior and consistently disrupted the learning environment. According to school and district zero tolerance policies, when a student demonstrates aggression toward another student or staff they are to be suspended for five days with a hearing. Sam’s mother was not called and his behavior continued to escalate.

The inconsistency in coding Sam’s aggressive behavior became a common practice. Whenever Sam assaulted another student or an adult, that behavior was simply not given a code; therefore, it was not reported to the state. I cannot say that this was done intentionally, but all of the other types of referrals did receive codes for behavior. Were the missing codes purposefully omitted to keep BSH from being labeled a dangerous school? In any case, Sam’s behavior did seem to get more rather than less aggressive over time—moving from silly attention getting behaviors to more and more threatening behaviors that should have prompted some changes to how the school was responding to Sam.

- “Sam’s behavior has continued to escalate and he has become more aggressive.”
- “He was taunting/teasing another student in English and Spanish, instigating a fight.”
- Sam was involved in a fight (PE) with another student. After repeatedly being separated, students continued to throw punches at each other. After separating them the first time, he threw a punch for my face [the teacher] but missed.

The consequence for this last behavior was two days of OSS, but again, the referral was not coded. Sam was placed out of school for two days, but the referral was not reported to the state, due to improper and incomplete coding.

The homeroom teacher receives a copy of their student's behavioral referrals. Therefore, it was within the purview of Sam's teacher to question why was there no code assigned to Sam's behavior. If the teachers had reported their concerns to the administrators and followed-up with his parents, Sam could have received the additional assistance he needed. If Sam's behavior had been correctly coded and reported, the State could have initiated an inquiry. These checks and balances are in place to prevent students from falling through the cracks. But there is also an obvious disincentive to reporting this information to the state. Instead, protocols were simply ignored and problems ensued. Predictably, Sam's behavior became more aggressive and more violent. He was acting in such a dangerous manner on one occasion that all of Sam's classmates were removed from the room to ensure their safety.

- “Sam was throwing chairs in the classroom. An administrator, sentry and police officer were called to the room”

According to the CSD zero tolerance policy, Sam should have been suspended for five days with a hearing. Again, these established rules were disregarded and there was no follow-through. In this violent outburst, it is documented that Sam is throwing chairs and papers and intimidating and assaulting others. Yet, not one of these actions prompted either a hearing or a referral for a FBA.

Sam continued to experience problems across settings, even in the ISS room. It may be that Sam has a difficult time “cooling off” after he has had an outburst. It is unclear what strategies, if any, teachers used to try to deescalate his behavior or if anything in particular seemed to trigger more aggressive behavior. Again, the paper trail of referrals does not seem to prompt this kind of attention—it only prompts consequences, which are mostly ineffective.

- Sam is not following rules in ISS. He came right in calling other students names and threatening them. He would not stay seated, throwing papers. He was asked several times to stay in seat and to quiet down. He refused.

Sam's anger and intimidation were often directed at a select number of students in his class. The following are examples of Sam's violent tendencies that Olweus (2003) describes as bullying behaviors:

- "He returned and immediately began threatening another student that he was going to beat him up at three o'clock."

Based on the way this and other infractions were handled, bullying behaviors were often either tolerated or ignored. Besides being ineffective, this response (or lack of response) was also against BSH and CSD policy.

The following is another sequence of events, as noted by Sam's teacher, in which Sam's behavior was allowed to go on over a period of time until the teacher finally had enough. On this particular day, three different educators wrote referrals for Sam. Because the administrators handled all three infractions, it is not clear why support staff was not involved in follow-up to determine if there were any mitigating factors in Sam's life that he needed assistance. Of course, much instructional time was lost for all of students in the class, not just Sam.

- [9:00 AM] Talked back to Ms. K in waiting area, refused to sit down, made fun of a student. As the line came down the hall Ms. T witnessed him kicking a student. He refused to step out of the line. Started running around—when I asked Ms. K to escort him to the office he laid down in the hall and rolled around on the floor and hid behind the garbage can.

A note in the file from Sam's teacher, states:

- “I met with student’s mother a week and a half ago. We agreed that a daily report would be a good idea, but it has not been consistent. If anything, his behavior has escalated.”

It was unclear why the daily report was inconsistent, as Sam’s teacher is responsible for completing the report and sending it home. The research of Spivak and Prothrow-Stith (2001) indicates that Sam’s bullying demonstrated the need for support services. Sam’s behavior, still unchecked, escalated to threatening others with weapons. Another referral written on the same day reads as follows:

- [Special Class] He was verbally abusive throughout the entire PE class today and was threatening another student, yelling racial slurs at him. He called the student a “fuckin’ White cracker” and shoved him. Then he told me to shut the “fuck up” as he left the gym. He physically intimidated other students constantly as well. He is a major safety issue in the gym.
- [1:15 PM] He got out of his seat without permission, went up to another student’s desk and threatened to ‘cut him’ As I asked him to leave the classroom he told me to shut up, called me a ‘ho’ and gave me the finger

According to notations in the file, Sam’s mother was contacted and she came into school.

Sam agreed to keep his hands to himself during his reinstatement and not to swear or use racially- degrading comments. Though there were many systems in place at BSH that could have been utilized in this situation, i.e. mediation, diversity instruction, positive behavioral supports, and school-based counseling, no supports were offered to Sam. This reinstatement was a missed opportunity for the staff at BSH and for Sam’s mom to collaborate and initiate some interventions to provide positive support for Sam.

Sam's behavior continued to raise concerns for safety as he persisted in threatening and degrading the adults in charge:

- He was extremely disrespectful and would not stay in the seat and was threatening me and other students. He said 'I'm gonna smack all the teachers in the goddamn face. He was very confrontational. He is a constant safety issue.
- "He was rude to Ms. B and repeatedly threatened another student. Also refused to do any work"
- He has refused to do any work. He threatened a student and was about to shoot a rubber band at him when I intervened. He has wandered around the classroom, sung a song and sat on a table and read aloud. He also ran in and out of the classroom. This is becoming a daily occurrence. We need more serious consequences and a parent conference.

This is another situation where the teacher deferred follow-up to the administrators.

Unfortunately, the behavior and frustration only continued.

- Sam enjoys the attention he gets from his classmates. He was called to the office after several name-callings, threats, and bullying. On the way out he punched a student in the jaw/lower side of the face. Student was taken to the nurse.

In this incident, the student was assigned a violent behavior code, but sent to in-school suspension for the rest of the school day, which is contrary to BSH and district protocol.

- Sam refused to sit quietly and listen during read aloud time. He was asked repeatedly to settle down and move to his seat. He did a cartwheel and a somersault and then ran across the room. When I asked him to leave he threatened to punch me.

- “While waiting in the office to speak with an administrator, he looks at the other teacher in the room who is writing this referral and pretends he has a gun pointing at his head and he shoots.”

Certainly, Sam was showing a pattern in terms of his behavior, but there was also a pattern of nonexistent proactive strategies and lack of choices to assist Sam in the classroom. Again, in this situation, a subjective decision was made to not respond in accordance with district and school policy. District protocol required OSS for his nonverbal threats with a fictitious gun.

Although second grade began with the teacher initiating communication with Sam’s mother, it was followed by another year at BSH where ineffective strategies were used, and multiple referrals were written without any visible change. Nor was there any documentation of any interaction or communication between the school and Sam’s mother. Sam continued to be defined as disruptive and disrespectful.

In third grade, the only proactive strategies initiated by Sam’s teachers were attempts to contact his mother, which were seldom successful. An effective educator will identify what role the challenging student is displaying and design a set of strategies that will diminish or manage the behavior in the classroom to ensure the success of the student.

By fourth grade Sam had attended BSH since first grade (four years). No preventive measures were set up to end the barrage of referrals about Sam. There were no interventions put in place to help Sam become successful or to begin a new year with a fresh start. Instead, the referrals only became more prevalent.

Zero tolerance was originally established to decrease the presence of weapons and drugs in schools and was applied mainly to the area of violence. Violence in the twenty-first century covers many areas. It includes, but is not limited to, bullying, which Sam repeatedly engaged in

at BSH. Although zero tolerance was an agreed-upon procedure in this district, it was not actively practiced at BSH. Discipline procedures were very sporadic. Thereby validating those who support zero tolerance practices, which when implemented consistently alleviates any subjectivity. Zero tolerance one-size-fits-all approach does not teach students strategies but in this case it would have alerted the district office to the unsafe environment that was taking place in some of the classrooms at BSH.

Sam Falls Through PBIS Cracks

The PBIS philosophy at BSH maintained that all students were respectful, responsible, and safe. On many occasions, an educator chose to remove Sam from the class without teaching/re-teaching what was appropriate or expected in those types of situations. Instead, BSH consistently responded to Sam in a reactive mode (Oshner et al., 2010). Simply responding to the behavior is not the same as holding the student accountable, while simultaneously teaching him the appropriate behavior. The literature purports that one way to reduce the school-to-prison pipeline is by using preventative approaches and teaching students how to make positive choices (Noguera, 2003b).

An important goal of using positive behavioral supports is to teach individuals how to manage their behavior through communication, self-control, and social skills. As students form positive relationships with their classmates and teachers, they begin to see themselves as part of a community to which they can contribute and often desire to impact in positive ways. The success of this process is determined by the effective reduction of the unacceptable behavior and improvement of the student's positive experiences in school.

Although Sam's teachers clearly did not accept his behavior, PBIS strategies were not implemented, which could have deterred his negative conduct or to teach Sam how to manage

anger and frustration. PBIS uses a three-tier approach, yet the tier two and third tier were never implemented at BSH for either Sonie or Sam. According to the PBIS auditors, all of the students who were asked were familiar with BSH behavior expectations; however, many students did not demonstrate the expected behaviors. These findings are consistent with behavior demonstrated by Sam and the responses from educators who interacted with him. Instead, teachers allowed Sam's foolish and inappropriate behavior to frustrate them. After failing to problem-solve these types of behaviors, Sam's behaviors escalated to a point that was dangerous for all involved. It is difficult to know why Sam was left to fall through the cracks, but it is very important when implementing a school-wide behavior philosophy that all stakeholders support the plan in place. The following is an example of an educator at BSH who did not support the PBIS philosophy:

- I gave him an action plan and he ripped it up and said he wasn't going to do anything today. He was very disrespectful and laughed and encouraged others to misbehave. I asked him to complete this action plan.

The action plan mentioned in the referral is something the specialty teacher required students from all grade levels to complete when they misbehaved in her class. Student(s) completed this form independently and were required to indicate how they should have behaved in a positive manner. We might ask whether an elementary aged student (or any student) who struggles in written language is developmentally able to understand, reflect and communicate the appropriate behavior independently. This was the teacher's own discipline policy and not part of PBIS protocol for the school. It was also a missed opportunity for the teacher to model and reinforce the school-wide PBIS strategy, which may have supported intrinsic learning for Sam and more developmentally appropriate.

Enforcing rules teaches lessons when they are implemented with consistency and fairness. But what lesson did Sam learn? He was not taught any strategies and was not held accountable for his actions. Instead he was continually marginalized and isolated from his peers. There were so many missed opportunities where the teachers and administrators could have assisted Sam, contacted his family, consulted support staff (i.e. a social worker) or even made a home visit. Reviewing the expectations of the classroom and PBIS motto could have provided positive supports and brought necessary order to Sam's classes, but also supported Sam's progress.

BSH Intervention Strategies Disregarded

Any of Sam's teachers could have initiated strategies for Sam or referred him to the Pupil Service Team (PST). One initial step might have been to review academic and behavior outcomes for Sam. If behavior was a problem, the next step would have been to contact the parent/guardian and initiate a Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA) to try to understand Sam's behaviors and their functions. The goal of completing a FBA is to understand the student's behavior and provide students with supports to help keep them on track, so they are supported in developing good behaviors. An FBA is also designed to ensure that students receive all the instructional time they need and deserve (Crone, Horner & Hawken, 2004). The point of an FBA is not simply to identify students with behavior problems in a reactive way, but to support students in learning appropriate behaviors and to help them make good decisions. This type of assessment takes into consideration why a student acts out. It helps to target unmet needs, troubling behaviors, and set goals that are observable and measurable.

Although Sam met the criteria for the Prescreening Team (PST), he was never referred. There were multiple interventions available at BSH; unfortunately they were not utilized.

Consequently, the teachers relied on behavior referrals to isolate Sam from the classroom setting. It is evident by the referrals that this became a no-win situation for the students, teachers, and most of all for Sam.

Catherine (psychologist) reported her observations regarding the irregularities of enforcing school-wide behavior policy both in the schools and within the district. During an interview Catherine explained:

When you go into the classroom, they (students) don't have a behavior plan and there is no FBA in place. It can be very challenging to create a behavior intervention, but if we don't implement behavior interventions, we are going to be labeling more kids for MR [mental deficiency] and LD [learning disability] in reading math and written expression because behavior usually precedes academic failure. One change that should be implemented is school-wide behavior plans. (Interview, 2009)

According to Danforth and Smith (2005) unmet learning needs can also result in students acting out in school and lead to behavioral problems. When student behavior is not addressed, it sometimes leads to the mislabeling of students. An uncontested explanation for unruly behavior can sometimes result in labeling the student as emotionally disturbed (ED).

BSH administrators provided the training for all staff to learn the behavior expectations and the interventions that were available; however, there was no follow-up. The administrators did not enforce the procedures that were put into place. Administrators consistently handled teacher-managed behaviors, processed incomplete referrals, and improperly coded student behavior. They also disregarded policies for handling violent or threatening behavior.

Catherine (psychologist) also acknowledged that extra work is needed to create a behavior plan and complete a FBA. Although training was offered at BSH on how to complete a

FBA, creating behavioral strategies for individual students was not addressed during training sessions at BSH. Catherine stated that, “Teachers should have training to identify kids that have behavior problems. I’m beginning to see more noncompliant behavior. Students are disrespectful to authority and aggressive” (Interview, 2009).

Multiple adults wrote referrals for Sam, but no behavior assessment was planned. And, because Sam did not have a behavior plan in place, he continued to disrupt the learning environment. Sam continued to receive negative attention and did not learn from the seemingly random consequences for his inappropriate behavior.

A teacher’s beliefs shape the way discipline is handled in the classroom. Teachers draw on their own cultural competency to interpret their perception regarding the behavior of students of color (Gay, 2000). A tenured teacher (Carol) shared her beliefs regarding Sam’s negative behavior and why she did not believe utilizing an outside intervention would be helpful:

Some of the outside agencies that are supposed to assist us [teachers] with behavior in the classroom are unrealistic. Students are placed in smaller group settings with more adult-to-student ratio. I had a student removed for behavior for eight weeks. When he returned, the recommendation was that I should reward him in 15-minute periods. I don’t agree with this mindset. I don’t have time to reward a kid every 15 minutes for staying on task. It seems to me at this level he should be able to sit long enough with all the things that need to be accomplished. I want my student engaged in instruction, engaged in the activities that I am planning for whether they are rewarded or not. (Interview, 2009)

Carol was referencing a six-to-eight week program designed for students who continuously received referrals and those who were not responding to in-school strategies.

Students were sent to a separate location where they were taught strategies to help them be successful when they return to a typical school setting. Carol expressed the belief that the strategies these students learned were unrealistic and did not translate into a traditional school setting. Sam was later sent to this type of setting and after experiencing challenges there he was placed on homebound.

If BSH were truly an open collaborative community, Carol's experiences would have been useful information to share with the intervention teams or outside agencies. Instead, the teacher simply made a conscious choice not to utilize this agency's services or implement its strategies. Unlike, Sonie, Sam had not been identified as having special education needs or a disability label—why Sam was never referred to the Pupil Service Team remains a mystery.

Problematic Connections between Home, School and Community

From first through fourth grades, Sam received referrals from multiple educators, teaching assistants, and specialty teachers. In second grade, Sam began another year at BSH without any positive supports instituted. There was no indication that teachers or administrators ever spoke to Sam's mother about completing a functional behavioral assessment or to create a behavior plan. There was nothing recorded indicating that any support staff offered assistance to the family to receive community services.

In third grade, based on the comments written on referrals, either contact numbers to reach Sam's parents did not work or phone calls were not returned.²⁰ Although Sam lived within walking distance of the school, no one from BSH (teacher, administrator, or social worker) made an attempt to visit his home. Open communication provides valuable access to important

²⁰ Per notation in Sam's file.

information that can be extremely helpful and informative in supporting a student's academic or behavioral needs.

No Connection with Home

Teachers also did not pursue any collaboration with Sam's mother to assist with his disruptive behavior. Other than unsuccessful attempts to reach her by phone and by mail, no other contact was documented. This lack of home-school connection was referenced in several referrals:

- "Multiple messages were left on the home answering machine, but no direct contact was made."
- "Sam's parents could not be reached because the school had no working phone numbers"
- "Sam's mother could not be contacted and all phone numbers on file had been disconnected."
- "All contact numbers disconnected."
- Notes in the file indicate, "There is no current number to contact Sam's mom, as the family had recently moved." (Returned mail and no current phone number supported this).

In Sam's last year at BSH (fourth grade), his behavior continued to deteriorate. And as Sam became more defiant and violent, his mother also became more adversarial. Sam's mother expressed her frustration and disappointment at the schools' inability to help her son. This information was noted in Sam's file. The lack of follow-up for developing a behavior plan was not attributed to a lack of interest by Sam's mother, but rather BSH inconsistent and ineffective practices.

- “Sam’s mother was called and asked to come in and sit with him. The plan developed (on the phone) was that mom was coming in to sit with her son when he misbehaved, which did not happen.”

Sam was absent from school due to a suspension. His mother was asked to come in for a meeting, which she agreed to do, but missed her appointment. BSH did not follow-up and Sam returned without a reinstatement meeting. He was placed in ISS on the first day and allowed to return to class the next.

- “A message was left on the answering machine to inform Sam’s mom that he was suspended.”

A note on the referral stated that a copy of the suspension was given to Sam’s sister to ensure that his mother was notified of the situation.

- During an outburst, Sam called his mother on his cell phone [unbeknownst to the teacher]. All Sam’s mother heard was the teacher yelling at Sam. She came to school enraged and a sentry and a police officer were called as she went after the teacher [physically]. She took Sam home. Sam left on Wednesday and returned to school on Monday.

An incident report was made for the teachers’ protection. After this incident Sam’s mother was banned from the building. This action further alienated Sam’s mother, which made the possibility of collaboration nearly impossible.

No Connections to School or Community

One finding of the study is that collaboration was not evident between educators, administrators, and support staff at BSH despite the fact that a new school-wide behavior system was put into place that stressed the need for collaboration. Teachers treated Sam as if he

reasoned like an adult, but most importantly, positive supports were not made available to him. Many of the initial referrals were for foolish and immature actions. Over time, as Sam's needs were not met and positive supports not provided, Sam's behavior escalated.

Sam had developed a reputation and most teachers knew of him through the constant all-calls from prior years on the public speaker, which could not have helped Sam's relationships with either his teachers or his peers. Since teachers were aware of Sam's challenging behavior, it may have been important to begin each year with clearly established boundaries and strategies to promote a positive school climate.

The following information was obtained through school records. The practice at BSH and all schools throughout this district was to complete a feeder card for the next year's teacher. Sam had attended BSH for three years and was entering his fourth year at BSH as a fourth grade student. His behavior, according to school records, was becoming increasingly dangerous to Sam and to others. Feeder cards were used to advise the next teacher of any interventions that were put into place in the prior year or that needed to be put into place for the new school year. This information could have been used to implement early interventions at the beginning of the school year; however, nothing was put into place to ensure that Sam would have a successful year. In fact, by fourth grade, Sam had earned the status 'of bully' among both students and staff at BSH.

Sam's teachers did not initiate any positive supports, either from in-house staff or community resources. Sam and his teachers did not develop a relationship of respect and cooperation with either Sam or his parent. BSH had a check-in-check out procedure [CHICO] where students would receive a word of encouragement to begin their day or deescalate a volatile

situation—yet no adult was assigned to Sam. Assigning a mentor may have been helpful in developing a relationship with Sam.

There were no recommendations to involve outside agencies (i.e. Big Brothers or 100 Black Men), or attempts to offer any counseling to help Sam or his family. Administrators and support staff from the Pupil Service Team (PST) usually initiated these services based on their assessment of referrals; however no referrals were given to the committee for Sam. There were many agencies available for this particular area of the city but somehow Sam went unnoticed and disregarded. Once again we see ineffective practices evident in a school with numerous supports that were left underutilized.

Lost Instructional Time

During Sam's enrollment at BSH, he accrued a total of 662 hours and nineteen minutes of lost learning time, which does not include time missed due to inclement weather, sick days, or timeouts. Sam's behavior exacerbated over time as he continued to accrue many missed hours of instruction. As discussed in the chapter five, students attend school for 180 days. Academic instruction is approximately 32.5 hours per week, which totals 1,170 hours each academic school year. Sam attended three and one half academic school years (approximately 129 weeks). During his attendance at BSH, he received 79 referrals, which totaled 662 hours and 19 minutes of lost learning time—of which 464 hours and 24 minutes were in the fourth grade. This represents approximately 15.8 % of missed learning opportunities.

Figure 5.5

Sam's History of Lost Learning Time While Enrolled at BSH

Grades	Number of Referrals	Lost Learning Time
First	5	6 hrs. 40 minutes
Second	20	80 hrs. 35 minutes
Third	19	100 hrs. 40 minutes
Fourth	35	226 hrs. 54 minutes
4th grade/PASS		247 hrs. 30 minutes
Total	79	662 hrs. 19 minutes

The preceding chart represents the grade Sam was in and the number of referrals he received in each grade. Lost Learning Time reflects the amount of missed learning time he accrued outside of his classes. Positive Alternative to School Suspension (PASS) represented times Sam was removed from typically scheduled classes and possible hours that were available after school. This chart demonstrates how Sam's behavior increasingly escalated without positive supports.

The teachers continuously described Sam as interrupting the learning environment of others, but did not mention the disruption to Sam's learning. He was a young man who demonstrated intelligence, but who clearly was disengaged from school. Each incident should have been used as a learning opportunity and signal a need for problem solving. It was important to ensure that Sam had a successful academic experience; however, because Sam was not taught and did not learn appropriate and acceptable behavior in the classroom, his peers were affected

by Sam's outburst and violent behavior. This created dangerous situations and lost learning time for all students, and likely negatively impacted his relationships with his teachers and peers.

Almost daily the same behavior was exhibited and the same ineffective practices continued. Sam continued to disrupt the learning process for himself and others. However, despite all his absences and lost learning time, Sam achieved a Four²¹ on the English language arts (ELA) and math state tests. This eliminated academic difficulty as being the root cause of Sam's problems. In fact, it might be reasonable to conclude that Sam was perhaps even bored in his classes? Although behavior data was reviewed regularly at discipline, PBIS, and grade level team meetings, neither the administrators nor the teachers at BSH initiated any additional supports for Sam.

Consequences

Consequences of a Failed System, Ineffective, and Inconsistent Practices

Most of Sam's referrals began with redirection, but eventually led to time-outs and the reflection room, eventually leading to either in-school or out-of-school suspensions. The behavior referrals were written by teachers and teacher assistants, but were coded by administrators. Similar to Sonie's case, the coding on Sam's referrals often did not match the description of his behavior. Also, although Sam's behavior was often similar, the consequences resulting from that behavior varied. According to Darensburg, (2010) consequences should be given in a consistent fair manner to help teach life-long lessons that help to deter the unwanted behavior. Some examples of the varied consequences were:

- Sam was accused of bullying. For this, he receives a half-day of ISS.
- Sam threatened to punch a teacher and receives 3 days OSS.

²¹ A four is the highest rating one can achieve on this states' standardized tests.

- Sam was running through the building and received a half-day time-out.
- Sam caused a disruption and received 40 minutes in the reflection room.
- Sam accused of bullying and physical assault and received one day of ISS.
- Sam was disrespectful and received lunch detention.
- Sam threatened other students and received one-day OSS.
- Sam kicked another student and was given a half day ISS.
- Sam accused of disruption. He received a half-day in the reflection room.
- Sam again referred for being disrespectful and defiant and he is given time-out in kindergarten class.
- Sam referred for a disruption and given a half day ISS and missed next library class.
- Sam again referred for being disrespectful and disruptive. For this he is given a time-out in a second grade class.
- Sam was deemed disruptive for beating on trashcan and made to miss his next art class.
- Sam referred for being disruptive and he is sent to ISS.
- Bullying [threatening and intimidating] other ISS students a half day.

It is clear from this list that Sam does not understand or submit to the expectations and consequences of working within a classroom environment. Consequences should be implemented in a planned proactive and consistent manner, but never in a punitive or arbitrary way. In many instances minor infractions were given very punitive consequences. At other times the consequences seemed very minor compared to the infraction. According to Rose,

Sometimes as an administrator you make a judgment call—if you think the student will be left at home unattended, spending unsupervised time outside or getting into more

trouble, you don't suspend the student. We seek alternative methods for instance placing the student in ISS for one week. (Interview, 2009)

Sam's mother was a working single parent with no other supportive adult in the house. Therefore, if Sam were to be suspended, there would have been no one at home to watch him. It may be that an administrator might decide to go against district policy if he/she feels there are mitigating factors, but teachers are not always aware of these factors and feel that students are not being held to appropriate consequences. It also means that ISS is sometimes used inappropriately for more serious infractions.

Another noted inconsistency was that behaviors on Sam's referrals were sometimes not coded, which meant that many behaviors that should have been reported to the state were not. Administrators at first were not coding Sam's dangerous and violent behavior. Once they began using the correct codes, they did not always assign prescribed consequences. It is difficult to know why the codes started to appear when they had not prior. There was nothing in Sam's behavior files that indicated what caused the change. I was able to confirm that Sam's fourth grade teacher stopped writing referrals for Sam and simply sent him to the office. Moreover, when Sam got upset and stormed out of the room, she locked the door so he could not reenter and continue to cause a disruption (Personal conversation from 2009).

Is it possible that the administrators in the building had to deal with Sam on such a regular basis that it hindered them from their daily routines. Sam at one point threatened to cut a student and received only one day of ISS. Another day, Sam used racial slurs and cursed at a teacher and received two days of OSS. One teacher continued to write referrals describing Sam as a safety issue, but did not indicate what (if any) safety measures he taught or implemented to help Sam or his peers.

Based on the documentation in school records, Sam on some occasions went from the typical school setting to an atypical setting to homebound status because he refused to conform to the established rules of the program. Would circumstances have been different for Sam in the latter grades had he been taught strategies to control his anger or deal with frustration more effectively? Would a more challenging curriculum have allowed Sam to get positive peer attention? Were there other reasons why Sam went from being class clown to an aggressive and angry young man that might have signaled the need for counseling or other supports?

What we do know is that the school did not follow the district's or the school's zero tolerance policy, nor did it make use of the many PBIS supports that it put into place. We also do not know if the lack of coding or inconsistent coding was intentional (consciously or unconsciously) because administrators wanted to prevent BSH from being labeled as a dangerous school? If BSH had followed its own protocol, Sam may have received the support he needed. At the very least, Sam's documented behaviors would have warranted further follow-up and likely an FBA.

If correct procedures had been followed, attention might have been drawn to the school from the district office regarding how PBIS was underutilized at BSH with challenging students. The lack of an effective response at BSH is consistent with ways that the larger society and schools set some students up to fail by using inappropriate behavior as a push-out tool to get rid of troublesome students (Noguera, 2003b). This practice of using punitive discipline rather than proactive strategies to help students also contributes to the school-to-prison pipeline (Advancement Project, 2011). Not only was Sam's education disrupted, but also so was the education of his peers as well as their safety in the classroom, which was compromised. Sam,

without an effective way to shift his behavior and get his needs met, continued with the same behavior.

Conclusion

The data present many examples of how Sam was failed by: 1) a system that was designed to fail; 2) ineffective practices; 3) problematic connections between home, school, and community; 5) lost instructional time; and, 6) punitive consequences.

BSH created an environment that was structurally deficient, because it failed to address problems or perceived problems with realistic interventions or effective supports. The system also violated the student's rights to appropriate supports through its punitive policies. Evidence of that failure can be seen in the way that PBIS was implemented and the number of students who fell through the cracks, despite these systems being put into place. In spite of training, teachers were not adequately prepared to implement interventions on a tertiary level. The system failed to improve outcomes for Sam and other students who exhibited severe behavior challenges. Despite all the school-based teams and support staff they did not meet Sam's emotional and educational needs. Sam was immersed in a system of broken promises.

Sadly, Sam was enrolled at BSH at six years of age and was expelled by the age of ten. In three and one-half years, Sam received 79 referrals, but not one of them triggered staff at BSH to consider trying something more supportive and less punitive. The failed attempts to implement effective practices helped to exacerbate his declining behavior and increased feelings of frustration and rage. In spite of its lack of effectiveness, punishment was chosen instead of discipline and the overreliance on exclusionary punishments failed to teach Sam any lifelong strategies. Teachers, because of their own fears, their lack of empathy, and/or their lack of ability to effectively address disruptive behaviors in their classes caused them to over rely on

referrals to administrators', which further weakened their ability to manage their class. Although Sam displayed defiant and violent tendencies, the staff never addressed the root cause of his actions. Instead of positive reinforcements for meeting school and classroom expectations, Sam was punished and isolated. Consequently, Sam repeated the same behavior that only seemed to intensify each year.

Documentation in Sam's files indicated that BSH failed to follow its own procedures or consistently use interventions that already existed. Blatant examples of inconsistent practices include the contradictory or nonexistent coding on behavior referrals. As a result the inconsistent practices, BSH failed to attempt to help Sam in any meaningful way. Further evidence of this is demonstrated when after three and one-half years of attendance Sam is observed and finally a FBA is initiated. The summary of Sam's FBA stated:

- Sam demonstrates a pattern of behavior that interferes with his learning. Sam has repeatedly been removed from class for misbehavior and Sam has received five or more days of suspensions. Sam strengths and attributes are his intelligence in all academic areas, sense of humor and [he is] very artistic. The behavior targeted is inappropriate verbal aggression toward staff and students. The frequency of the behavior is 10 to 15 times per day for five to ten minutes each occurrence. Sam bullies peers constantly. His parents are separated. Mom is aggressive and has been banned from building. She does not hold Sam accountable for his behavior and takes no responsibility for his actions. The precipitating condition antecedent is when he does not get attention, when he is stopped from doing something, or during transitions. The measurable behavior that will be monitored is Sam's inappropriate, verbal aggression toward staff and students. Some strategies that can be used after

the behavior: Sam will be removed from the situation, redirected, ignored, verbal reprimand, or time out for 20 minutes. The possible reasons for the behavior are to gain attention, express anger, vengeance, or to seek power or control (FBA, 2009).

This plan stipulates the same consequences that have been ineffective. There were no positive suggestions to capitalize on his strengths, or to give him the attention he craves in a more pro-social way. Although, a FBA was not completed until February, a formal plan was never written. Five weeks later, Sam was suspended for five days and later expelled. Sam was not given a reasonable amount of time to change his behavior?

BSH had many support systems available both in and outside of school, but there was no record of any support recommended or made available to Sam or his family. Sam attended BSH from first grade through the first six months of fourth grade. Sam had two older siblings that also attended BSH, yet there was no evidence of any established relationship between Sam, his mother, teachers, administrators, or support staff.

As stated earlier, Sam received 79 referrals while he was a student at BSH. Over a three-and-one-half-year period, Sam lost 662 hours and 19 minutes of lost learning time. Surprisingly, 464 hours and 24 minutes of that time was lost in fourth grade alone. This recorded time does not include the numerous occasions Sam was sent to time-out or absent due to illness. BSH failed to provide Sam with strategies that afforded him a successful education. Frequently suspending or isolating challenging students make it less likely that they will finish school. Statistics show that these students have a greater probability of dropping out of school or getting into serious trouble with the law, thus increasing the potential of the school-to-prison pipeline (Hagen, 2007).

Sam experienced many consequences at BSH. His behaviors ranged from silly to violent and damaging outbursts. Consequences tied to those behaviors were erratic and sometimes contradictory of the described behavior. Sam was not taught accountability, nor was he taught how to cope with his emotions. Sam failed to thrive in a system that seemed designed to fail.

Sam's Status at the End of Study

Sam's behavior and attitude by all accounts drastically deteriorated in fourth grade. In Sam's final year at BSH (February) an FBA was completed. Five weeks later, Sam was suspended for five days with a formal hearing for persistent disobedience.

Sam and his mother appeared before the hearing officer and because of the severity of the offense, he was prohibited from returning to Brick School House. Consequently, after Sam's five-day suspension he was placed on PASS for 45 days. Sam was then transferred to another school within the district. His behaviors continued to escalate. He was charged with assault on six different occasions and again placed on PASS for the remainder of the school year. Sam got into additional trouble while on PASS and was placed on homebound. Sam was involved in a sexual assault with an older student against a male student at BSH. Sam was sent to an alternative school for eight weeks.

If Sam's behavior had been dealt with expeditiously, consistently, and fairly at BSH in the early grades, could this expulsion have been prevented? If Sam had been taught proactive strategies or been on a behavior²² plan, would his behavior have escalated to the point of expulsion? Could PBIS supports have led to a less tragic ending for Sam and for his victims?

²² Although a FBA was completed, a behavior plan was never generated.

Chapter 8

Conclusion

My study explored two specific questions: how are at-risk students understood and disciplinary procedures implemented within the context of one urban school? According to the data, at-risk students are viewed in particular ways that are shaped by an educator's impressions, cultural knowledge (or lack thereof) and assumptions. In schools, perceptions of particular students are based on the educator's personal experiences as well as their biases. Educators are not trained to manage diverse populations of students or how to deal with behaviors that are not aligned with what teachers might consider being mainstream American values. All educators must accept responsibility for assisting students at-risk.

The results of at-risk conditions, regardless of origin, remain the same. Learners are at-risk of not becoming all they can be. Therefore, for learners' overall welfare, educators need to take a stand for and help at-risk children and adolescents (Manning & Baruth, 1995, p. 135).

The key to helping at-risk students is to have a clearly defined understanding of behaviors that place students at risk, so students do not fall through the cracks. At-risk students may not achieve academically unless educators use research-based strategies that improve their chances for success. Educators must acknowledge that all students come to school with different experiences and different perceptions of themselves, school, and the world (Page, 2006).

My next questions explored how males of color are selected on discipline referrals and the implications of the disciplinary procedures they experience. According to the data males, of color are often defined based on perceptions of their behavior and actions. They are treated based on how they behave in the present and receive no consideration regarding their potential or

future endeavors. There is no focus on helping them develop intrinsic values. They are routinely punished rather than disciplined, and therefore do not learn life skills. Disciplinary options are applied in an attempt to break their will rather than to provide opportunities to learn.

Society is full of examples where historically students of color have been misrepresented based on stereotypes. Consequences for their behavior are used as retribution rather than opportunities to adopt transformative strategies to help them internalize and exercise self-discipline. The discipline used with Sam and Sonie were attempts to restrict their movement and control their will; therefore, BSH was really punishing both students without teaching any social skills or helping them to internalize the rules.

In this study, my data are presented from my position as a participant observer and from my analysis of school documents, interviews, memos, minutes and agendas from team and staff meetings. As expressed in the beginning of this study, my interest in the topic of discipline is fueled mainly by my concerns over the root causes of the overrepresentation of African American males in the areas of intellectual and emotional behavioral disorders.

In chapter four, I presented how the Brick School House evolved from having no written discipline plan to developing a multiple step process, and eventually adopting a school-wide positive behavior support program. In chapter five, I described and reported the results of my data sets. I explained how discipline referrals were used at BSH and how student behaviors were monitored. In chapters six and seven, I specifically focused on two students who received the highest number of referrals at BSH. I analyzed the types of referrals written by their teachers and assessed how administrators coded them. In this chapter, I summarize my findings and implications. I will make these results accessible to teachers and administrators and recommend further topics that I believe should be explored.

Research shows that the most cost-effective, preventive measure to decrease the school-to-prison pipeline is the implementation of supports that help in the positive development of children in the early grades (Darling-Hammond, 2010). The vignettes I include in chapter one are examples of students who exemplify those most likely to become victims of the school-to-prison pipeline.

In this study, I explored discipline as it applies to African American and Latino males in public education. The data demonstrates that students are punished, not disciplined. There was no effort made to change the unsuccessful strategies applied to Sonie or Sam. Two very different students were handled in the same ineffective manner. My data revealed how the most challenging students often have histories of being suspended or expelled, without interventions implemented to decrease academic failure or support positive behaviors. I would argue that you could trace many students who end up being suspended out of school to how their behavior was handled in school. The literature is consistent in documenting that a large number of males of color are overrepresented among those receiving disciplinary actions and special education services (Noguera, 2003a; Rocque, 2010; Skiba et al., 2011).

In my review of the literature, I could not find any studies that counter these claims of overrepresentation of African American males or students of color (Advancement & Civil Rights Project, 2000; Christle et al., 2004; Rocque, 2010; Townsend, 2000). The literature shows that overrepresentation is a persistent problem that remains largely intractable. Throughout the literature there are several explanations for why overrepresentation occurs, from left over legacies of the eugenics movement, which purports that certain races are biologically inferior to institutional bias, which increases school failure among poor students and students of color by providing them with minimal resources and subjecting them to inferior educational practices.

Another factor at play is cultural hegemony, which maintains the belief that the dominant group values and culture are superior to those of other cultures. Finally, stereotyping has been posited as a cause, based on overgeneralized beliefs about a particular group or class of people. This by no means exhausts the list of factors that contribute to overrepresentation, but these are the most common factors that are mentioned in the literature (Harry & Klingner, 2006).

Summary of Findings and Implications

Culturally Awareness or Cultural Bias

Educators draw on their personal beliefs, experiences, and assumptions to form their perceptions about students. The educators I interviewed appeared to have difficulty separating their personal values, cultural experiences from their perceptions and expectations of particular students they encounter in the educational environment. For example, Carol (general education teacher) relates to her students based on her beliefs about the way she raises her child. Therefore, Carol found it difficult to be culturally sensitive to students from different backgrounds and struggled to accept that though their beliefs and values were different, they were not necessarily wrong.

It seems that the area of child rearing is where many educators are likely to struggle with differences between their beliefs and experiences and those of the students in their classrooms. During an interview Carol indicated that a student's lack of communication skills was caused by a lack of parental support: "... that is one of the things we as children learn from our parents and I don't think in my professional opinion that his mother has been able to give him that type of support" (Interview, 2009). Carol had minimal contact with her students' parents and was vehemently against home visits. She believed the areas where her students' resided were too dangerous.

Suzie (special education teacher) linked one student's academic struggles to a lack of discipline at home, citing the student's family dynamics in an interview: "... because he (the student) is not an only child and she (the mother) has two other kids. I think she is overwhelmed" (2009). As a relatively new educator, Suzie has worked for just one year as a certified teacher and is also strongly against home visitation. Based on her responses and personal philosophy, she indicated that she could provide positive support without the help of parents or guardians.

Effective educators must enter the field of education with the understanding that all students can learn. Expectations should be based on each student's capabilities, and not limited to the beliefs and values held by the individual teacher. Some educators at BSH behaved as though it was their mission to save students from poverty and difficult family situations, which often took precedence over the students being held to high standards of instruction. According to Noguera (1995), some educators and social reformers believe schools can do a better job of raising children than a child's own family.

Often, when parents were called in and did not respond in ways that demonstrated mainstream societal thinking, or who failed to reflect a teacher's personal value system, the parent and the educator often became adversaries. Educators tend to make judgments of students based on observations of a parent/guardian, including: how the parent/guardian speaks, how he or she interacts with, reprimands and disciplines the child. In spite of noticeable differences in cultures, stereotyping of parents or students is never appropriate or even helpful. Cultural differences should never be interpreted as cultural deficiencies. An effective school system distinguishes between "school behaviors that are culturally connected" from those that may reflect an academic disability" (Polite & Davis, 1999, p. 46). Educators who fail to see race

in a school filled with mostly students of color are in fact reifying stereotypes. This belief system only serves to dehumanize everyone. The only way to understand and value race, class and culture is to acknowledge that there are differences.

Unfortunately, the mores of one culture are often valued over those of another, subjecting a student from a different culture to a negative projection. This can lead to poor self-esteem among students of color and can create social barriers, where they are regarded as inferior and academically deficient. However, educators who use culturally relevant pedagogy will value what every student brings to the classroom environment and this can ensure that all students experience success. Such educators will assist a student when there appears to be a breakdown in communication. The key to success is not ignoring, but acknowledging, accepting and celebrating all students, while teaching them how to access all resources available to them. Gay (2000) calls this culturally responsive teaching.

Suzie and Carol explicitly blamed parents for students' behavior and/or academic struggles, claiming in some instances that parents were self-involved, had too many children, or simply could not handle the stress of parenting. But these teachers held deficit views of parents and of urban students in particular. Assumptions were made with little or no checking against the actual experiences of the parents of children in these cases. How could productive collaboration with students and parents take place when there was no mutual respect?

Development of a Discipline Policy

In the beginning, BHS did not have any written rules for behavior. There were procedures in place, but there were no clear guidelines on how to ensure that goals were reached or how progress could be measured. Despite personnel issues in the school, which included high administrative and teacher turnover rates, BSH eventually created a discipline manual and

required the implementation of discipline policies based on the Positive Behavior Intervention Support (PBIS) model. Though it helped to improve the climate at BSH by celebrating positive behaviors, it did not reduce the number of referrals for students with the most challenging behaviors.

All behavior policies were voted on and accepted by the majority of the staff. Training was provided for every staff member. Unfortunately, some of the staff failed to adhere to the established procedures and did not implement them in their classrooms. Consequently, this sent mixed messages to students. When school-wide guidelines are not followed there is a high probability that goals will not be attained and that any gains will not be sustained.

Research supports that students with the most needs are removed from school usually because of their behavior (Cassidy & Jackson, 2005). If discipline policies are to be effective, a collaborative effort is an absolute necessity. All stakeholders must be involved: parents, students, educators, the school district, and the larger community. This district's discipline policy clearly stated that the district would work together with the staff to promote students' physical, emotional, social needs and positive self-concept. Mission statements from both the district office and BSH stated that partnership was critical for optimum results. Cooperation with parents was encouraged in all team meetings, but was clearly not embraced by all staff throughout the building.

An Environment Designed to Punish

According to Yang (2009), discipline is most effective when it is transformative and provides opportunities for learning. At BSH, all segregated areas used for disciplinary purposes were aimed at teaching a lesson; but in practice these spaces resulted in simply isolating students. Students did not learn how to develop life skills, solve problems, or make better choices.

Students who were sent to time-out areas experienced unrecorded minutes of lost learning time. Older students were often sent to classrooms of lower grades, but it was not clear whether this was to humiliate them into compliant behavior or to separate them from their peers. Such practices failed to achieve the primary objective for being in school: to receive a quality education.

BSH experienced many challenges. It was cited as a school under review for academic failure, excessive referrals, and was used as an overflow facility to relieve overcrowding in other schools. New students arrived at BSH to face deplorable physical conditions. As students from all over the district and the city transferred into BSH, new behavioral issues began to surface among the rapidly growing and diverse population. Chaos ensued, revealing the need for a written discipline policy. New procedures were implemented for writing and processing discipline referrals.

A Reflection Room was established in a partially renovated, stench-filled bathroom. Every student in the building from kindergarten through eighth grade was sent to this same space to reflect on his/her negative behavior. This also proved to be a less than ideal place for younger students who were influenced by inappropriate role models and negative behaviors from older peers. The research states that young, developmentally-immature students should not be treated like adults. They are not developmentally able to grasp the magnitude of their behavior. Students placed in ISS were given days and hours worth of worksheets. Worksheets are not an effective instructional practice in the classroom, so why would they be acceptable in the ISS room? A PASS program was established for suspended students to attend school after regularly scheduled hours. Attendance in the PASS program was not mandatory, therefore students were not obligated to attend, participate, or complete assignments. To complicate matters, chaos often

ensued when students, all cited for inappropriate behavior, were gathered in one room with a single teacher to monitor them.

BSH was apparently in conflict with itself as it promoted PBIS, yet designed segregated environments to punish some students and make examples of others. These procedures were designed to discourage the recurrence of unwanted behaviors through punitive measures. The ISS and Reflection rooms were created to isolate nonconforming students from conforming students and to limit their exposure to the school environment as a whole.

Each room restricted students' movements and represented a very controlled and exclusionary environment. Students with the most challenging behavior did not benefit from these areas or from the assigned consequences. The rooms only incited students who were already experiencing challenges, increasing their likelihood of being expelled from school.

Both on-premise and off-premise locations represented symbolic parts of the justice system and further promoted the school-to-prison pipeline. In the justice system, offenders who violate the law are assigned a number to identify them in the penal system. In the school system, students are assigned a number when they enter the educational system. When an infraction occurs students are scheduled for a hearing (trial), where they are allowed to explain their side of the story. Parents/guardians (and lawyers) attend and, if the accused is found guilty, they are sentenced to time served or to additional time, assigned by the appointed officer (judge). Further, like many in the justice system, students who complete their time are allowed to return to class (society), although sometimes worse off than when they left. Many get into trouble after returning (probation violation) and are expelled from school. But what have they learned? How has the experience served to rehabilitate them? And, who will assist them so that there are no repeat offenses?

Punishment fails to support positive learning and potential growth, and has proven to be ineffective. (Wald & Losen, 2003). Off-premise locations (sites that serve as alternative schools for violent and nonviolent behavior as well as for hearings) also resemble courtrooms and reformatory buildings. These spaces produce some corrective action, but only through punishment. They are not structured to have a positive effect on students. Instead, they are intended to teach students that they do not want to return; but do little to help them find constructive ways to deal with frustration, make good decisions, or to respond in more positive ways.

Sam and Sonie received punishments that were not designed to teach them how to manage their outbursts and emotions. They required a more systematic set of proactive supports to ensure that their needs were met and supports were provided to assist them in behaving in ways that were pro-social.

Behavioral Interventions

Eventually, teams were created and written plans and behavioral procedures were put into place and made available. Some behavioral issues were resolved, however, many were not. A federal grant was awarded to BSH to create and implement Positive Behavioral Supports. As the PBIS philosophy began to develop and the staff became trained, the effect of this philosophy was seen in many parts of the building. One year later, change was noticeable. Students who did the right thing were openly celebrated. Posters promoting the PBIS philosophy were visible throughout the building. Students were proactively taught how to apply new more effective strategies when they experienced challenging situations. At the end of every year, an auditor came in and evaluated the implementation and progress of the PBIS support system. The auditor

looked at a prescribed checklist and the PBIS team used the data to determine which areas needed to be modified to meet all PBIS goals.

This was the only team where parents /guardians were actively involved. And this was also the only team that had funding to reward them for attending informational meetings regarding their children. Parents/guardians were eligible for prizes and drawings in exchange for their attendance. They also received information regarding community resources. In the final year of the grant, the auditor found that PBIS had improved the climate at BSH for students and families. This conclusion was based primarily on the increased attendance by parents at various school functions. But could it really be determined that PBIS resulted in intrinsic change? PBIS auditors also reported that although all students knew the expectations: BSH students are respectful, responsible and safe, it was not very evident in some of the classrooms or halls.

Administrators acknowledged that PBIS improved the environment for students who did the right thing or who occasionally experienced a bad day, but PBIS failed to provide enough support for students who were constantly in trouble. As a result, they sought out additional methods to assist teachers. Administrators accessed school funds and provided teachers with professional development, books and planning time to learn additional strategies in classroom management.

Multiple strategies and training programs offered a number of options for how to better manage difficult students. Workshops were provided, including *Discipline with Dignity* (Mendler & Mendler) and *Bridges Out of Poverty* (Payne, DeVol, & Smith). These resources and strategies were essential to the positive transformation and behavioral policy that evolved in the building. A discipline handbook was written, specific consequences were identified, and

expectations and procedures were implemented. The staff at BSH began to access the data to guide academic support and behavioral expectations.

The data collected from this study showed that PBIS did not, however, reduce the volume of referrals for those presenting serious behavioral challenges. The staff never implemented PBIS on the tertiary level for students who exhibited and demonstrated the most need or those who required individualized attention. At the end of the study, it was found that 50% of students who received special education services were being sent to ISS or were suspended. The data at BSH supports the literature on overrepresentation of African American males in the areas of intellectual and emotional behavioral disorders. By using Rocque's (2010) definition of overrepresentation, BSH exceeded the 10% guideline, not only for students of color but for those who received special education services as well. Rocque's rule states that if any statistical group is either 10% higher or lower than the identified group, the group is either under- or overrepresented.

BSH did not do enough to support the academic growth or behavior expectations for students who received special education services. BSH became so involved in implementing the PBIS process that they ignored those students who needed the most support. The school failed a segment of the student population that was experiencing the most challenges.

Behaviorally-Challenging Students Defined by Discipline Referrals

Teachers and teacher-assistants wrote many of the referrals, but the administrators assigned the coding. Challenging students were constructed as disruptive and disrespectful on discipline referrals. On many occasions, referrals were written contrary to school policy regarding teacher-managed behaviors. Additionally, many serious infractions were not coded or given inaccurate codes. Some minor infractions received very harsh consequences, while

dangerous behaviors resulted in minimal or no consequences. Referrals that should have been reported to the state, due to their serious nature, were not. Chronic offenders were given disrespectful nicknames and were frequently referred to as: ‘frequent flyers’ and ‘heavy hitters’²³

If discipline referrals are to evaluate whether school discipline policies are working, they must be handled expeditiously and effectively. Boynton and Boynton (2005) suggest several steps to limit the overuse and dependency of referrals:

1. An excellent communication system must be in place.
2. Students referred to the office must receive immediate and meaningful consequences.
3. Students should not be referred to the office for pre-identified classroom managed behaviors.
4. The office should not be used as a holding area for students exhibiting challenging behavior.
5. Referred students should be separated in a quiet area and wait for an administrator to handle the problem.

Clear guidelines must be established and followed by teachers and administrators.

Administrators must closely monitor all referrals, consistently and objectively seek to understand the root cause of challenging behaviors, and code all referrals accurately and correctly. At BSH there were so many inconsistencies writing and processing referrals that it is not clear whether the problem was with the teachers or administrators or both. What is clear is that many referrals were written without any positive results, leading only to more referrals and more punishments.

²³ Students who regularly demonstrate behavior deemed inappropriate

In regard to Sonie and Sam, BSH did not strictly enforce zero tolerance with either student. The school was very inconsistent on how both were disciplined and neither student received any positive behavior supports. Proponents of zero tolerance cite this reason for the necessity of having such a law in place. The subjective levels of discipline procedures and practices at BSH left many students vulnerable to bullying and contributed to the failure of others. As a result, no students at BSH were afforded a safe and optimum environment conducive for learning.

Ineffective Discipline Procedures for Students who Receive Special Education Services: The Case of Sonie

Sonie was a middle school student with an Individual Education Plan (IEP). He had a learning disability in reading and was diagnosed with ADHD. Over a three-year period, Sonie lost 505 hours and 39 minutes of learning time. After reviewing all the data, Sonie received 49 referrals in three years, yet not one was written by any teachers in the arts or physical education department. In these classes, very little reading and writing was required. Was there a connection? More time was spent on controlling his behavior than ensuring that he received a quality education. Sonie's teachers did not provide him with appropriate strategies and effective alternatives.

Perhaps if Sonie's academic goals had been addressed, his behavior problems might have diminished. According to the research of Danforth and Smith (2005), students will often act out to mask their academic struggles. Sonie did not receive any behavioral referrals in art, music and physical education classes. In these classes very little reading and writing was required. Sonie's IEP should have been modified to ensure he received more individualized assistance during typical academic classes. Sonie's academic lessons should have been modified

to ensure he experienced success. Although the treatment of students who receive special education services has improved, segregation practices persist, masked also by exclusions, suspensions, or expulsions. At the end of this study, the data showed that 50% of students at BSH who were sent to ISS or were suspended were students who received special education services.

Sonie attended BSH for four years; yet, his reading level never improved. BSH did not ensure that his IEP goals were met. Sonie's IEP's goals were never modified to adjust to the challenges he experienced at BSH [only his attendance was addressed during his annual reviews]. No additional assistance was sought to help Sonie become a successful learner or to address his struggles with behavior. He was often isolated within the school community with little or no support given to effectively access the curriculum. There was no documentation showing that the school made grade-level texts and important information accessible to Sonie. Teachers and administrators saw Sonie and students with similar challenging behaviors as the problem.

Educators at BSH attempted to remedy disruptions in the classroom by simply separating and punishing the offending students instead of looking beyond their behavior to find the root cause of the problem. This supports the premise that students with the most needs do not always receive an appropriate education as required by IDEA. The vast majority of disabled students have mild disabilities that should not prevent them from making educational progress if they get the extra assistance that they need and deserve. If such help were made available, progress would be visible through rising graduation rates and higher national test scores, since special education students are included in these measurements. The "absence of this support is a clear indication that the school system is performing inadequately" (Green, 2005, p. 22).

BSH failed Sonie as well as other students who were in his classes because his behavior often interfered with the learning of others. Students who struggle academically will very often mask their difficulties with inappropriate behavior. But once their academic needs are addressed, their behavior usually improves. It is the teachers' responsibility to ensure that all students' academic needs are met; simply because a student has a label, does not release the general education teacher from the responsibility of ensuring that all students' receive quality instruction in the classroom environment.

The administrators at BSH did not monitor Sonie's situation to ensure that the learning environment was safe; and that it was conducive for providing rigorous curricula for all students. Instead, BSH continued to implement the same ineffective practices, which did little to help neither Sonie nor his peers.

Failing to Plan is Planning to Fail

Sonie's medical records indicated he was diagnosed with ADHD. When Sonie was disruptive there were many instances when his mother could not be reached and she did not return phone calls from the school. Sonie and his mother were not held accountable for his behavior. But it is also blatantly noticeable that neither Sonie nor his family were given resources that would support or assist him. Why was a 504²⁴ plan not offered? It was evident that his behavior was having a severe impact on his academic progress. On multiple occasions, it was noted Sonie had not taken his medicine or that he did not have any medication to take. In this district, you cannot send a student home if they do not have, or have not taken their medication. Also, the school/district cannot require a parent to give the student medication or ensure that the student has taken it.

²⁴ This explains the modifications and accommodations that will be needed for students to perform at the same level as their peers. <http://specialchildren.about.com>.

BSH should have had alternative measures in place available to help Sonie and his teachers manage his behavior in the absence of medication. Any educator who has students in their class being treated for ADHD, with or without medication, must make adjustments to ensure these students are receiving comprehensive care.

School can be a difficult environment for students with ADHD and it can be exacerbated when the student also has a learning disability. It is imperative that designated staff members are aware of students with this diagnosis and that confidential accommodations and supports are provided to help the student be successful.

Collaboration with colleagues can be extremely helpful. Alternatives should have been developed to keep Sonie in school without disrupting the entire learning environment. An educator should never depend totally on medication alone to meet the needs of a student with ADHD. Could it be that Sonie's teachers misunderstood the neuropsychological underpinnings of a student with this condition and therefore assumed that Sonie was being willfully undisciplined, unmotivated, and disruptive?

Ineffective Discipline Procedures for General Education Students

The Case of Sam

Sam was enrolled at BSH at six years of age and was removed at age ten. In three-and one-half years, he received 79 referrals and lost 662 hours and 19 minutes of learning time. Sam began demonstrating disruptive behaviors as early as first-grade, which proceeded to exacerbate each year. Sam began displaying extreme behavior in second grade. This was the year his mother and father separated. Sam should have been assigned a mentor or counseling to help him through this difficult time. This was a situation where supports were available but were not

implemented. Assistance should have been offered Sam's mother and attempts should have been made to connect school behavior and issues at home.

Sam was allowed to come to school daily and terrorize his peers, create havoc in the classroom, throw and break furniture, and spew profanity throughout the building. Many educators tolerated his behavior or ignored it until they became frustrated.

Their response to Sam's outbursts was always the same: to isolate him from his classmates or suspend him from school. In many instances, Sam's consequences were strictly punitive. A functional behavior assessment was completed approximately five weeks prior to Sam's removal from school after years of ineffective practices. Sam was suspended, which resulted in his removal for the remainder of the school year. How could three-and-one-half years of challenging behavior be corrected in just five weeks? Any effective behavior plan should be implemented and modified until a solution is found. Expulsion from school should be a last resort after all other options have been exhausted. It appears the educators and administrators were tired of writing and processing referrals because they surely did not exhaust all interventions available to ensure Sam's success.

Outside support was never recommended for Sam or his family. It is unfathomable to believe that a building full of educators, support staff and administrators allowed his behavior to escalate without his receiving any documented assistance. BSH allowed Sam to disrupt the learning environment and intimidate his peers. How did BSH support the learning environment and ensure that all students received a safe and quality environment conducive for learning?

Sam did not have a relationship with any adult in the building, one or more of whom could have deterred some of his inappropriate behavior. Despite the many hours of lost learning time in the classroom Sam achieved passing scores in state English language arts and math tests.

Sam should have been tested to assess whether he was receiving rigorous instruction commensurate with his ability. Although mentors were available, Sam never received any support to encourage his intelligence and spark his interest. Was Sam bored? There was no documentation indicating that Sam was ever tested to see if his intelligence was being supported. During the three and one-half years at BSH, Sam's behavior escalated from being defiant and disruptive, to bullying, acting aggressively, and being expelled from school.

Implications of Ineffective Procedures: Sonie and Sam Failing Forward

We live in an era in which there are constant conversations about the dangers of bullying. Yet, multiple times Sonie and Sam harassed, physically hit, or intimidated their peers, male and female, in addition to adults. In many instances, both students were given time in the Reflection Room, though clearly Sam received more punitive consequences. All records indicate a functional behavior assessment was completed five weeks before Sam was suspended, but a formal behavior plan was never completed. Notes in the file indicated that Sam refused to help complete his portion of the behavior plan and BSH did not seek any assistance from his parents to complete missing information (i.e. Sam's likes/dislikes). Was the staff trying to help Sam or ensuring that all paper work was in order to expel him from BSH?

There were many examples of BSH not following district policy. Too often, the process was reactive, not proactive, and punitive instead of corrective. These two students of color were routinely punished, not disciplined. If the administrators cannot guarantee the safety of their students and staff, how do they secure an environment that is conducive for learning?

At BSH, both students should have been held accountable for their behavior. Unfortunately, neither student was given the appropriate support. Sonie did not have a behavior plan in place. Although he had an IEP to guarantee he received a quality education, he was not

taught strategies to function at school with ADHD and did not have behavior goals or supports included in his IEP.

Stakeholders at BSH were not invested to ensure that these students were successful. Neither Sonie nor Sam had any relationship with any adult at BSH. Both young men experienced difficulties that were not addressed. They were allowed to interrupt the academic setting to such a degree that instruction and learning according to the educators was not possible. Additionally, not only did Sonie and Sam accrue many hours of lost learning time, but their peers did as well. The students in Sonie and Sam's classes did not experience an environment conducive for learning. Teaching and learning were not supported in these classrooms. When educators and administrators do not handle educational challenges efficiently and effectively it affects the academic environment for everyone.

When written behavior policies were finally established, they were not followed consistently and effectively. Procedures put into place should always be honored when working in a school environment. All stakeholders should be given the opportunity to contribute in creating a safe and healthy learning environment. Everyone should be accountable to know and adjust to the philosophy of the building, whether in total agreement or partial disagreement. When all staff members are trained and administrators handle procedures efficiently, and implement them consistently and fairly, all students will experience a greater opportunity for success.

Students need to learn the intrinsic value of being a contributing and positive influence in their community. Strategies that work take time especially when dealing with different students and staff each year. Data must drive the implementation and modifications if real change is expected to have a significant affect within the school environment.

According to Ferguson (2011), Sam and Sonie were likely perceived as unsalvageable. They were not given consideration as being children, but were judged as adults capable of making reasonable choices. Rather than teaching Sonie and Sam how to work within the parameters of an educational setting successfully, BSH allowed them to fail. They allowed them to continue to rely on a failing system with no chance of benefitting from a different strategy or from assistance solicited from other support systems.

Multiple interventions were available at BSH and most of the staff was trained on how to access the different strategies. Nevertheless, every day Sam and Sonie entered school—and most of those days they were punished to varying degrees for exhibiting the same behaviors day after day. The revolving ineffective practice of writing referrals continued without any new strategies implemented, thus supporting the premise that schools are a system structured to breed failure for students who experience behavior challenges.

Ultimately, no matter what systems were put in place at BSH there are pre-conditions to establishing trusting relationships with students. This begins with the teacher making a positive impression with the student and family upon first encounter. Teachers who fear their students will have very little positive impact on their academic success. Teachers must change their ideology to see and draw the best out of every student. They must be sensitive to different cultural norms without being judgmental.

Relationships were a missing factor at BSH. The behavior referrals at the elementary level were far fewer than middle school. Interestingly, there was also less staff at the elementary level. The elementary staff consisted of experienced tenured teachers who had been at BSH for many years. Yet, by the time Sonie and Sam were in the upper elementary and middle school grades there was no positive interaction with any faculty member with either student. The

middle-school level had an extremely high number of referrals and also experienced a high staff turnover rate with many new non-tenured teachers.

Interventions without Staff Support and Adequate Resources Breeds Failure

The administrators and teachers failed to address the problems, which led to the same outcome for both students: lost learning time. They treated Sonie and Sam as if they were the problem rather than modifying the system to help them. I did not find strict adherence to the harsh realities of zero tolerance. However, if zero tolerance had been followed, it may have highlighted the behavioral challenges the teachers and administrators were experiencing at BSH, which may have alerted the need for additional training and accountability.

Consequences were so inconsistent that it was impossible for Sonie or Sam to either learn about or experience positive change. It is very important to have consistent protocol in place, rather than depend upon subjective decisions that lead to a chaotic learning environment. The learning environment that these two boys experienced was not conducive to rigorous, relevant, and effective learning for them as well as their peers. Skiba's (2000) research supports these findings that consequences assigned to behavior are usually very subjective. In addition to lack of consistent consequences, BSH had many interventions in place that were never offered to either Sonie or Sam.

BSH attempted to punish both boys without any type of support or instruction as to how appropriate behavior should look. Instead of using a proactive approach, the focus was on stopping the inappropriate behavior without determining and eliminating the actual factors causing the problematic behavior. According to the work of Noguera (2003b), to help students become successful, the root cause of their behavior must be explored and resolved.

At BSH, regardless of who wrote the referrals, the administrators were responsible for assigning behavior codes. In many instances behavior was coded as ‘other,’ which prevented many dangerous incidents from being reported to the state. In some instances no code was assigned. Is it possible so much effort was placed in hiding the situations taking place that these students were lost in the system? Actually, the school-to-prison pipeline maintains that they are not lost but that they turn up later in life in our prison system.

There were many recorded incidents of teachers being threatened or receiving a barrage of insults and expletives about which a representative of the state commented, “I would not want to be a teacher here and have to be exposed to some of the situations I witnessed today” (feedback from state appointed officer, 2009). At times, the behavior interfered so severely with learning that one teacher stated, “I can teach reading, I can teach math, but their behaviors are off the hook. I’d rather deal with academic than behavior problems any day!” (Interview, 2009).

The Response to Intervention model (RTI) is encouraged in this district, but BSH did not implement the three-tiered approach for Sonie or Sam. Such an approach would have looked at each student individually and created strategies and alternatives specifically tailored for Sonie and Sam. Their behaviors were never addressed on the tertiary level. BSH was not structured to accommodate challenging behaviors on a tier three level and therefore failure was unavoidable. The mishandling of Sonie and Sam’s behaviors were not oversights; this was a practice that regularly took place at BSH.

There are multiple examples of the staff at BSH ignoring the protocols in place and subjectively responding ineffectively to the students. There were other students like Sonie and Sam²⁵ who created havoc in the classrooms at BSH and had similar experiences. The following

²⁵ Data taken from BSH referrals.

students did not have behavior plans nor were there any referrals for PST or notations to complete functional behavior assessments: Here are some scenarios:

- Manuel (Latino male). He has been suspended five times and school has been in session for only ten weeks. He has just been reinstated back into school after going to a formal hearing. It is really his behavior with other teachers; at least in my classroom he is not throwing things, cussing me out, or hitting kids (Referral, 2007).
- Derek (Black male). I have talked with the nurse several times about Derek taking his medication (ADHD). Mom said she is going to discuss with the school about Derek taking medication at school instead of home, but there has been no follow through. Derek has been suspended three times since school started [school has been in session 10 weeks]. For the most part it's an escalation of his anger and his inability to calm himself down. He has this tendency when he gets pissed off to get up slam the door as he walks out of the room. That doesn't fly with me you just don't walk out of my room!" He is the most frustrating part of my academic day (Referral, 2007)
- Jose (Latino male). A couple of years ago while teaching third grade, I had a very disruptive and violent student. His presence in my room completely changed the learning environment to the point where no learning was taking place and quality teaching was impossible. When I would write a referral he would be sent back to the room or given a half-day of in-school suspension (Referral, 2008).

Note that the students are all males of color who had no behavior plans. All were functioning academically below grade level. Again, interventions were available but not utilized. Many urban educators complain about not having enough resources, but in this case, teachers were not using the resources that were available.

Working and Learning in a System Where Supports Are Under-Utilized

BHS had numerous supports that were not utilized by the staff and administrators. Like many urban schools, BHS had many students who were vulnerable and reacted in angry, aggressive, and combatant ways. BHS continued practices that led to predictable outcomes and failure for these students. Although these two young men were clearly struggling, as well as the other students in their classes, there were no significant changes in how they were handled. How could anyone receive a quality education with the amount of chaos that was identified in these referrals? This violent undercurrent left behavioral problems unaddressed—whether real or perceived. Instead of putting the student first, the reaction was to implement punitive policies.

Students have many emotional and academic needs that are not being met in our urban schools. As a society we have become focused on external outcomes and accountability, but have ignored the intrinsic worth of our students and the educators that teach them. We apply band-aids and external dressings over wounds that are clearly festering. We have not addressed the root causes of the challenges our students' face. Teaching and learning is a joint effort. Success can only be accomplished when everyone works collaboratively toward the same goal. The results produce a rewarding academic experience.

It takes a conscious effort to work productively. Parents, teachers and administrators must come together collaboratively. PBIS was somewhat successful because it brought fun into the classrooms and school. It allowed for celebration for students who were working hard or at least trying. Successful students can only rise to the expectations of their teachers in the classroom. A teacher can only rise to the level of professional development, and administrators can only succeed within the parameters of their district procedures. Until the focus is placed on doing what is best for students, we will stay in this continuous cycle of failure.

Effective techniques must be learned and implemented for all students. Quality professional development is needed to address the needs of all students from all cultures. There appears to be large gaps between what new teachers learn and what they need once in the classroom. Tenured educators must accept the fact that in order to meet the needs of their students they must be willing to learn how to do old things differently or change inefficient practices into productive and rigorous instruction. All educators must learn strategies to help students be successful whether they have a recognized disability or an unacknowledged difficulty, regardless of whether they take medication or not. Many students attend school with large gaps between their academic ability and their grade of record and not all are considered students with learning disabilities.

All teachers should have cultural sensitivity training. Currently many administrators and teachers are not prepared to identify when students of color are trying to make sense of their classroom environment. Many educators see the diverse use of language as a limitation. Educators don't acknowledge this attribute as a method where students from different ethnic backgrounds build bridges between their culture and others. Educators are not trained to help students or teach in complex, challenging classroom environments.

Bullying is how 21st century students act out violence in our schools. Bullying appears in many forms, from physical violence to cyber bullying. Educators are not trained how to identify or handle covert forms of violence. Classroom management must be addressed. Educators are over-reliant on exclusionary methods and referrals. Punishment only stops the behavior temporarily. Discipline is most effective when students internalize the expected behavior and learn new ways of getting their needs met. New and veteran teachers need professional development to learn different behavioral techniques and implement multiple

strategies that address all behavior concerns for all students. A great deal of learning time is lost in classrooms and our schools when students are placed in time-out, reflection rooms, and in-school suspension or simply suspended or expelled out of school.

We live in an angry world that thrives on aggression, and it appears that as a society we are raising angry children. There seems to be an immediate need for mental health services for students who are under severe emotional distress. Many attend school and demonstrate extreme anger beyond their developmental years. These students don't have strategies to handle their emotions and educators are not equipped with strategies, guidelines, or a process to follow to get these students help. We need more, as Yang (2009) describes, classroom Xs—highly structured teaching environments that encourage rigorous creativity, free expression and risk-takers working within a collaborative community.

We need educators who will provide structure while giving students opportunities to take risks and enjoy learning. In our 21st century American schools, where the standard is to have highly trained, highly qualified educators in every classroom, why are we reverting to scripted programs with no flexibility? Training teachers and providing quality professional development is providing educators with multiple tools and allowing them to use the technique that fits the students in front of them at any given time. If the educational system has a firm foundation with trained teachers that are allowed to use their autonomy laced with cultural sensitivity all American students will excel and be the cream of the crop in the intellectual world!

Subjectivity is what makes the topic of discipline in schools so complex. The experiences that individuals (student or teacher) encounter affect how they respond to challenging and stressful circumstances. Therefore, it is imperative that every educator is trained to handle classroom diversity with sensitivity and fairness.

Further Study

I believe the following topics that emerged from this study warrant further study. First, how are teachers assisting students with ADHD in the regular education classrooms? Second, how much learning time do students lose in classrooms where there are disruptions due to misbehavior? Third, how does lost learning time affect the academic achievement gap for students of color? Fourth, how effective is preservice and in-service training in positive behavior supports in helping new and existing teachers deal more effectively with challenging behavior. And, finally, what are effective examples of positive behavior supports for students who struggle significantly with behavior?

My Final Thoughts as Participant Observer

I began in chapter one identifying the many hats I wear as an educator, social worker, nurse, nurturer, judge, jury, and police officer—acknowledging all the positions that are necessary to be an excellent educator. After completing my study as a researcher, I am both saddened and very concerned regarding the outlook of education. I realize there is much that needs to be accomplished and, reflecting historically, we are moving backward on the ladder of success. There is an immediate need to reach the most challenging students in our urban schools. I believe this is the key to unlocking the achievement gap with minority students especially males of color in our urban schools. As an educator, it is hard to write referrals knowing the effects of a student missing time in the classroom. I am compelled to find ways to connect with parents and guardians so we can open lines of communication and collaboration to assist students who need our help to be successful. I also am troubled by the disconnect between state and local laws. Finally, as a teacher, there is an immediate need for smaller class sizes to assist students who experience multiple challenges socially, emotionally, and academically in the classroom.

Professional development is extremely important to dispel stereotypical thinking and increase cultural sensitivity.

Appendix A



SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
Teaching and Leadership Programs

Consent Form for Understanding the Criteria Used for Referring At-Risk Students

February 29, 2009

Dear Participant:

I (Valarie A. Torrence) am a graduate student in the School of Education at Syracuse University. I am inviting you to participate in my research project. Involvement in the study is voluntary, so you may choose to participate or not. This letter will explain the study to you. If you have any questions or need clarification please feel free to ask.

My study is designed to understand the challenges that educators face in urban school districts. I am interested in learning how educators handle these challenges and the strategies implemented to help all students be successful.

You will be asked to participate in interviews, which will take approximately 45-50 minutes. The interview will be audio taped. I may request a phone or in person follow up if I need clarification on any information previously received or if I have additional questions. By checking the box at the end of this letter, you are giving your consent for your interviews to be recorded. Any audio files will be transcribed, then erased. I will store the paper data in locked files at home, and the electronic data will be stored on my computer that only my password will give access. Paper files and electronic data will be kept for seven years. None of the data will be used in the evaluation of anyone's professional career or placed in your institution's files. All information that you share will be kept confidential. Only my faculty advisor and I will have access to any data that is collected. At your request and without charge, I will be happy to provide you with copies of your interview transcripts. To protect your privacy I will use pseudonyms for you, your school district, and the geographic location.

Refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are entitled. You may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Participation is voluntary and presents minimal risks to you as a participant. The risks are related to sad or depressing memories of your interaction with a particular family or student. In addition, you have the right to pass on any question you do not wish to answer.

Effective strategies that are identified will be shared with other educators to enhance our educational system, and promote best practices.

150 Huntington Hall / Syracuse, NY 13244-2340
315-443-2685 / 315-443-1468 / 315-443-9659 / Fax: 315-443-3289

1

Appendix B

Effective strategies that are identified will be shared with other educators to enhance our educational system, and promote best practices.

If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about the research, you can contact me at (315) 657-7738, or my faculty advisor Beth Ferri at (315) 443-1465. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, or if you have any questions, concerns, or complaints that you wish to address please contact Syracuse University Internal Review Board at (315) 443-3013.

All participants will receive a signed copy of this consent document. Thank you for your interest, time, and participation in this research project. I look forward to talking with you.

Best regards,

Valarie A. Torrence
vtorrenc@syr.edu

- I agree to be audiotaped during the interview.
- I do not agree to be audiotaped.

I am over the age of 18 and I wish to participate in this research study. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without penalty. All data collected will remain confidential.

 Signature of participant

 Date

 Printed name of participant

 Signature of researcher

 Date

 Printed name of researcher


Appendix C

Sample Questions for Semi-structured Interviews

- Please share with me your experiences as an educator.
- What criteria do you use to identify students who need extra support?
- What type of behavior is tolerable in your classroom?
- What type of behavior is expected?
- What type of interventions do you use in your classroom to help your students?
- What type of support do you receive from your administrators?
- What type of support do you need to support the learning environment in your school/classroom?
- Please share how your experiences at graduate school helped you in your profession with interventions and discipline?

Appendix D

DISCIPLINE REFERRAL


 School District

 School Name

Student ID

Grade

School ID

STUDENT NAME: _____

Incident Date

Incident Time

AM
 PM

Referring Teacher

DESCRIPTION OF INCIDENT (use additional paper if necessary): _____

INFRACTION(S) (teacher check appropriately):

<input type="checkbox"/> Cutting Class <input type="checkbox"/> Disruptive Behavior <input type="checkbox"/> Disrespectful/Uncooperative <input type="checkbox"/> Failure to Follow Reasonable Request/Insubor. <input type="checkbox"/> Fighting <input type="checkbox"/> Leaving the Building w/o Permission <input type="checkbox"/> Leaving the Classroom w/o Permission <input type="checkbox"/> Overt Defiance	<input type="checkbox"/> Persistent Tardiness <input type="checkbox"/> Physical/Verbal Harassment of Staff/Student <input type="checkbox"/> Possession of an Inappropriate Object <input type="checkbox"/> Possession/Use of a Weapon/Dangerous Object <input type="checkbox"/> Possession/Use/Sale of Alcohol/Drugs/Paraphernalia <input type="checkbox"/> Refused to Stay for Detention <input type="checkbox"/> Smoking	<input type="checkbox"/> Striking a Staff Member/Student <input type="checkbox"/> Threatening a Staff Member/Student <input type="checkbox"/> Truancy <input type="checkbox"/> Unprovoked Assault of a Staff Member/Student <input type="checkbox"/> Use of Inappropriate Language/Profanity <input type="checkbox"/> Vandalism
---	--	--

LOCATION OF THE INCIDENT:

 Auditorium Staircase
 Bathroom Other _____
 Classroom Athletic Field
 Cafeteria Playground
 Gym Parking Lot
 Hall School Function/Off Grounds
 Library Transportation
 Locker Rm.
 Office

ACTION TAKEN BY TEACHER PRIOR TO REFERRAL?

 Consulted Support Staff Held Student Conference
 Detention Student Court
 Home Visit Time-out in Classroom
 Letter Sent Team Conference
 Modified Instructional Techniques Time-out w/another Teacher
 Mediation Other
 Telephone Parents
 Held Parent Conference

POSSIBLE MOTIVATION

 Obtain peer attention
 Obtain adult attention
 Obtain items/activities
 Avoid peer(s)
 Avoid adult
 Avoid task or activity
 Don't know
 Other _____

TEACHER SUGGESTED ACTION(S): _____

Teacher Signature: _____

ADMINISTRATIVE USE ONLY

Charge(s): _____

MAJOR MINOR

Location: _____

Special Ed: _____

Nexus: _____

Nature of Victim(s) _____

Witness(s) _____

In School Suspension
 Block(s) Period(s) (Length)
 Hour(s)
 Day(s)


Out of School
 Block(s) Period(s) (Length)
 Hour(s)
 Day(s)

Date(s) of Suspension: _____

ADMINISTRATIVE COMMENT(S):

Administrative Signature

Appendix E



DISCIPLINE REFERRAL

Student ID
Grade
School ID
School Name

STUDENT NAME: _____

AM
 PM

Incident Date
Incident Time
Referring Teacher

DESCRIPTION OF INCIDENT (use additional paper if necessary): _____

LOCATION OF THE INCIDENT:	ACTION TAKEN BY TEACHER PRIOR TO REFERRAL?	POSSIBLE MOTIVATION	OTHERS INVOLVED
<input type="checkbox"/> Auditorium <input type="checkbox"/> Bathroom <input type="checkbox"/> Classroom <input type="checkbox"/> Cafeteria <input type="checkbox"/> Gym <input type="checkbox"/> Hall <input type="checkbox"/> Library <input type="checkbox"/> Locker Rm. <input type="checkbox"/> Office	<input type="checkbox"/> Staircase <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Athletic Field <input type="checkbox"/> Playground <input type="checkbox"/> Parking Lot <input type="checkbox"/> School Function/ <input type="checkbox"/> Off Grounds <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation <input type="checkbox"/> Consulted Support Staff <input type="checkbox"/> Detention <input type="checkbox"/> Home Visit <input type="checkbox"/> Letter Sent <input type="checkbox"/> Modified Instructional Tech <input type="checkbox"/> Mediation <input type="checkbox"/> Telephone Parents <input type="checkbox"/> Held Parent Conference	<input type="checkbox"/> Held Student Conference <input type="checkbox"/> Student Court <input type="checkbox"/> Time-out in Classroom <input type="checkbox"/> Team Conference <input type="checkbox"/> Time-out w/oth Teach <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Obtain peer attention <input type="checkbox"/> Obtain adult attention <input type="checkbox"/> Obtain items/activities <input type="checkbox"/> Avoid peer(s) <input type="checkbox"/> Avoid adult <input type="checkbox"/> Avoid task or activity <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____
			<input type="checkbox"/> Alone <input type="checkbox"/> Peers <input type="checkbox"/> Staff <input type="checkbox"/> Substitute <input type="checkbox"/> Teacher <input type="checkbox"/> Unknown

TEACHER SUGGESTED ACTION(S): _____

Teacher Signature: _____

ADMINISTRATIVE USE ONLY

VADIR Code _____

Special Ed: YES NO

Nexus: No Date _____ TBA

Victim(s) names: _____

Staff involved: _____

Witness(s) _____

SCSD Code _____

Weapon Type _____

PASS offered? _____

Police called? _____

In School Suspension
 Block(s) Period(s)
 Hour(s) (Length)
 Day(s)

Out of School
 Block(s) Period(s) (Length)
 Hour(s)
 Day(s)

Date(s) of Suspension: _____

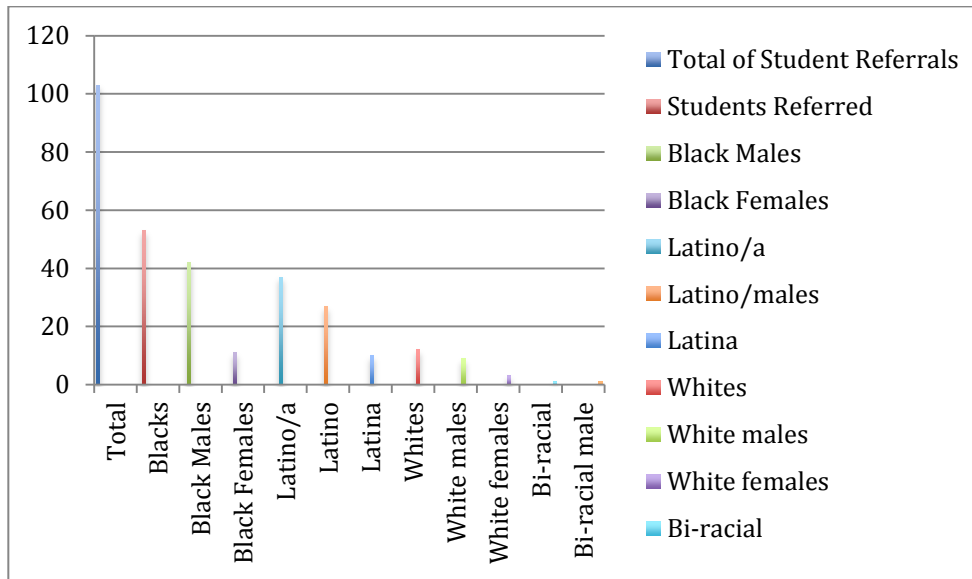
ADMINISTRATIVE COMMENT(S):

Administrative Signature

9/1/06

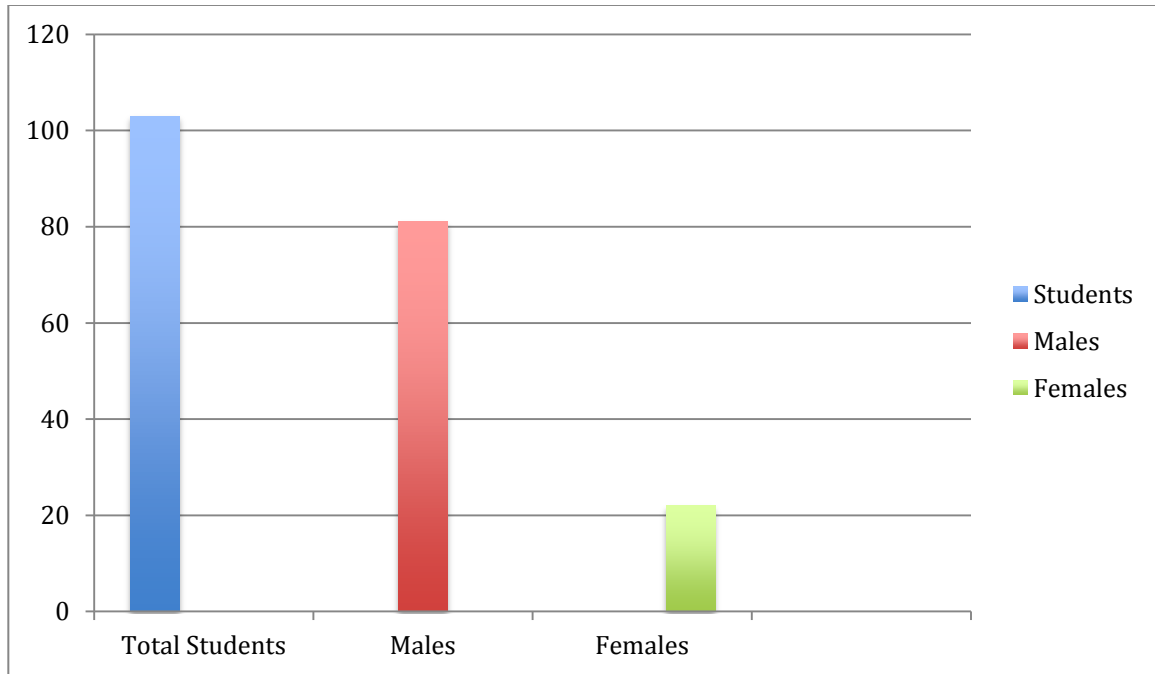
Appendix F

Students With Eight or More Referrals



Appendix G

A Comparison Of The 103 Males and Females That Received Referrals



Appendix H

CODES

Consequences do not rise to the level of a full day of ISS
or OSS or Charge does not disrupt the educational process.

CHARGES	CODE
Cheating	500
Disruptive	501
Cutting/Leaving Class	502
Excessive Absences	503
Excessive Tardies	504
Failure to Report to Detention	505
Gambling	506
Illegal Parking	507
In hall without a pass	508
Inappropriate Apparel	509
Profanity	510
Insubordination	511
Late to Class	512
Leaving School Grounds w/o permission	513
Truancy	514
Smoking tobacco	515
Possession of electronic equipment	516
Other	517
IIIMP	518

Failure to follow rules

521

Appendix I

VADIR CODES

CHARGE	CODE	WEAPON
Homicide	1	(w)
Serious Sexual Offense ("forcible compulsion)	2.1	(w)
Other Sexual Offense ("inappropriate, but not forcible")	2.2	(w)
Robbery (forcible stealing)	3	(w)
Assault with Serious Physical Injury (hospitalization)	4	(w)
Arson (intent to damage)	5	
Kidnapping	6	
Assault with Physical Injury (intentional or reckless)	7	(w)
Reckless Endangerment (grave risk, but no injury)	8	(w)
Minor Altercations (assault)	9	(w)
Intimidation, Harassment, Menacing, Bullying (not physical)	10	(w)
Burglary (entering to commit a crime)	11	(w)
Criminal Mischief (damaging property)	12	(w)
Larceny or Other Theft Offenses	13	(w)
Bomb Threat	14	
False Alarm	15	
Riot (to more with grave risk of injury)	16	(w)
Weapons Possession only	17	See Types of Weapon codes
Use, Sale, or Possession of Drugs Only	18	
Use, Sale, or Possession of Alcohol Only	19	
Other Disruptive Incidents (*)	20	

PLEASE IDENTIFY ALL VICTIMS, i.e.; Staff, Students or Other

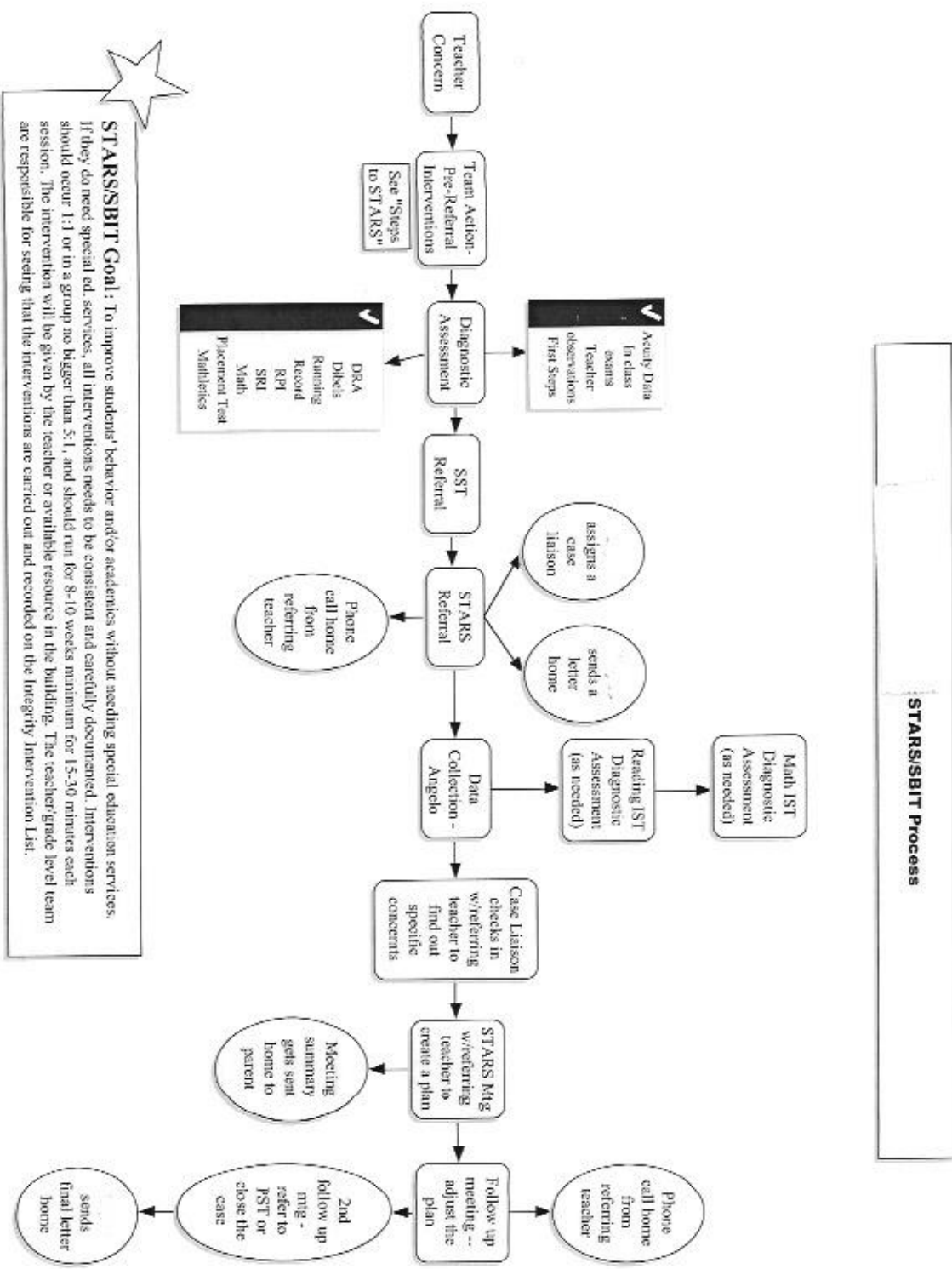
<p>IN MOST CASES, REPORT ONLY ONE CHARGE</p>

(IF OFFENSE INVOLVES ONE OF THE **TOP 8 CATEGORIES**, MORE THAN ONE MAY BE USED, I.E.; WEPO AND DRUG)

Possible Type of Weapon Codes

Handgun	GUN
Rifle/Shotgun	RIFL
Other Firearms	OFIR
Knives	KNIF
Chemical/Biological Agents	CHEM
Other Weapons	OWEP

Appendix L



STARS/SBIT Goal : To improve students' behavior and/or academics without needing special education services.

If they do need special ed. services, all interventions needs to be consistent and carefully documented. Interventions should occur 1:1 or in a group no bigger than 5:1, and should run for 8-10 weeks minimum for 15-30 minutes each session. The intervention will be given by the teacher or available resource in the building. The teacher/grade level team are responsible for seeing that the interventions are carried out and recorded on the Integrity Intervention List.

Appendix M

May 2007 SBIT Team Survey Results for:

Team Surveys Returned:	6
------------------------	---

1=Did not follow at all closely 6=Followed very closely

1. How closely did your team follow the formal SBIT problem-solving process during initial meetings? **6.00**
 2. In general, how well did you feel that your team got along interpersonally? **6.00**
 3. Do you feel that you have gained intervention ideas or knowledge through your membership on the SBIT Team and/or participation in SBIT trainings that you will now be able to use with students with whom you work? **6.00**
-

1=Strongly Agree 2=Disagree 3=Slightly Disagree 4=Slightly Agree 5=Agree 6=Strongly Agree

4. Our SBIT Team typically experienced little or no confusion about time, date and location of scheduled meetings. **5.50**
5. Members of our team rotated meeting roles regularly. **5.67**
6. Scheduling of times for our team to meet was not a major inconvenience. **5.83**
7. Our SBIT Team is generally well-regarded among teachers at our school building. **5.17**



Thursday, June 28, 2007

Appendix N

May 2007 SBIT Teacher Survey Results for:

	1=Not at all severe	6=Very Severe
1a.	How would you rate the severity of the student's target problem(s) prior to your referring the child to SBIT?	5.14
1b.	How would you rate the severity of the student's target problem(s) now (after referring the child to SBIT)?	4.57
	Difference	0.57

	1=Strongly Agree 2=Disagree 3=Slightly Disagree 4=Slightly Agree 5=Agree 6=Strongly Agree
2.	I liked the procedures used in this intervention. 4.00
3.	This intervention was a good way to handle the problem. 3.43
4.	Overall, this intervention was beneficial for the child. 3.29
5.	I had the resources (time/materials) needed to implement this intervention. 3.71

	1=Never/Didn't use the intervention 6=Every day/Exactly as planned	
6.	To what extent were you and/or others able to implement the SBIT intervention as designed?	4.57

	1=Definitely NO 6=Definitely YES	
7.	Do you feel that you have gained intervention ideas or knowledge through your involvement with the SBIT Team that you will be able to use with other students?	4.29

	1=Not at all helpful 6=Very helpful	
8.	In general, how helpful was the SBIT Team in helping you to achieve a positive outcome for the student?	4.29

7	Teacher Surveys Returned
14	Teacher Surveys Sent
50.0%	Percent Returned



Tuesday, September 25, 2007

Appendix O

Revised 7/07

- PBIS Matrix (Behavior Expectations)

	Cafeteria	Assemblies	Hallways, Staircases, Sidewalks	Bathrooms	Buses	Walkers	Outdoor Activities	Classroom
We are Respectful	Line up Use inside or quiet voices when talking Chew with your mouth closed Say "thank you" to the person that serves you	Be silent and listen to the speakers Raise your hand if you have an emergency Sit on your tortois Stay in your seat Keep your hands and feet quietly to yourself	Use quiet feet and voices Always walk on the right hand side Help each other Look and admire class work and displays with your eyes only	Give others privacy Flush the toilet when you are finished Keep bathroom walls and doors free of writing	Follow the adults directions the FIRST time they give you a restroom request Use your quiet voice	Listen to the crossing guards Follow directions given by Budget Staff	Follow the directions of the adult in charge Line up when the signal is given Use the equipment properly	Follow the established classroom procedures
We are Responsible:	Get all meals, food, condiments and milk the first time that you go through line Wait for permission to request Raise your hand if you have a question or request Clean your area when done eating	Focus on yourself Clap and laugh at appropriate times Listen to the speakers	If you are nice with your class then you need a pass/agenda book to be in the hall Go directly to where you need to be Get what you need promptly from your locker	Do your part and keep the bathroom clean for others Wash your hands with soap and water Dry your hands with a towel before leaving the bathroom Place all used towels in the trash can	Be at your stop on time Sit and stay seated until your stop Go directly to your assigned place after you get off the bus in the morning Go directly home after you get off the bus in the afternoon	Stay on the sidewalk Cross at the crosswalks	Play fairly Be kind to others Return equipment to storage locations	Follow the established classroom procedures Be on time Keep area clean Stay in your seat Raise your hand to speak
We are Safe:	Use your utensils for eating only Eat and touch your own food Keep your hands, feet and food to yourself Stay seated Notify an adult of spills	Wait for and follow teachers directions before, during and after an assembly Walk on the right Keep hands / feet to yourself Walk at all times Go straight to class Outside doors stay closed ALWAYS	Hold the handrail with one hand Walk on the right Keep hands / feet to yourself Walk at all times Go straight to class Outside doors stay closed ALWAYS	Report any spills or leaks from the toilet or sink to an adult	Keep belongings out of the aisles Remain seated until the bus comes to your stop	Go directly home after school Cross at crosswalks Look both ways before crossing the street Walk on designated sidewalks	Use equipment properly Stay within the boundaries Be aware of others around you Play fighting is UNACCEPTABLE	Bring materials necessary for learning Keep hands, feet and body to yourself Stay in your seat Raise your hand to speak

Appendix P

TEACHER VSV. OFFICE MANAGED BEHAVIORS

K-3

TEACHER	OFFICE	BOTH
Use/appearance of electronics/cell phones	Fighting	Absences and tardiness(Teachers identify and alert administration and support providers)
Too long on a hall pas	Cussing out an adult	Damage to property
Talking during class	Possession of a controlled substance and/or weapon	Student leaving the room/building without permission (Teacher notify the office)
Lack of student work accomplished		Hitting/kicking another person(Teacher address the situation and notify the office if needed)
Refusal to sit in assigned seat		In the hall without a pass
Cheating		
Class disruption		
Profanity		
Theft		
Insubordination		

*** Any Office managed behavior may result in a referral and/or a discussion with an administrator and/or student.

*** These behaviors need to be evaluated concerning their frequency, excessiveness, and severity. Some Teacher managed behaviors may become an issue that needs to involve administrative support.

Appendix Q

TEACHER VS. OFFICE MANAGED BEHAVIORS:

GRADES 4-5-6

TEACHER	OFFICE	BOTH
Use/appearance of electronics/cell phones	Fighting	In the hall without a pass (Hall monitor and Sentry)
Talking in class	Damage/destruction of property	Hitting/kicking another person (Teacher address the situation and notify office if necessary)
Student disagreement	Theft	Absences/tardiness (Teacher identify and notify administration and support providers)
Insubordination	Possession of a controlled substance and/or weapon	
Class disruption	Leaving class/building without permission	
Refusal to sit in assigned seat	Cusses out an adult	
Profanity		
Lack of class work accomplished		
Cheating		
Too long on a pass		

*** Any Office managed behavior may result in a referral and/or a discussion with an administrator and/or student.

*** These behaviors need to be evaluated concerning their frequency, excessiveness, and severity. Some Teacher managed behaviors may become an issue that needs to involve administrative support.

Appendix R

OFFICE S. TEACHER MANAGED BEHAVIORS

Grades 7,8, Specials

TEACHER	OFFICE	BOTH
Use/appearance of electronics/cell phones	Leaving class/building without permission	Absences and tardiness (Teacher identify and notify administration and support provider)
Talking during class	Possession of a controlled substance or weapon	Hitting/kicking another person (Teacher address the situation and notify the office if necessary)
Refusing to sit in the assigned seat	Damaging property	Insubordination (depending on the severity of the situation)
Profanity	Fighting	In the hall without a pass (Hall monitor and Sentry)
Too long on a hall pass	Theft	
Lack of class work being accomplished	Cussing out an adult	
Cheating		
Class disruption		
Student disagreement		

*** Any Office managed behavior may result in a referral and/or a discussion with an administrator and/or student.

*** These behaviors need to be evaluated concerning their frequency, excessiveness, and severity. Some Teacher managed behaviors may become an issue that needs to involve administrative support.

Appendix S

Student _____ Date _____

PBIS ISS Questions

Which teacher's class were you sent out from? _____

Circle the place in the building where your violation occurred:
Cafeteria Assembly Hallway/Stairway Bathroom

Bus or Sidewalk Classroom

Describe what happened: _____

Name the 3 Expectations at XXXXXXXXX School (look on the Matrix):

- (1) _____
- (2) _____
- (3) _____

Using the Matrix, write down the positive behaviors that are expected for the place in the building that you were in violation of:

I _____, will do my personal best to follow the 3 expectations of XXXXXXXXX School, and not be sent to the reflection room again.

Initials of reflection Room Supervisor: _____

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