

ISSUES OF CRIME AND SCHOOL SAFETY  
ZERO TOLERANCE POLICIES AND CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts  
in the Department of Sociology  
in the College of Sciences  
at the University of Central Florida  
Orlando, Florida

Spring Term  
2012

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## ABSTRACT

In the aftermath of school shootings, safety in educational institutions became a national concern. The Zero Tolerance policy was designed to remove students who posed serious and or imminent threat to the school environment. It was hoped that the institution of this policy would allow schools to better police student behaviors through the use of tough disciplinary actions, and to ensure a safer learning environment for all. However, one of the latent consequences of establishing a broad set of directives was to result in the differential treatment of some minority groups such as special education students. To date, there exists little research that tests the efficacy of the zero tolerance approach in reducing school violence or its effect upon special education students who exhibit unique and separate characteristics from the general student body. Some of the behaviors that are beyond their control can impede their learning, but are even more often seen as falling under the guidelines of the zero tolerance policy, which in turn subjects this group to a number of disciplinary actions previously not utilized to address their specific needs.

To address the potential impact this policy has on students with learning and emotional behavioral disorders this study analyzes data from a sample comprising of 2,736 total schools, reported over 4 different time periods, 1999-2008 originally collected by the School Survey on Crime and Safety. This study examines the relationship between various school characteristics, the proportion of special education students in a school, and the use of the disciplinary actions as a means of controlling behaviors that could be undesired but may not pose a serious threat to the educational institution.

The results indicate that presence of students identified as “special education students” was strongly related to the number of disruptive behaviors reported. The increased frequency of those reported behaviors was also found to be significantly related to the use of suspension and expulsions as disciplinary actions in a school. Further multiple regression analysis yielded data demonstrating the nature of the relationships between the presence of special education students in a school, the frequency of disruptive behaviors reported, and the increased use of disciplinary actions.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to all those who helped to complete this thesis.

For my son, thank you for being my inspiration during this journey. Your patience and understanding, together with your love and support have made achieving my dreams possible.

I want to thank the Department of Sociology for all the help and support during the course of my studies.

Thank you to my thesis committee Dr. Ida Cook, Dr. David Gay, and Dr. Liz Grauerholz for their continued encouragement and assistance from beginning to end.

A very special thank you to Dr. Ida Cook, my thesis chair and advisor, for being an amazing mentor and friend. Without her patience and dedication this idea would never have come to fruition. Thank you for always believing in me, even when I doubted myself. For without your unwavering devotion, support, and guidance throughout this process I may have never realized my full potential.

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## **LIST OF ACRONYMS/ABBREVIATIONS**

Special Education Students: LD/EBD students

LD/EBD: Learning Disabled and Emotional Behavior Disorders

Secondary: High school

SES: Socioeconomic Status

IDEA: Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

OSS: Out –of-school suspension

ISS: In-school suspension

Elem: Elementary School

Mid: Middle School

High: Secondary School

Combo: Combined School

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Safety in public schools has been of growing concern over the last decade in the wake of increased school violence. One can't read the newspaper, tune into the daily news, or access the internet without discovering another tragic incident has taken place somewhere in the world. According to the National Center for Education Statistics Indicators of School Crime and Safety 2008 report, there were approximately 55.5 million students enrolled in public schools nationwide during the 2006-2007 school years (NCES Indicators, 2008). The report indicates that during the 2006-2007 school year 48% of all public schools took at least one serious disciplinary action against a student for physical assaults, drug and alcohol possession, and possession/use of a weapon. In fact, of those reported serious disciplinary actions (approx. 830,700) resulted in 74% being suspended for 5 days or more, and 5% were expelled. Between the years 1996-2008 approximately 47 public school shootings occurred resulting in the death of 133 students and 21 faculty and seriously injuring 140 other students, and 10 faculty members, according to the Time Line of Worldwide Shootings (Infoplease.com). There can be no doubt that school violence is a serious concern for all (Skiba, 2000b). In response to the public's outcry for better safety measures, policymakers devised the zero tolerance policy as a means to restore safety on school campuses while simultaneously dealing with individuals and or situations with varying degrees of severity based on the infraction(s) violated.

However in this policy's aftermath, it has increasingly subjected youth who are afflicted with learning disabilities/emotional and behavioral disorders to suspensions and expulsions for

offenses not perceived as dangerous such as dress code violations, classroom disruptions, and other minor infractions previously handled by administrators (Johnson, 2003; Morrison & D’Incau, 1997; McIntire, 2002). Using this disciplinary policy to drive home the message of “no tolerance,” exacting the maximum punishment allowed regardless of the circumstances is not only detrimental to labeled and stigmatized youth, it is overly burdensome to the educational system.

Research on the use of the zero tolerance policy by educators and administrators indicates that their attitudes and lowered expectations of minority groups together with a lack of effective classroom management techniques, increases the probability that educators and administrators will respond to challenging behavior by using disciplinary actions to remove those individuals from the educational institution. Thus it is not surprising then that special education students are overrepresented in the use of suspensions and expulsions (Skiba & Peterson, 2000; Cooley, 1995; Rose, 1988).

In this study I examine the relationship between the training level of school personnel, the proportion (or prevalence) of learning disabled and emotional behavior disorder students (hereafter identified as special education students) in a school and the use of Zero Tolerance as a behavioral control. Most studies have concluded that race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status have a direct correlation on the frequency of suspensions and expulsions doled out in the public school system utilizing the Zero Tolerance policy. However, few if any have specifically focused on those labeled as “disabled”, the characteristics of these targeted students, and whether or not

the disabled are being stigmatized because of the personal perceptions and attitudes of educators/administrators.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this review of related literature is to seek information about the purpose and function of public educational institutions, and the practices and policies utilized by administrators and educators to address the behaviors of students with learning disorders and emotional behavioral disorders. The review of previous research investigates the range of procedures (i.e. suspension, expulsion) dispensed in accordance with mandated one-size-fits-all disciplinary policies, and the impact said practices have on the minority group, children with learning disorders and emotional behavioral disorders (LD & EBD). This review focuses on the school as an institution, the students with learning and emotional behavioral disorders, and the specific policy coined Zero Tolerance adopted by school districts nationwide. Although this disciplinary policy is considered to be the national norm for all public educational institutions it is not implemented uniformly throughout the country. School districts enjoy much latitude in the application of the policy, which results in many inconsistent uses within the educational organization.

### Schools

Schools in American society are considered second only to the family in its contribution to the growth and development of children (Bruns, Moore, Stephan, Pruitt, & Weist 2005; Evans, 1999). Although portrayed as an institution of equality, the public educational system has been the focus of controversy regarding its efforts to achieve and sustain equalized opportunities for all since the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* court case (Eitle, 2002). This case brought to light the issues of discrimination based on race, and set a precedent for future policies regarding human rights. The *Brown* decision struck down the laws and policies that fostered “human

tendencies to prejudge, discriminate against, and stereotype individuals on the basis of their ethnicity, religious beliefs, cultural ideologies, and physical characteristics”, citing that “the 14<sup>th</sup> amendment to the U.S. Constitution guarantees all citizens equal protection of the laws” (Brown v. BOE). Yet, the process of enforcing equality for all has been a slow progression and nearly a decade later the requirements are still not being enforced as the Brown v. BOE decision laid out (Waldon, 2005). Rather the dynamics have shifted, while the institution no longer practices racial segregation it does still exclude some minority groups such as children in special education from the same equitable educational opportunities of general education students who more uniformly mirror the socialized expected behaviors highly valued within the institution and society.

Merton (1968) believes that the “social functions of an organization help determine the structure; just as the structure helps determine the effectiveness with which the functions are fulfilled” (p. 136). Educational institutions as an organization are centered on socially constructed norms, values, and expectations. As such, they establish measures, standards, and policies such as Zero Tolerance which they feel best equip the institutions with operational structure to fulfill their goals in educating our youth. These designed parameters create and cause both manifest and latent functions resulting from their implementation and use over the student body. According to Merton (1968), “manifest and latent functions are the difference between conscious motivations for social behavior, and its objective consequences” (p. 114). Manifest functions are understood to be the consequences observed or expected by the participants of an institution or organization and latent functions are those unintended or unforeseen consequences that many endure or suffer as a result (Helm, 1971; Preston and Roots, 2004, Merton, 1968; Maynard, 1985) of the initial action or policy. Students adherence to these established rules,

policies, and 'behavior codes' is understood to be a natural part of functioning within the institution. Yet, rigid adherence to strict and unwavering structure can also create levels of dysfunction for those individuals who may not fit perfectly inside the parameters of this socially constructed box. Schools in their desire to promote the institution of education as a socially constructed egalitarian organization for all individuals enforce a student code of conduct with many impending consequences for behavior deemed socially unacceptable. Through the use of this structure their goal is to create a non-disruptive and violent free environment that provides a safe and positive learning atmosphere where students can achieve academic success – recognized as the manifested function of their stated measures, standards, and policies. However their inequitable distribution of educational opportunities for minority subgroups such as special education students based on their perceived lack of conformity to the rigid social expectations for which they are often punished using the zero tolerance policy can only be described as the latent function of a policy structured as unbiased but unequally applied. As Carrier (1983) points out Western education is about more than just passing down a plethora of knowledge. It is an instrumental system for social reproduction that allocates and legitimizes access to social power. It incorporates the educational values and practices important to the dominant group that helps to shape social structure and order. Carrie (1983) states, “Americans have historically placed great faith in education as a road to social mobility” (p. 950). Operating as an institution of social control, schools play an extremely important role in socializing children and teaching them the values and norms held in high regard by those dominant groups in the upper societal hierarchies (Noguera, 2003). Many argue that promoting this type of institutional order and control will prepare children to gain better societal stature and future wealth. Unfortunately, administrators



become agents of socialization rather than educators (Noguera, 2003) and schools begin to function more like a business than a place for ascertaining knowledge and creating hopes and dreams (Cassidy & Jackson, 2005). As agents of socialization the focus is placed on instilling and demanding conformity of socially acceptable attitudes and behaviors. Formal teaching by educators has become displaced as a rigid institutionalized curriculum replaces an education enriched one where learning opportunities are vast and equitable for all students. Thus children are conditioned to follow directions without question, disciplined to do as told without protest, and labeled “good” or “bad” based on one’s willingness to adhere to the conformity highly valued by the institution. And although it is a school’s obligation to provide a respectful, inclusive, safe and ordered environment, many children experience discrimination on the basis of race, class, and disability. The environment in today’s educational institutions appears to reflect and reinforce much of the discrimination and inequalities which minority groups have faced in the past.

#### Instructor Bias

Children who display traits and behaviors that challenge the conventional norms within the educational setting often become labeled and stigmatized by those in authority. Research shows that teachers develop opinions and superficial impressions about students very early in the beginning of the academic year based on one’s dress, language, race, disability, and socioeconomic status. In a 1982 longitudinal study (Alexander, Entwisle, & Thompson, 1987) focusing on the interactions between student and teacher-status characteristics 825 first graders, 800 parents, and 50 teachers were randomly selected by racial composition and socioeconomic status in Baltimore City elementary schools and in-depth interviews were conducted. The

framework for the study was based on the theory that teachers' social origins and pupils' racial backgrounds have the most bearing on teachers' affective responses towards student situations and their perceptions and evaluations of the student. Low socioeconomic status teachers' perceptions remained constant regardless of a students' race, but it was a factor for high socioeconomic status teachers. They often perceived black students and students with low SES as lacking in "good pupil" and "receptive learner" qualities and were held to lower expectations as a result of their disadvantaged status. Becker (1952) conducted a similar study by interviewing teachers in the Chicago public school system. The purpose was to analyze the manner in which public school teachers react to cultural differences which may perpetuate the discriminatory nature of the educational system against children of the lower class. Interviews with the educators revealed that they believed they had a better chance of success when teaching the "ideal" student (middle class, socialized to conform, and a good work ethic) rather than the less desirable lower class student who lacked attention, ability to work hard, and socialization of acceptable behaviors. The differences each group of students displayed were said to have a direct impact on the educators' attitudes, perceptions, and levels of expectation. The result of the study was the gap between what one should have learned and what one did learn continues to widen because less is expected of "difficult" students (Becker, 1952). Thus implying educators who are committed to disadvantaged students, believe in their abilities, and hold higher expectations will experience greater success in helping those students attain academic achievement (Alexander et al, 1987). It becomes evident that social class impacts and influences educators' attitudes and willingness to promote educational excellence as their actions express favoritism towards those students they believe are capable and worthy.

Another study of educators' attitudes draws comparable conclusions as that of previous researchers. In this study teacher attitudes were measured using the Minnesota Teacher Attitude Inventory, and pupils were measured with the "About My Teacher" 100 item inventory. The sample consisted of 102 teachers and pupils (4<sup>th</sup> Grade N=33, 5<sup>th</sup> Grade N=36, 6<sup>th</sup> Grade N=33) from thirty two (32) public schools in middle class neighborhoods, and 110 teachers and pupils (4<sup>th</sup> Grade N=39, 5<sup>th</sup> Grade N=38, 6<sup>th</sup> Grade N=33) from eighteen (18) public schools in lower class neighborhoods located throughout cities in central Texas during the 1965-1966 school year. Results concluded that there are large differences in the attitudes of educators towards lower and middle class students. Teachers of middle class pupils were depicted as warm, trustful, and sympathetic. The opposite was true of educators for lower class students whose attitudes were characterized as cold, blame laying, and fault finding towards their students for unbecoming behaviors and lack of achievements (Yee, 1968).

### *Labels and Stigmas*

The indifference and subtle hostility displayed by many educators can gravely affect the disadvantaged minority student and likely reoccur in the future as the labels and stigmas associated with being classed as disabled and disruptive travel with the student throughout their educational journey (Cassidy et al, 2005). Once a student is labeled it becomes their new identity regardless of any behaviors or characteristics that may be attributed to the individual. Labeling theorists posit that social labeling affects an individual's self-concept and their behavior (Alexander et al, 1987; Cassidy et al, 2005; Goffman, 1963; Noguera, 2003; Stager, 1983). They begin to accept the distorted view of their person through the lens of others, most of whom are authoritative figures within the dominate group. This can often lead to the process of self-

fulfilling prophecy (Stager, 1983; Noguera, 2003) by those experiencing negative socialization from peers, and educators. Alexander, et al (1987) states, “Youngsters are singled out, stigmatized, and suffer because they along with their educators and peers begin to label themselves as losers” (p. 665). According to Link and Phelan (2001), “the process of linking labels to undesirable attributes becomes the rational for believing that negatively labeled persons are fundamentally different from those who don’t share the label” (p. 377). Essentially by attaching the label removes the responsibility from the institution to the person, holding them accountable for any behavioral issues rather than acknowledging the role educators play in the process (Cassidy et al, 2005).

In a study of student self-reports Cassidy, et al (2005) conducted a secondary analysis of data collected over an 18 month period at Whytecliff Education Centre-an independent school established to address the needs of youth with ‘troublesome’ behaviors who had been expelled or dropped out of school-located in Canada. Researchers examined students and parents self-reported experiences at their previous schools compared to the Whytecliff program. The self-reports indicated that each of the students and parents interviewed felt judged, labeled, and demeaned at their previous educational institutions, and felt they were provided little to no support or services. This was a stark difference from self-reports about their Whytecliff experience where they reported feeling welcomed, safe, understood, and capable of academic success. The difference in the two educational settings is the attitudes and perceptions of the staff. The students were treated with respect, their problems weren’t emphasized, and rather the focus was on their talents. Using these reports, they note the negative effects that labeling and the zero tolerance policy has on youth and schools as they examined the notion of the right for all

children to have a safe, ordered, and inclusive environment for learning. The study revealed that children may suffer from more than one form of discrimination, but not receive multiple levels of protection from the educational system.

These attitudes towards individuals labeled as disabled affect the individual in their relationships with their peers, the interactions with their teachers, and in their general experiences in society (Altman, 1981). Stigmatization then develops as a result of the separation between an “us” and “them” mentality creating increased unequal outcomes on the basis of negative stereotypical characteristics of human behaviors (Link et al, 2001). Goffman (1963) points out that conditions such as being disabled or possessing some handicap becomes “deeply discrediting attributes” (p. 3). He describes stigmas as bodily signs designed to expose something unusual and bad about the moral status of the signifier (p. 1). He defines them [stigma’s] as various physical deformities, character blemishes such as mentally ill, and tribal (race, religion, and nation) and notes that many individuals are affectionately labeled cripple, bastard, and moron (p. 5) by most persons in today’s society. Those not labeled with a stigma are considered by the general population to be “normal” and discriminate against those discredited into the inferior social groups often classified by their handicap. This ideology leads those self-identified as normal to perceive those they are projecting stigmas on to be “not quite human” (p. 5). In the public educational system this often times leaves students with LD & EBD vulnerable and at a greater risk than their peers for experiencing disciplinary problems (Raffaele-Mendez, Knoff, & Ferron, 2002) for displayed behaviors that may be a direct result of their inability to self regulate, and or their misinterpretation of the social cues but often lead to disciplinary actions (Christle, Nelson, & Jolivette, 2004).

### *Behaviors and Consequences*

Public educational institutions comparatively function like that of an industrial organization whose focus is on mass production. Schools operate with the expectations that all students will abide by the blanket of common rules described as the norms for behavior set forth in the rule book better known as the student code of conduct. They are expected to obey these rules and comply with those in authority in exchange for their education (Noguera, 2003). The logic behind the disciplinary process in the school system is the belief that it “serves to develop student’s character, preserve a school’s reputation, and create a safe environment” (Duke 2002 cited in Kajs, 2006, p. 17). The system then argues that consequences such as suspension and expulsion are a necessary evil (Noguera, 2003) to reduce violence and crime, maintain order, and provide a stable learning atmosphere. However, this idea of uniform behavior discounts the myriad of individualistic needs that aren’t addressed by this school of thought. Thus, in their attempt to create a school environment brimming with complete obedience under the guise of reducing school violence, and maintaining order and stability, LD & EBD labeled students become targeted for their inability to adhere to the rigid structure that is to exist. Subsequently, they become subjected to greater disciplinary action (suspension and expulsion) more frequently than their unlabeled peers.

### Zero Tolerance Policy

In response to these concerns of violence in public schools the federal government enacted the Zero Tolerance Policy in 1994 (Chen, 2008) to restore and preserve the safety of school environments. Sinclair (1996) states that, “zero tolerance refers to both the policy and the attitude toward violence and problem behaviors in public schools” (p. 4). The policy was born out of the 1994 Gun Free Schools Act (GFSA). The GFSA requires that all states receiving federal funds must have a law that requires local educational agencies to expel any student found to have brought a weapon, or be in possession of a weapon at any public school or school function for a period of not less than one year, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). Since its inception the policy has broadened its reach beyond the federal mandates (Skiba, 2000b) and now encompasses a wide range of infractions such as dress code, language, personal conduct, and classroom disruptions that have never previously been considered a threat or danger to the school environment (Dunbar & Villarruel, 2002; Skiba, 2000b; McIntire, 2002).

Although the purpose of the policy is to eradicate the potential for violence in the school setting (Skiba et al, 2001) it has contributed to a significant increase in the number of students being suspended and expelled (Skiba, 2000b) for behaviors and violations previously considered to be minor (Johnson, 2003) in the school code of conduct handbook. The handbook is often a meld of federal, state, and local laws along with the local school district’s policies and is the most common and widely used measure to inform students of what constitutes acceptable and unacceptable behaviors and the possible consequences for any infraction violation (Kajs, 2006).

The policy's design assumes that students are consciously aware of all the rules in the handbook, and function using skills of reasoning that allow them to differentiate right from wrong. However the policy lacks sensitivity towards LD and EBD individuals who have difficulty with basic social, emotional, and behavioral skills (NCLD).

### Suspensions and Expulsions

According to the Florida Department of Education's Student Data Elements ([www.fl DOE.org/eias/dataweb/database\\_0910/st99\\_1.pdf](http://www.fl DOE.org/eias/dataweb/database_0910/st99_1.pdf)), suspension and expulsion are defined as:

***Suspension** – the temporary removal of a student from all classes of instruction on public school grounds and all other school sponsored activities, except as authorized by the principal or the principal's designee, for a period not to exceed 10 school days and remanding of the student to the custody of the student's parent with specific homework assignments for the student to complete.*

***Expulsion** – is the removal of the right and obligation of a student to attend a public school under conditions set by the school board, and for a period of time not to exceed the remainder of the term or school year and 1 additional year of attendance. Expulsions may be imposed with or without continuing educational services and shall be reported accordingly.*

Dupper (1998) states, "Although school suspensions may be used as a mechanism to maintain a safe school environment, the majority of suspensions are the result of preventable minor offenses, such as infractions of rules, involving no dangerous or violent behavior" (p. 355). Many of these minor offenses such as classroom disruptions, disrespect for peers and teachers, outbursts, and inability to sit still are disciplinary problems that have continued to be a part of the educational system for decades (Bear, 1998; Bruns, et al, 2005; Dupper, 1998).



The following examples suggest that the practice of exclusion from educational opportunities for minor misconduct extends beyond the federal mandates to maintain a safe and violent free school environment.

- *In Ponchatoula Louisiana, a 12-year-old who had been diagnosed with a hyperactive disorder warned the kids in the lunch line not to eat all the potatoes, or "I'm going to get you." The student, turned in by the lunch monitor, was suspended for two days. He was then referred to police by the principal, and the police charged the boy with making "terroristic threats." He was incarcerated for two weeks while awaiting trial.*<sup>1</sup>
- *In Palm Beach, Florida, a 14-year-old disabled student was referred to the principal's office for allegedly stealing \$2 from another student. The principal referred the child to the police, where he was charged with strong-armed robbery, and held for six weeks in an adult jail for this, his first arrest. When the local media criticized the prosecutor's decision to file adult felony charges, he responded, "depicting this forcible felony, this strong-arm robbery, in terms as though it were no more than a \$2 shoplifting fosters and promotes violence in our schools."*<sup>1</sup>
- *A fifth grade student with autism was suspended. The reason - he drew a picture of the World Trade Center attack (a class assignment) and then grinned while showing it. The principal said the boy had committed "disruptive physical conduct or speech" and "communication of a threatening nature." When the principal asked the student why he did this, it is reported "...he just looked at me and smiled." The principal's letter to the parents stated "This is totally inappropriate and (the student's) behavior has to change."*<sup>2</sup>
- *Max is an 8-year-old boy who was diagnosed with ADHD and is known to have learning difficulties and emotional instability; he has an educational classification Other Health Impaired; he was adopted from Russia two years ago. He is provided with special education services in the regular education classroom.*

*Max's classroom behaviors often upset his new, first year teacher. He would often ask that directions be repeated and he needed extended time on most assignments. He*

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<sup>1</sup> Zero Tolerance Policy Report (2001). American Bar Association, Juvenile Justice Policies.  
<http://www.abanet.org/crimjust/juvjus/zerotolreport.html>

<sup>2</sup> McIntire, Jonathan C. (2002) "'No Child Left Behind' and Zero Tolerance – An Incongruity!" CEC Today, Arlington, VA, The Council for Exceptional Children, Vol. 9 No. 3, September/October 2002.

*would also become agitated and frustrated when he could not follow the teacher's instructions. One day when he was agitated a peer grabbed the work with which Max had been struggling. Max was trying to figure out how to cut out and paste a picture onto his class assignment. He was using blunt end plastic school scissors. When the classmate pulled his work away from him, Max picked up the scissors he was using in a threatening manner to the child and told him he had better watch out. The teacher sent the child to the principal's office. This was not a first visit but it was the first for violent behavior. Under mandates for "zero tolerance for violence" the principal immediately suspended the child for the rest of the school year (practically, for one month).<sup>3</sup>*

While these may be more severe and less common examples, many students are being subjected to suspension and expulsion for seemingly even lesser infractions. The issue of the use of more extreme forms of discipline in a longitudinal study conducted by Raffaele-Mendez (2003) investigated student demographics, academics, behavior, and self perceptions to uncover predictors of suspension and the effects on individual's educational achievements. The study was conducted in 150 schools located in Pinellas County, Florida and followed 8,268 students entering kindergarten in 1989 with an anticipated high school graduation date in 2002. The data set spanned an eleven (11) year period from the 2<sup>nd</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> grade and included student and teacher surveys, student standardized test scores, and suspension records. The results from the study suggest that the disciplining of children in grades K – 6<sup>th</sup> with out-of-school suspension (OSS) can predict future suspensions and have a negative effect on students overall academic performance. The data indicated that students who are suspended frequently in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade are unlikely to experience success in high school. More than two thirds of the African American males included in the study were special education students and had been suspended in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade. Even though they represented less than 5% of the total sample population they were

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<sup>3</sup> Gindis, Boris, Ph.D. (2005). Know Your Rights: Disability Manifestation Determination for Your Child. <http://www.adoptionarticlesdirectory.com/Article/Know-Your-Rights--Disability-Manifestation-Determination-for-Your-Child/416>

suspended 24-56% more often than any other group. The research suggests that the use of suspension as a disciplinary measure is more detrimental than positive as it does not address the issues of the misbehavior, nor does it deter students from misbehaving.

A similar study (Christle et al, 2004) examined the suspension rates in a sample of Kentucky public middle schools, grades 6<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> for two consecutive academic years 2000-2001, and 2001-2002 using a multi stage triangulation method. The three stage analytic process consisted of using annual reports from the Kentucky Department of Education and the Kentucky Center for School Safety to collect school demographics and outcome variables significantly related to suspensions. The suspension rate was then used to select a purposive sample of forty (40) middle schools: 20 with the highest suspension rates, and 20 with the lowest. Lastly to address the differences in school suspension rates qualitative data was collected from eight (8) of the 40 previously selected schools (4 low and 4 high suspension rated) as case samples (sample size of those surveyed, interviewed, or directly observed not provided). Researchers conducted one day school visits to examine the following school characteristics using administrator surveys, staff interviews, and direct observations:

- School policies and procedures concerned with student behaviors and discipline
- Principal's characteristics, philosophies, attitudes, and behaviors
- Staff (teachers, administrators, guidance counselors, and office personnel characteristics, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors
- Student characteristics and behaviors
- School environment
- Class room instruction

The results of this study revealed several differences in the disciplinary practices between low and high rated suspension schools. In general, principals in high suspension schools (HSS) were

less experienced than those at low suspension schools (LSS) and 63% indicated there was a need for suspension reductions. The HSS noted that they needed additional resources to address the issues of student behavioral problems, while LSS listed few if any needs. The survey results showed that individuals at the LSS locations felt their administration was very supportive (96%) compared to just 55% of those at the HSS locations. On reports of effective disciplinary measures 73% of the staff at HSS felt the current measures used were not effective, compared to only 17% of LSS staff. Overall the HSS staff seemingly held much lower expectations for minority and low SES students, compared to the LSS staff that was more supportive and encouraging of their students. It was evident that student's socioeconomic status, along with educator's attitudes and behaviors indirectly related to suspension rates in these public educational institutions.

Mukuria (2002) conducted a comparative study of principals and how they address disciplinary challenges in low and high suspension rated schools during the fall 1998-1999 school year. Sample selection was taken from 65 urban public middle schools identified as predominantly African American (55% or greater of student population) using the data from the Louisiana Bureau of School Accountability of the Department of Education. Suspension rates were then calculated using data from the 1994-1995, 1995-1996, and 1996-1997 academic years. Schools were categorized and rank ordered from low to high suspension rates. Principals from the two (2) lowest and two (2) highest rated schools were then selected as the case study sample. Researchers conducted in-depth interviews, and direct observations of the principal's daily routines for a period of 5 hours a day, for 4 days. The data collected indicated that principals in LSS both appreciated and supported their teachers and staff making sure they had ample

resources and equipment acknowledging their students and school would not be successful without the caring staff in place. Unlike principals of HSS who gave no indication that they valued or respected their educators, especially with regards to issues of necessary disciplinary actions. The principals at the LSS locations enforce the district disciplinary policies with a soft approach that allows them to the modify consequences meted out on the basis of individual circumstances and case by case analysis. The HSS principals were less malleable and implemented the district disciplinary policies with rigid conformity, discarding the need for flexibility, discretion, or a case by case approach to enforcing the stipulated disciplinary consequences.

In a triangulation study investigating school suspensions in a large and ethnically-diverse county system in west central Florida, data on out-of-school suspensions (OSS) were collected during the 1996-1997 school year from 142 general education schools located in the second largest district in the state, and twelfth largest in the U.S. Researchers used a three stage data collection method – 1) obtained routinely collected data on OSS from district’s main database, 2) an open-ended School Discipline survey was distributed to each school, and 3) collected qualitative data from administrators at the twelve locations with the highest OSS and twelve with the lowest OSS. A total of 32,544 OSS were recorded, of which the largest percentage of suspensions (20%) was for disobedience, disruptive behavior was 13%, inappropriate behavior was 11%, refusing assigned disciplinary action was 7%, and weapons/serious infractions were only 1%. The data revealed that the students with LD and EBD made up 42% of the special education population but received 51% of suspensions by all students. This study showed that although schools with higher percentages of students living in poverty tend to have more

suspension than those more economically privileged, the approach that schools take relative to student discipline is more important than demographics or backgrounds (Raffaele-Mendez et al, 2002). Bruns et al (2005) conducted a study of elementary schools (N=82) in Baltimore City public school system (BCPSS) to evaluate if schools with mental health clinicians have lower out of school suspension (OSS) rates than schools with more limited approaches to mental health. The study compared school level variables (student enrollment, percent of impoverished students, rate of school attendance, and percent of nonwhite students) by obtaining data from BCPSS Office of Suspension Services, and school demographics from Maryland State Department of Education. The sample consists of 41 schools with clinical social workers and psychologists who provide services for individual and family therapy, student assessments, and consultations for emotional and behavioral issues versus 41 schools without a clinical staff program. The results concluded that the school level variables were all predictors of OSS. However the presence of the expanded school mental health programs (ESMH) did not predict or affect the total number of OSS incidents, the average suspension length, or the rate at which suspension days were dispensed. This may have been in part to the ESMH School's lack in structure for ensuring early and constant referral of students in need of OSS intervention. As a result most students who were suspended were never referred for services or referred only after the OSS had been issued. Although the study did not show that ESMH programs have an effect on OSS rates, the results are still consistent with other studies that have found a greater number of students who experience suspension are those minority groups such as the impoverished, and learning disabled (Skiba, Peterson, Reece, & Larson 2001, Raffaele-Mendez et al. 2002).

In a study by Morrison and D’Incau (1997) they examined 158 expulsion files for the academic years of 1993-1994, and 1994-1995 in a medium sized suburban K-12 public school district (exact location unidentified) to gain more insight into the characteristics of students who are increasingly being recommended for this type of disciplinary action. The sample population consisted of 143 males and 15 females, of which 10% were from grades K-5<sup>th</sup>, 33% from grades 6<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup>, and 57% from grades 9<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup>. Thirty five students with disabilities were also included and represented 22% of the sample. The expulsion files were categorized into four groups: First Offense, Disconnected, Troubled, and Socialized Delinquent; and offenses were categorized as: 1) Weapon possession, 2) Drug Involvement, 3) Defiance, and 4) Weapon and Drug combination. The severity of the offense was coded 1-Low/accidental, 2 – Intentional but low threat, 3 – Threatening. The data analysis revealed that the majority of offenses involved weapons. This was the majority of the incidents for First Offense group, and the severity was categorized as low/accidental. The Troubled and Socialized also had a majority of infractions for possessing weapons but their severity rate was higher, and they were considered threatening. Of the thirty five students with disabilities 60% were categorized in the Troubled group. The Disconnected group had the highest rate of drug offenses, and the Socialized group had the highest rate of offenses for defiance. Of all the cases examined only 15% resulted in expulsion, and most were from the Socialized group. This group posed the most danger to school safety but only composed 31 of the 158 cases. The Disconnected group caused more trouble off campus then on, the First Offense was not continually problematic, and the Troubled group needed the most extensive social and emotional support. Morrison believes that by permanently excluding a student from school, educators are in a sense denying them a right to education as guaranteed in

Brown v. Board of Education. This brings up many concerns because refusal to educate or provide support services for these identified individuals may only exacerbate later problems of delinquency, criminality, and mental health.

Rose (1988) replicated a study originally conducted by Wu, Pink, Crain, and Moles (1982) that evaluated school disciplinary practices with handicapped learners. The study used the original data by Wu, et al. collected from the 1976 Safe Schools study. The same sample was selected for the current study and an additional 47 schools who didn't respond in the previous study were added. The school discipline survey was sent to the principals of the 371 schools from the 18 preselected states. With a response rate of 70.4%, the sample population included 261 schools, of which 253 (68.2%) had special education classes. The collected data was analyzed and the results concluded that 66.9% of the principals surveyed use in-school-suspension (ISS), 66.4% use out-of-school suspension (OSS), and 28.5% use expulsion to discipline handicap students. The survey results exposed that handicap learners were less likely to receive ISS for disruptive behavior and fighting, but more likely for disrespecting the rules and people, and endangering others. They were less likely to receive OSS for disrespect of the rules and people, and for abuse of drugs and alcohol but more likely for violating school behavior codes, endangering others, and bringing weapons to school. They were less likely to be expelled for fighting, disrespecting, weapons, or violating behavioral norms, but more likely for hitting adults/teachers, committing a felony, and abusing drugs and alcohol. Learning disabled students were more likely to be suspended than students with emotional behavioral disorders, but EBD students were more likely to be expelled (Rose, 1988). From these results it appears that



what may be needed are positive disciplinary practices, clear explanations of behaviors and their consequences, and a flexible disciplinary policy that doesn't treat the masses as one.

### Policy Implications

Those in support of the zero tolerance policy claims that establishing clear guidelines for unacceptable behaviors is necessary and that consequences should be applied equally (Cassidy et al, 2005). Sinclair (1996) states, "School discipline policies and the behavioral standards they reflect, mirror society's policy of 'being tough on crime' and stiffer punishments with minimal leniency underlies the spirit of the disciplinary practices (p. 2) within the educational system. However, Dr. Pedro Noguera of New York University has argued that "stringent disciplinary policies are adopted less for their effectiveness than their symbolic value, attempting to reassure administrators, parents, and teachers that strong actions are being taken in response to the perceived breakdown of school order" (Skiba et al 2000; Kajs, 2006).

The Hamilton Fish Institute Education Law Center commissioned a survey in 2002 of key national education stakeholder groups: teachers associations (2), school governance (school administrators, and school principals) (4), state education agencies (3), national parent teacher association (1), health service groups (psychologists, counselors, and social workers) (5), and law enforcement associations (2), to determine their position on the zero tolerance student discipline policies. Interviews were conducted with the organizations spokesperson or public relations official for thirteen of the seventeen groups who agreed to participate (parent and law enforcement groups did not respond). Of these thirteen groups interviewed four of the organizations: The American Federation of Teachers (AFT), National Education Association

(NEA), National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP), and the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) reported they actively support the policy but agree that there are problems with the way it's written and implemented. Two of the school governance organizations (American Association of School Administrators, and National School Boards Association) were reportedly the least supportive reflecting that a tough approach is necessary but the policy should be more flexible. The teachers' organizations, AFT and NEA were the most supportive of the more flexible policy believing it is necessary, and that the disciplinary consequences should be "calibrated" to the particular offense. Their general consensus was that even though the policy was flawed it doesn't undermine its value. It was their position that teachers do not rely on the policy for suspension/expulsion of students, especially those labeled LD and EBD as a means of controlling the classroom. However, the findings indicated that although there was some positive support for the zero tolerance policy it was also indicated that improvements were needed in the areas of teacher training and development so that educators could be better equipped to manage the classrooms and teach both general education and those with special needs without depending on the act of student exclusion as a method of control (Boylan and Weiser, 2002).

A qualitative study of Ontario Canada's public school system's zero tolerance policy titled The Safe School Act (SSA) of 2001 was conducted in a midsized urban center using school personnel (administrators, counselors, social workers, and teachers) in five public schools (2 high schools and 1 elementary). The study determined that much like the U.S. policy, the SSA had a detrimental impact on students, especially minority groups and students with disabilities. Many of the participants believed the SSA brought consistency to the system which they equated

with fairness, but felt that suspensions and expulsions did not deter the student's behavior that the policy was intended to discipline. The students mostly affected were LD and EBD; stating "these students have special circumstances that affect their behavior and problem solving abilities in school" (Daniel & Bondy, 2008).

Dunbar, et al (2002) performed a similar policy analysis on Michigan's zero tolerance policy to explore how it was interpreted, implemented, and enforced. The study conducted face-to-face interviews with 36 of 42 principals working in an undisclosed urban school district, and 8 out of 9 in an undisclosed rural school district in Michigan's public educational system examining the impact the policy had on administrators' duties. The districts population was approximately 53% Black and 41% White, and was selected because both the educators and community in this area raised a concern about the zero tolerance policy's impact on students. The data analysis revealed considerable differences in the urban and rural school leader's interpretation and implementation of the policy. Rural principals had a general but vague understanding of the policy, whereas the urban principals were more aware of the policy's specifics. The principals in the rural district stated they didn't believe the policy was necessary noting they had a less punitive, more positive plan in place to address any acts of violence. However, 60% of the urban principals believed the policy was very useful in eliminating the gray areas in dispensing disciplinary consequences. It seemed there were many variations of the policy throughout the district resulting in unequal disciplinary measures being utilized for similar infractions as urban principals reported they complied with the tenets of the policy but the rural principals did not, choosing instead to use discretion (Dunbar et al, 2002). Dunbar et al noted that the intended objective of the zero tolerance policy was to ensure the safety of students and

staff in public schools “however its inequitable implementation raised concerns about its judiciousness for all students” (Dunbar et al, 2002).

### Learning Disabled/Emotional Behavior Disorders

Learning disabled students are often recognized as lacking appropriate skills to understand and or handle difficult and frustrating situations (Cooley, 1995). As a result, disability, by definition, becomes a product of the labeling process which seemingly tends to reinforce the stigmatization attached to one’s limitations and incapacities (Haber & Smith, 1971). There are currently over 6.68 million American school children involved in various types of special education programs (U.S. Department Education, 2008) for learning and emotional behavioral disorders. These individuals have difficulty in acquiring the basic academic, social, emotional, and behavior skills like other children. Their inability to adapt creates a disconnect between the level of expected and actual achievement in both interpersonal and educational settings (National Center for Learning Disabilities).

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), 1997 defines a learning disability as:

*“a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations...”*(Library of Congress; National Dissemination Center).

This also applies to those who suffer from emotional behavioral disorders which include “mental health problems and focuses on behaviors that both identify and create emotional, interpersonal, and social problems for children and adolescents”, as reported by the United States Department of Health and Human Services. IDEA ’97 defines such behavior disorders as:

*“a condition exhibiting characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree which adversely affects educational performance: an inability to learn which cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors. ...An inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers (Library of Congress, Council for Exceptional Children).*

Researchers have identified that children with LD and EBD typically underperform in school compared to that of general education students (Carrier, 1983; Cooley, 1995) and are often unable to meet the expectations of the educational system (Haber et al, 1971). In so doing they [LD & EBD individuals] as a minority group are stereotyped based not only on their physical or mental deficiencies but also by the attitudes of their peers, educators, and administrators within the educational institution (Shattuck, 1946 as cited in Altman, 1981). Bender and Bolden (1988) conducted a study of 54 learning disabled students and 54 non-learning disabled students in grades 3-6 from 32 different schools in New Jersey to examine the relationship between their self-perception of behavior and teacher's perceived adaptive behavior in the classroom. The researchers used the Weller-Strawser Scales of Adaptive Behavior, a scale that incorporates 35 adaptive-behavior characteristics in the areas of social coping, relationships with peers and educators, pragmatic language, and production (p. 57) for the Learning Disabled to assess the student's behavior in the classroom. As well, each special education and mainstream teacher also completed the scale for both sets of students. Mainstream teachers also completed the Walker Problem Identification Checklist to measure five behaviors: acting out, withdrawal, distractibility, disturbed peer relations, and immaturity. Students also completed the Piers Harris Children's Self Concept Scale, an 80 item questionnaire to assess how the children felt about themselves. Both learning disabled and non-learning disabled children were aware of

their own production in the classroom, but LD children did not accurately perceive adaptive behaviors in social relationships. They were less able to identify social cues, and interact in social situations than non-LD children. The study concluded that teachers perceive learning disabled children as less adapted than non-learning disabled students, exhibit more problematic behaviors, and are less able to identify social cues and effectively interact in social situations. While these attitudes and perceptions may not always be good predictors of behaviors, they can provide a pathway for labeling and stigmatization to continue within society (Altman, 1981). Friedson (1965, p. 72-76 as cited in Haber et al, 1971) perceives behavioral deviations as being beyond one's control and including those with a disability as deviant behavior that violates societal valued norms.

## Summary

The Zero Tolerance policy was implemented into the public educational system to combat the issues of increased school violence, and restore safety and peace of mind to administrators, parents, and students. However, it tries to apply a one size fits all solution (Kajs, 2006) when disciplining students who aren't from cookie cutter molds. Research has shown that the serious infractions the policy was designed to target occur infrequently, but due to its broad interpretation many minor infractions are now more likely to be subjected to suspension or expulsion (Skiba, 2000b). "Adverse effects of discrimination can be said to occur when a law or policy has a disproportionate and harmful impact on children in a protected group" (Buckly p. 43 cited in Cassidy et al, 2005 p. 439). As a result, students with LD and EBD experience greater risk of being disciplined under the policy's guidelines by educators and administrators who label these students as difficult, or troubled.

## Research Questions

Based upon the previous review of literature the following concepts and ideas suggest the need to research the Zero Tolerance policy as it relates to the treatment of special education students with learning disabilities (LD) and emotional behavioral disorders (EBD) in public schools. Much of the previous research seems to indicate that the practice of labeling students coupled with suspension/expulsion can greatly stigmatize these individuals. Educators and administrators often choose how to apply the policy and many times students labeled as "good kids" receive less punishment than those labeled "bad kids" for the same offense (Walden,

2005). Thus, it is not surprising that special education students are overrepresented in the use of suspension and expulsion (Skiba et al, 2000).

The Zero Tolerance policy in public schools increases the likelihood students with learning disorders and emotional behavioral disorders will receive differential treatment that exposes them to greater frequencies of suspension and expulsions. According to Morrison et al, (1997), “more information is needed on the characteristics, the reasoning, the attitudes and perceptions of educators/administrators, and the proportion of the students who are labeled as LD and EBD” (p. 319).

The literature suggests the following research questions:

1. What is the rate of Zero Tolerance policy use in schools with higher proportions of special education students?
2. What is the relationship between schools with high proportions of special education students and types of disciplinary actions?
3. What is the level of training among teachers who use the Zero Tolerance Policy?



## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

### Data

Data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) School Survey on Crime and Safety for the years 1999-2000, 2003-2004, 2005-2006<sup>4</sup>, and 2007-2008 (nces.ed.gov/surveys/ssocs/) were used in this study. These were the only years for which data were collected thus far. A selection of the four sample years included a total of 10,326 cases (n=2270 in 99-00, n=2772 in 03-04, n=2724 in 05-06, n=2560 in 07-08). Originally, the SSOCS study was developed for the purpose of reporting on the issues of crime and safety within the public education system. The data are made available to the public at little to no cost in the hopes of furthering research interests, and ascertaining greater knowledge from the initial findings. The NCES study is a nationally representative cross sectional survey of principals from approximately 715 public elementary, 948 middle, 936 secondary, and 137 combined (Pre-K through 12<sup>th</sup> grade) schools to allow estimates of school crime, discipline, disorder, programs, and policies. This survey is administered to school principals every spring of even numbered school years. The findings are presented in a report in the *Crime, Violence, Discipline, and Safety in U.S. Public Schools, Findings from the School Survey on Crime and Safety* (Crime, 2007).

In 2008, Chen (2008) analyzed the above Crime and Safety data employing a crime and safety model. His focus was on the instances and interactions of criminal violations and the impact to the institution. It is important to note that neither Chen nor NCES focused on the rates

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<sup>4</sup> 2005-2006 sample some items values were imputed using a best match approach, values were taken directly from the 2003-04 SASS Frame (SSOCS 2006).

of special education students or the possible effects of differential treatment, or the rates for disciplinary action. This study will re-analyze the same data and focus on the proportions of schools with special education students' experiences of disciplinary action as they might relate to other discipline, and treatment outcomes. In approaching the analysis of the NCES Crime and Safety data, the following assumptions have been made.

There exist two choices of disciplinary actions available to the school. The two types of action are:

- Any disciplinary action labeled as 'with services' refers to treatment of special education students.
- Any disciplinary action labeled as 'without services' refers to treatment of non-special education students.

## Variables Defined

The following variables from the SSOCS data set were used to determine whether there is a relationship between school and instructor characteristics that help explain the use of certain choices of disciplinary actions.

***Special Education Students.*** Special Education student describes any individual enrolled in school who has been identified as having a disability, mental defect, hearing impairment, speech/language impairment, visual impairment, emotional disturbance, brain injury, other health impairments such as autism, specific learning disabilities, and or emotional behavioral disorders who need special education and related services and receives them under IDEA. This variable is measured as a percentage reported by the participating educational institutions.

***School Level.*** School level describes the recognized grade levels that are included in a particular educational institution. Elementary is recognized as grade Pre-K through 5<sup>th</sup> grade. Middle is recognized as grade 6 through 8. Secondary is recognized as grade 9 through 12. Combined is recognized as Pre-K through grade 12.

***School Size.*** School size is measured by the total enrollment of a school at the beginning of the school year. The data are presented as a categorical variable in the SSOCS data set with four categories in ascending order, and the data will be coded into ordinal scales representing the ascending size category in the original data set.

***Urbanicity.*** Urbanicity describes the location of the school, which is a variable that has an effect on a school's characteristics, and population. Schools in the data set were classified into four categories: city, urban fringe, town, and rural. Urbanicity is coded such that a smaller number represents a greater degree of urbanicity.

***Socioeconomic Status.*** SES was originally derived from two measures of student population: poverty and racial/ethnic composition. In this study, the poverty level in a school is measured by the percentage of students eligible for free or reduced price lunches. The racial/ethnic composition is measured by school percentage of minority students. These two variables normally reflect the construct of student SES. However, for this data set free/reduced lunch<sup>5</sup> data was available for only one year and could not be used. Consequently only the variable percentage of minority students was used as the measure of SES.

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<sup>5</sup> Hypothesis 3-Low SES schools report greater number of suspensions/expulsions with services than schools identified as medium/high SES was introduced in original proposal, but was unable to be tested due to lack of data in subsequent years.

**Limited English Proficiency.** Limited English Proficiency refers to a student whose primary language is not English, and whose level of English proficiency is insufficient to support academic learning in a regular classroom where English is the language of instruction. This variable is measured as a percentage reported by the participating educational institutions.

**Instructor Training.** Instructor Training describes the training educators may or may not have received that may directly affect their response to student's behaviors and result in the use of disciplinary actions. These characteristics are: Classroom Management training; Discipline Policy training; Safety training; and Violent Behavior training. This variable reflects the school's level of training provided to educators and can directly impact the type of consequences students receive for behaviors requiring disciplinary action.

**School Prevention Programs.** School Prevention program describes the formal programs intended to prevent or reduce violence that may be implemented in the school. These programs are: Prevention Training (social skills, curriculum/instruction/training for students; Behavioral/behavior modification intervention; Counseling (social work, psychological, or therapeutic activity for students); Mentoring (individual mentoring/tutoring/coaching of students); Enrichment (recreational, leisure activities for students); Conflict Resolution (resolution/peer mediation for students); Community Integration (social integration programs); Hotline (students to report problems). These programs can have an effect on the behaviors of the students, the infractions reported, and the resulting disciplinary actions that may be taken.

**Disruptive Behaviors.** Behaviors reflect the existence or occurrence of each of the following within the school and taking place within the classroom. The occurrence of the following student discipline problems are considered disruptive: Bullying, Verbal Abuse, and Classroom Disruptions.

**Disciplinary Actions.** Disciplinary actions are measured by the number of times a school penalizes its students with Suspensions (ISS-in school, OSS-out of school) with or without continuing school services, Expulsions with or without continuing school services, Corporal Punishment, School Probation, and Detention/Saturday School for reasons including bullying, verbal abuse, and classroom disruptions. The school's disciplinary action variable reflects the extent to which schools use punitive measures in response to school disciplinary problems.

## Operational Definitions

### Independent Variables

The independent variables in this study include those measures that are predicted to influence the types of disciplinary action potentially taken against those who display certain kinds of disruptive behaviors. They are: school level, school size, urbanicity, socioeconomic status, limited English proficiency, special education students, instructor training, and school prevention programs. The specific measurements that were used for the individual variables are presented below. Attributes for the variable, School level, were coded as (1) Elementary, (2) Middle, (3) Secondary, and (4) Combined<sup>6</sup>. School size was determined by the response to the question, “As of October 1, what was the total enrollment at your school?” Responses were numeric and recoded into (1) is less than 300, (2) equals 300 to 499, (3) equals 500 to 999, and (4) equals 1,000 or more for ease of data management. The urbanicity of each educational institution was determined by its physical location. Each school location was classified into the following categories: (1) City, (2) Urban Fringe, (3) Town, and (4) Rural. The socioeconomic status of each institution was based upon the percent minority students enrolled at a school.

Answers to the question: “What percentage of your current students is Limited English Proficient?” were numeric, and recoded into (1) is less than or equal to 20%, (2) is 21 to 50%, and (3) is 51% or more for ease of data management. To determine the number of special education students enrolled at a school respondents were asked “What percentage of your current students are special education students?” The answer responses were numeric, and recoded into (1) less than or equal to 10%, (2) 11-20%, (3) 21-30%, (4) 31-40%, (5) 41-50%, and (6) 51% or more. Instructor characteristics describe the specific training that teachers may or may not have

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<sup>6</sup> Combined school level refers to educational institutions that are Pre-K through 12<sup>th</sup> grade

received and is determined by asking the question, “During the school year, which of the following trainings for classroom teachers did your school or district provide (select all that apply)?” The answer choices are Classroom management 1=yes 2=no, Discipline policies and practices 1=yes 2=no, Safety procedures 1=yes 2=no, and Violent behavior signs 1=yes 2=no. School prevention programs are intended to prevent/reduce violence at schools. The question used to determine if a range of programs exist is “During the school year did your school have any formal programs intended to prevent or reduce violence that included the following?” Prevention (social skills training) 1=yes 2=no, Behavior modification 1=yes 2=no, Counseling 1=yes 2=no, Mentoring 1=yes 2=no, Enrichment 1=yes 2=no, Conflict resolution 1=yes 2=no, Community integration (social interactions for greater good of community) 1=yes 2=no, and Hotline (students can report problems) 1=yes 2=no. For analytical purposes the value assigned to ‘no’ responses were recoded into 0.

### Dependent Variables

The hypothesized dependent variables in this study are disruptive behaviors and disciplinary action. Disruptive behaviors consisted of bullying, verbal abuse, and classroom disruptions. This variable was measured by the question, “How often did the following types of problems occur at your school?” Respondents were to choose one category for each of the following: Student bullying, verbal abuse of teachers, and classroom disruptions. The scale measured the frequency with which behaviors occurred— 1=Never, 2=Occasionally, 3=Monthly, 4=Weekly, and 5=Daily. A summary measure of this variable was also computed resulting in a range of 3 to 15, so that they can be measured by the greater the frequency different behaviors occurred, the higher the numeric value in the scale.

Disciplinary actions also were proposed as one of the dependent variables in this study. Principals were asked to provide some information about the types of disciplinary actions available and used at their school location during the school year. They were asked, “During the school year did your school allow for the use of the following disciplinary actions? If yes, were the actions used this year?” Measures of response were 1=Used/Available 0=Not Used/Available for the following categories. For analytical purposes the value assigned to ‘no’ responses were recoded into 0. The values for this variable were also summed yielding a range of 0 to 11. The sum of the values were such that the greater the numeric value of the range the greater or more severe the disciplinary action taken.

- a) Detention/Saturday school
- b) School probation – threatened consequences if another incident occurs
- c) Corporal Punishment
- d) In school suspension – (with school services) provided for less than remainder of year
- e) In school suspension – (no services) provided for less than remainder of year
- f) Out of school suspension – removal (with school services) for less than remainder of year
- g) Out of school suspension – removal (no school services) for less than remainder of year
- h) Expulsion – removal to regular school (no services)
- i) Expulsion – removal to specialized school (with school services)
- j) Expulsion –removal with Tutoring/at-home instruction (with school services) for remainder of year
- k) Expulsion – removal (no school services) for at least remainder of school year

This study is based upon the social situation wherein Zero Tolerance Policy had been established by schools systems around the country, and serves as a background to better understand the variety of initiatives that schools developed to address behavioral problems and violence in schools. Within this context and based upon the previous literature review the following hypotheses were developed.

### Hypotheses:

1. Schools with higher proportions of special education students report greater frequencies of infractions than schools with lower proportions of special education students.
2. Schools without school prevention programs (formal programs intended to prevent or reduce violence) report greater proportions of suspensions/expulsions than school with prevention programs.
3. Low SES schools report greater number of suspensions/expulsions with services than schools identified as medium/high SES.<sup>7</sup>
4. Schools with a greater proportion of minority students report a greater number of infractions than schools with low proportion of minority students.
5. Schools reporting no teacher training have more reports of infractions requiring disciplinary actions than schools reporting more teacher training.
6. Schools reporting no teacher training in classroom management report a greater number of infractions than schools with more teacher training in classroom management.

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<sup>7</sup> Hypothesis 3 was unable to be evaluated due to lack of information in the data set.



### Analytic Strategy

As indicated previously, secondary analysis was performed upon data that were originally gathered by the School Survey on Crime and Safety, which was conducted by the National Center of Education Statistics. Babbie (2007) argues that secondary analysis of existing data with a different approach than was originally used can be a very valuable research method. Such analysis can also greatly reduce the costs typically incurred with research. For research purposes in this study, since the data were collected from school representatives throughout the United States the unit of analysis is the School. The statistical software package, SPSS<sup>8</sup> was used to analyze the data. Initial descriptive analysis was conducted and is reported by year and school level. To test the relationship between the independent and dependent variables, multiple regression analyses also were performed.

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<sup>8</sup> SPSS – IBM Statistical Package for Social Sciences version 19

## CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

### Sample Description

Distributions of the different variables from the SSOC data set are presented in Tables 1 through 5. They are organized according to level of school and year. Frequency distributions for the demographic characteristics of the educational institutions by school level and year are presented in Table 1. The percent of elementary schools in the study for years 1999 thru 2008 ranged from 24.1 to 26.2, middle schools ranged from 32.8 to 35, secondary (high schools) ranged from 33.8 to 36.6, and combined (Pre-K-12) ranged from 4.3 to 8. The proportion of schools in the study at the elementary, middle, and secondary levels were found to be divided at approximately one-third for each level, with a slightly lower percentage for elementary schools in the final sample. The proportion of schools (elementary through high school) located within the city/urban fringe locale is approximately 60-70 percent, versus those schools located within town/rural locale at approximately 30-40 percent. Most notably, the majority of combined (K-12) schools (63%) were located in rural areas.

The average enrollment size of elementary and middle schools totaling 40-50% of sample was 500-999 students, and secondary schools on average of 50-60% of sample had enrollment size of 1,000 or more students. The majority (over 50%) of elementary schools had less than 10 percent of a student population labeled as special education students. Over 50 percent of middle schools reported 11-20% of student population as special education students, and 40-50 percent of secondary schools reported that 11-20% of their student population was identified as special education students. Elementary and Middle schools reported an overall increase in minority

student enrollment from school years 1999 – 2008. Secondary schools experienced a spike in minority student enrollment from 26 percent in 1999 to 30 percent in 2008 for the school with 6-20% minority population, and with a comparable rate of approximately 25 percent for those with 51% or more minority student category.

For all school levels across all years 1999 – 2008 the majority (80-90%) of limited English proficient students enrolled were less than 20 percent. Even though the question existed on the survey questionnaire, there are no reported data for students on free/reduced lunch for years 2003-2004, 2005-2006, and 2007-2008. Because it was excluded from the SSOCS public-use data file after 1999-2000, this variable will not be used in the analysis. However, for 1999-2000, 25% of elementary schools reported that less than 20% of students received free/reduced lunch<sup>9</sup>, while 44 percent of elementary schools reported that more than 51% of their student population received free/reduced lunch.

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<sup>9</sup> Free/Reduced Lunch is not used in any further analysis

**Table 1: 1999 – 2008 Frequency Distribution of Institutional Demographics by School Level and Year.**

	1999-2000				2003-2004				2005-2006				2007-2008			
	ELEM (N=577) 25.4%	MID (N=744) 32.8%	HIGH (N=768) 33.8%	COMBO (N=181) 8%	ELEM (N=715) 26.2%	MID (N=948) 34.8%	HIGH (N=924) 33.9%	COMBO (N=137) 5.0%	ELEM (N=715) 26.2%	MID (N=948) 34.8%	HIGH (N=924) 33.9%	COMBO (N=137) 5.0%	ELEM (N=618) 24.1%	MID (N=897) 35%	HIGH (N=936) 36.6%	COMBO (N=109) 4.3%
<b>TITLE<sup>10</sup></b>																
Principal	80.5	72.6	56.3	78.2	87.1	81.9	71.7	70.3	87.1	81.9	71.7	70.3	84.0	78.6	63.6	77.5
Vice-Principal or Disciplinarian	11.4	22.5	36.3	12.3	6.4	14.0	23.3	14.1	6.4	14.0	23.3	14.1	8.7	16.9	29.9	12.7
Counselor	0.7	0.9	.5	1.7	6.5	4.1	5.1	15.6	6.5	4.1	5.1	15.6	7.3	4.6	6.5	9.8
Other	7.4	3.9	6.9	7.8	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----
<b>LOCATION</b>																
City	<b>28.6</b>	24.9	21.6	6.1	31.6	<b>23.4</b>	25.0	13.1	31.6	23.4	<b>25.0</b>	13.1	29.4	25.2	26.9	17.4
Urban Fringe	<b>35.5</b>	35.9	39.2	12.2	39.6	<b>42.3</b>	37.3	12.4	39.6	42.3	<b>37.3</b>	12.4	33.2	34.9	30.4	10.1
Town	10.2	17.6	14.7	13.8	8.1	11.6	11.3	6.6	8.1	11.6	11.3	6.6	12.6	17.1	15.9	9.2
Rural	25.6	21.6	24.5	<b>68.0</b>	20.7	22.7	26.4	<b>67.9</b>	20.7	22.7	26.4	67.9	24.8	22.9	26.7	<b>63.3</b>
<b>SCHOOL SIZE</b>																
Less than 300	18.7	11	7.2	32.0	16.9	11.3	8.9	34.3	16.9	11.3	8.9	34.3	16.8	9.3	6.5	33.9
300 TO 499	32.4	<b>19.9</b>	11.6	28.7	<b>34.3</b>	16.9	7.9	25.5	34.3	16.9	7.9	25.5	32.5	<b>18.5</b>	10.3	21.1
500 TO 999	43.7	<b>53.1</b>	25.8	28.7	44.6	49.9	23.1	26.3	44.6	49.9	23.1	26.3	<b>46.4</b>	52.3	21.8	29.4
1,000 or more	5.2	16	55.5	10.5	4.2	21.9	60.2	13.9	4.2	21.9	60.2	13.9	4.2	20.0	<b>61.4</b>	15.6

<sup>10</sup> Title is not used in further analysis.

	1999-2000				2003-2004				2005-2006				2007-2008			
	ELEM (N=577) 25.4%	MID (N=744) 32.8%	HIGH (N=768) 33.8%	COMBO (N=181) 8%	ELEM (N=715) 26.2%	MID (N=948) 34.8%	HIGH (N=924) 33.9%	COMBO (N=137) 5.0%	ELEM (N=715) 26.2%	MID (N=948) 34.8%	HIGH (N=924) 33.9%	COMBO (N=137) 5.0%	ELEM (N=618) 24.1%	MID (N=897) 35%	HIGH (N=936) 36.6%	COMBO (N=109) 4.3%
<b>SPECIAL EDUC. STUDENTS</b>																
less than or equal to 10%	57.9	40.1	53.0	50.8	51.0	33.2	38.9	40.9	51.0	33.2	38.9	40.9	47.9	37.7	37.2	36.7
11-20%	33.4	50.5	40.9	41.4	38.6	<b>54.1</b>	50.3	40.9	38.6	54.1	50.3	40.9	<b>40.9</b>	52.7	<b>52.1</b>	40.4
21-30%	6.1	7.1	4.7	4.4	7.6	8.6	7.6	14.6	7.6	8.6	7.6	14.6	8.6	7.1	8.8	16.5
31-40%	1.6	1.3	1.0	1.7	2.0	2.4	1.9	2.2	2.0	2.4	1.9	2.2	1.6	1.3	1.2	4.6
41% or more	1	0.9	.3	1.7	.8	2.3	1.3	1.5	.8	1.6	1.3	1.5	1.0	1.1	.7	1.8
<b>MINORITY PERCENT</b>																
0-5%	26.1	25.5	29.3	54.2	14.7	15.4	17.6	32.8	15.0	15.8	18.3	34.4	12.3	11.9	14.1	34.9
6 to 20%	22.3	25.8	26.1	19.2	23.4	26.8	29.8	24.1	23.8	27.5	30.8	25.2	25.2	27.4	29.9	22.9
21 to 50%	19.6	23.9	<b>22.7</b>	13.6	22.9	25.5	24.1	23.4	23.4	26.2	25.0	24.4	<b>24.8</b>	<b>27.0</b>	25.5	20.2
more than 51%	31.9	24.8	21.9	13.0	37.2	29.6	25.0	15.3	<b>37.9</b>	30.4	25.9	16.0	37.7	<b>33.7</b>	<b>30.4</b>	22.0
<b>LIMITED ENGLISH</b>																
less than or equal to 20%	82.8	82.8	95.2	96.1	57.1	86.5	91.7	87.1	74.3	86.5	91.7	87.1	72.9	85.3	88.2	98.1
21 to 50%	11.1	11.1	3.8	2.8	13.1	11.0	6.5	8.1	17.1	11.0	6.5	8.1	<b>19.0</b>	<b>11.4</b>	<b>10.3</b>	1.9
51% or more	6.2	<b>6.1</b>	1.0	1.1	6.6	2.5	<b>1.9</b>	4.8	<b>8.6</b>	2.5	1.9	4.8	8.2	3.3	1.5	----
<b>FREE LUNCH</b>																
less than or equal to 20%	25	25.0	46.0	27.1	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----
21 to 50%	31.2	31.2	38.0	40.9	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----
51% or more	43.8	43.8	16.0	32.0	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----

### Instructor Training

Table 2 presents a comparison of the frequencies of the independent school demographic variables measuring instructor training, and school prevention programs by school level and year. The percent of elementary schools whose educators received training in classroom management was 68% in 1999-2000, increased to 82% in 2003-2004 and 2005-2006, and slightly decreased in 2007-2008 to only 79%. Middle and high schools reported classroom management training at 80% in 2003-2004 and held constant in years 2005-2008. Training in the school's discipline policy was reported at 90% for elementary schools in 1999-2000 but 20-30% decreased from 2003 to 2008. Both middle and high schools reported similar training trends with 90% in 1999-2000 but training in middle schools decreased at a rate of 30% and 15% for high schools for years 2003 to 2008. Educator training in safety procedures was reported at a dismal 30-40% for all school levels in 1999-2000 and experienced a stark increase of 55-60% per year from 2003 – 2008. Training in detecting signs of violent behavior were reported 35-40% for all school levels in 1999-2000 and only increased slightly to near 50% during years 2003-2008.

### School Prevention Programs

Reported use of school prevention programs in conflict resolution for elementary schools was approximately 60% for years 1999-2006, and decreased to less than 50% during the 2007-2008 school year. In looking across all reporting years and school levels, the following types of prevention programs were used in approximately the same proportions: Community integration (70-80%), Enrichment programs (70-85%), Prevention training showed a wider range of variability with a reported rate of 75-90% in 1999-2006 for all school levels, and for the years 2007-2008 prevention training was in the mid-range of 80-88%. The rate of behavior

modification, counseling, and mentoring programs were each reported 80-95% for all school levels and for all data years. However, use of hotline programs was lowest for elementary schools (20-25%) across all years, which could be explained by the young age of the students, and or the level of supervision by educators that may negate the need for this particular program. Middle schools reported a slightly higher rate of approximately 40% for years 1999-2006, but dropped to 24% in 2008. Use of hotline programs was highest in high schools with 59% in year 1999-2000 but steadily declined to a mere 31% in 2007-2008.

**Table 2: 1999 – 2008 Frequency Distribution of Independent Variables by School Level and Year.**

	1999-2000				2003-2004				2005-2006				2007-2008			
	ELEM (N=577) 25.4%	MID (N=744) 32.8%	HIGH (N=768) 33.8%	COMBO (N=181) 8%	ELEM (N=715) 26.2%	MID (N=948) 34.8%	HIGH (N=924) 33.9%	COMBO (N=137) 5.0%	ELEM (N=715) 26.2%	MID (N=948) 34.8%	HIGH (N=924) 33.9%	COMBO (N=137) 5.0%	ELEM (N=618) 24.1%	MID (N=897) 35%	HIGH (N=936) 36.6%	COMBO (N=109) 4.3%
<b>Instructor Training</b>																
Classroom Mgmt.	68.3	70.0	68.1	58.9	81.8	81.2	80.6	81.8	81.8	81.2	80.6	81.8	78.6	80.7	79.5	87.1
Discipline Policy	<b>89.6</b>	<b>92.7</b>	<b>91.7</b>	<b>88.3</b>	<b>71.0</b>	<b>62.2</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>75.9</b>	<b>71.0</b>	<b>62.2</b>	<b>75.0</b>	<b>75.9</b>	<b>61.4</b>	<b>64.8</b>	<b>70.9</b>	<b>75.2</b>
Safety Procedures	30.5	34.7	37.9	26.7	91.3	92.4	91.2	89.8	91.3	92.4	91.2	89.8	81.4	90.7	91.2	92.3
Violent Behavior Training	35.4	39.1	43.8	31.5	49.4	54.0	56.8	54.0	49.4	54.0	56.8	54.0	48.1	46.7	47.9	55.0
<b>Prevention Programs</b>																
Prevention Training	<b>92.9</b>	89.4	78.5	83.0	90.6	88.7	74.8	80.3	90.6	88.7	74.8	80.3	84.6	87.7	85.0	80.7
Behavior Modification	<b>92.9</b>	90.7	85.6	<b>82.1</b>	<b>94.1</b>	90.5	81.4	83.2	<b>94.1</b>	90.5	81.4	83.2	84.6	90.3	91.6	90.2
Counseling	<b>92.2</b>	<b>94.6</b>	<b>88.2</b>	81.1	92.2	<b>95.7</b>	92.0	83.9	92.2	95.7	92.0	83.9	<b>84.9</b>	<b>94.9</b>	<b>95.5</b>	94.9
Mentoring	88.6	89.7	86.5	80.0	92.9	92.4	89.1	<b>84.7</b>	92.9	92.4	89.1	84.7	<b>84.9</b>	90.3	92.5	93.6
Enrichment	72.1	81.4	74.0	65.1	83.8	88.1	84.1	83.2	83.8	88.1	84.1	83.2	80.7	84.2	86.6	84.8
Conflict Resolution	60.0	69.4	70.1	58.5	57.2	60.5	57.0	48.2	57.2	60.5	57.0	48.2	47.0	52.3	55.5	65.2
Community Integration	80.0	77.1	75.0	71.7	80.7	81.0	77.5	75.2	80.7	81.0	77.5	75.2	72.3	80.2	81.1	63.8
Hotline	22.1	41.7	58.6	36.8	19.6	38.2	47.4	38.7	19.6	38.2	47.4	38.7	22.8	23.7	31.5	51.3



### *Prevention Measures*

In addition to considering the specific prevention programs that are used in schools, Table 3 provides a summary measure of the total number of school prevention programs measured. It was created by summing the total number of types of prevention programs a school may have implemented for its faculty and students. Slightly more than 50% of the schools reported using between 6 and 7 types of prevention measures. Closer examination reveals that fewer high schools (16.8-26.4%) reported using 6-7 measures for all reporting years except for 2007-2008 (27.2-30.4%). Both elementary and middle schools report a slight decrease in the percentage of schools reporting use of 6-7 measures in years 2003-2006 (21.5-23.1%) from 1999-2000 (25.1-32.6%), but experience a slight increase again in the year 2007-2008 (25.6-30.5%). Nearly 20% of elementary schools report that nearly 20% were using 5 measures in year 1999-2000 with a slight decrease in the percentage reported in 2003-2008 to 15%. Both middle and high schools report that only 11-16% use 5 measures for all reporting years. All school levels report that only 3-7% use 2-3 measures for all reporting years. Schools with only 1 measure constitute approximately 20-25% of all reports except for year 2007-2008 when they decreased slightly (18%). The number of prevention measures for high schools varied the most in extremes for all years. That is, while one-fourth of schools report using 7 measures, the next highest frequency of measures reported being used by high schools was only 1 measure.

**Table 3. 1999 – 2008 Frequency Distribution of School Prevention Measures by School Level and Year.**

	1999-2000				2003-2004				2005-2006				2007-2008			
	ELEM (N=577) 25.4%	MID (N=744) 32.8%	HIGH (N=768) 33.8%	COMBO (N=181) 8%	ELEM (N=715) 26.2%	MID (N=948) 34.8%	HIGH (N=924) 33.9%	COMBO (N=137) 5.0%	ELEM (N=715) 26.2%	MID (N=948) 34.8%	HIGH (N=924) 33.9%	COMBO (N=137) 5.0%	ELEM (N=618) 24.1%	MID (N=897) 35%	HIGH (N=936) 36.6%	COMBO (N=109) 4.3%
<b>Number Prevention Measures</b>																
No Measures	0.5	----	0.2	----	0.8	0.6	1.1	2.9	0.8	0.6	1.1	2.9	2.1	0.6	0.5	0.9
1 Measure	11.6	21.2	28.3	15.2	13.4	22.5	26.5	20.4	13.4	22.5	26.5	20.4	13.3	13.8	18.5	28.4
2 Measures	2.4	2.5	5	8.6	1.5	1.6	3.1	3.6	1.5	1.6	3.1	3.6	5.3	1.9	1.6	1.8
3 Measures	1.9	2.4	3.3	3.8	3.4	2.3	4.1	5.1	3.4	2.3	4.1	5.1	3.9	3.1	2	1.4
4 Measures	6.6	5.8	6.6	11.4	5.6	5.1	8.5	3.6	5.6	5.1	8.5	3.6	7	6.4	5.3	5.5
5 Measures	19.4	11.2	14.2	13.3	14.1	11.2	13.3	17.5	14.1	11.2	13.3	17.5	15.8	15.8	14.3	10.3
6 Measures	<b>25.1</b>	<b>25.8</b>	<b>18.2</b>	<b>22.9</b>	<b>23.1</b>	<b>21.5</b>	<b>16.9</b>	<b>16.8</b>	<b>23.1</b>	<b>21.5</b>	<b>16.9</b>	<b>16.8</b>	<b>25.6</b>	<b>30.5</b>	<b>30.4</b>	<b>27.5</b>
7 Measures	<b>32.6</b>	<b>31.3</b>	<b>24.3</b>	<b>24.8</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>35.2</b>	<b>26.4</b>	<b>29.9</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>35.2</b>	<b>26.4</b>	<b>29.9</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>27.2</b>	<b>24.3</b>
8 Measures	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----

### Disruptive Behaviors

The examination of reports of disruptive behaviors is important to consider in order to better understand what types of behavior are considered problematic and potentially worthy of future action. Frequency distributions for disruptive behaviors by school level and year are presented in Table 4. The “occasionally” response seemed to be most frequently reported for all types of disruptive behaviors for all grade levels across all time periods. The pattern of response for bullying in middle schools was “occasionally” and “weekly” for year 1999-2006 when the pattern changed to “occasionally” and “monthly” for 2007-2008. Elementary schools reported “occasionally” and “monthly” for years 1999-2000, and 2007-2008 but the response pattern changed to “occasionally” and “weekly” for years 2003-2006. High schools consistently reported “occasionally” and “monthly” for all years.

Elementary schools reported verbal abuse “occasionally” and “never” for all years 1999-2008. Middle schools reported “occasionally” and “weekly” for 1999-2000, “occasionally” and “monthly” for 2003-2003, and “occasionally” and “never” for 2007-2008. High schools reported “occasionally” and “monthly” for years 1999-2006, and “occasionally” and “never” in 2007-2008.

For classroom disruptions, Elementary schools most frequently reported “occasionally” and “never” for all years 1999-2008. The response pattern for middle schools was “occasionally” and “weekly” for years 1999-2000 and 2003-2004, changing to “occasionally” and “monthly” for 2005-2006, and changed again to “occasionally” and “never” for 2007-2008. High schools most frequently reported “occasionally” and “weekly” for all years except 2007-2008 when the pattern changed to “occasionally” and “never”.

**Table 4: 1999 – 2008 Frequency Distribution of Disruptive Behaviors by School Level and Year.**

	1999-2000				2003-2004				2005-2006				2007-2008			
	ELEM (N=577) 25.4%	MID (N=744) 32.8%	HIGH (N=768) 33.8%	COMBO (N=181) 8%	ELEM (N=715) 26.2%	MID (N=948) 34.8%	HIGH (N=924) 33.9%	COMBO (N=137) 5.0%	ELEM (N=715) 26.2%	MID (N=948) 34.8%	HIGH (N=924) 33.9%	COMBO (N=137) 5.0%	ELEM (N=618) 24.1%	MID (N=897) 35%	HIGH (N=936) 36.6%	COMBO (N=109) 4.3%
<b>Disruptive Behavior</b>																
<b>Bullying</b>																
Never	3.1	1.3	1.6	3.9	2.1	0.7	1.1	2.9	2.1	0.7	1.1	2.9	5.6	2.1	0.6	1
<b>Occasionally</b>	<b>53.0</b>	<b>32.1</b>	<b>47.9</b>	<b>48.6</b>	<b>60.8</b>	<b>30.8</b>	<b>54.0</b>	<b>59.9</b>	<b>60.8</b>	<b>30.8</b>	<b>54.0</b>	<b>59.9</b>	<b>54.7</b>	<b>52.3</b>	<b>41.2</b>	<b>46.2</b>
Monthly	17.3	22	23.8	20.4	16.1	24.4	21.3	21.2	6.1	24.4	21.3	21.2	18.6	21.8	22	21.3
Weekly	17.3	27	17.8	16.6	16.4	29.7	15.5	11.7	6.4	29.7	15.5	11.7	14.4	16	22	20.2
Daily	9.2	17.5	8.9	10.5	4.6	14.3	8.1	4.4	4.6	14.3	8.1	4.4	6.7	7.8	14.2	11.3
<b>Verbal Abuse</b>																
Never	28.4	11.3	4.7	13.3	35.9	12.2	4.9	21.9	35.9	12.2	4.9	21.9	36.8	31.3	20.8	6.4
<b>Occasionally</b>	<b>54.9</b>	<b>51.5</b>	<b>54.8</b>	<b>58.6</b>	<b>52.3</b>	<b>56.8</b>	<b>56.7</b>	<b>59.1</b>	<b>52.3</b>	<b>56.8</b>	<b>56.7</b>	<b>59.1</b>	<b>53.0</b>	<b>57.2</b>	<b>61.7</b>	<b>62.4</b>
Monthly	7.6	14.1	20.6	13.8	5.7	14.1	18.8	13.1	5.7	14.1	18.8	13.1	4.9	6.6	9.3	15.2
Weekly	7.5	18.1	15.4	12.2	5.0	12.4	14.9	3.6	5.0	12.4	14.9	3.6	3.2	4.3	5.7	11.9
Daily	1.6	5	4.6	2.2	1.0	4.4	4.7	2.2	1.0	4.4	4.7	2.2	2.1	0.6	2.5	4.1
<b>Classroom Disruptions</b>																
Never	10.7	3.9	1.7	3.9	12.0	2.4	1.8	4.4	12.0	2.4	1.8	4.4	30.5	25.3	20.8	11.2
<b>Occasionally</b>	<b>64.6</b>	<b>46.8</b>	<b>48.2</b>	<b>56.9</b>	<b>65.3</b>	<b>49.8</b>	<b>48.6</b>	<b>65.0</b>	<b>65.3</b>	<b>49.8</b>	<b>48.6</b>	<b>65.0</b>	<b>53.3</b>	<b>53.3</b>	<b>51.4</b>	<b>50.2</b>
Monthly	10.2	17.9	18.9	13.8	9.9	16.1	6.8	14.6	9.9	16.1	6.8	14.6	10.2	10.5	13.1	14.8
Weekly	10.2	20.7	20.7	17..7	9.4	20.0	21.9	10.9	9.4	20.0	21.9	10.9	3.9	7.6	10.2	16.1
Daily	4.2	10.8	10.5	7.7	3.4	4.4	10.9	5.1	3.4	4.4	10.9	5.1	2.1	3.3	4.5	7.8

## Disciplinary Actions

### *Elementary Schools*

Based upon the above possible and frequency of reports of disruptive behaviors, the analysis turns to considering how institutions reported responding to their occurrence. The frequency distribution of reports of disciplinary actions taken by school level and year are presented in Table 5. Eighty-four percent of elementary schools reported routinely using Detention – Saturday school as a disciplinary action across all years, with a slightly elevated rate (93%) in year 2007-2008. They also reported a significant number (75-80%) that doled out the consequence of In School Suspension (ISS) with services compared to only 40% that used ISS without services. More than 50% in year 1999-2000 reported the use of corporal punishment and steadily increased to 76 percent by year 2007-2008. On average, 50% of elementary institutions reported the use of Out of School Suspension (OSS) with services for all data years, compared to 39% of OSS without services for 1999-2000, with a sharp increase to 70 percent by year 2003-2004 and 2005-2006, tapering off at 66% for year 2007-2008. More elementary schools reported the use of expulsion – transfer to special school (30-40%) consistently than expulsion – transfer to regular school (20-30%) across all data years. Few elementary schools resorted to expulsion with no services (7%) in all years except for 2007-2008 when a dramatic increase of 13% was reported. Comparatively, only 17 percent of elementary schools reported the use of expulsion – tutoring with services, dropping to 10% for years 2003-2006, and up by 11% to 21 % of schools using this type disciplinary action in 2007-2008.

### *Middle Schools*

Across all data years, approximately 95% of middle schools reported using the disciplinary action, Detention – Saturday school. The disciplinary action ISS with services was reportedly used by 94% of the middle schools from 1999 – 2008. Over 90 percent of the middle schools utilized school probation except for year 2007-2008 which reported a decrease of 15%. OSS with services use was reported by 70-80 percent of all middle schools across all data years. This finding appears to support the research by Raffaele-Mendez (2003) that found that the use of OSS as a disciplinary action in elementary and middle schools can negatively affect their academics by removing them from the learning environment. On average, 72 percent of the middle schools reported using Expulsion – transfer to special school during years 1999 – 2006, and only 48% of those schools reported use for 2007 – 2008. Roughly 54% used OSS without services between years 1999 – 2006, with a drop to only 32 percent in 07-08. Approximately 67% of the middle school from years 1999 -2008 reported using corporal punishment as a disciplinary action. Comparatively, only 50-60% of the schools reported the use of ISS without services and only 48% used expulsion – transfer to regular school from 1999 – 2008. Nearly 60% reported the use of expulsion – tutoring with services in 1999 – 2000, decreasing to 24% in 2007-2008. The least reported use by middle schools was expulsion – without services at 34% in 1999 – 2000, decreased to 26% in year 2007 – 2008.

### *High Schools*

High school institutions reported that nearly 98% used the disciplinary action, Detention – Saturday school. School probation and ISS with services were reportedly used by 95% of high schools during the years 1999 -2006, but school probation use dropped to 88%, and ISS with

services remained constant at 93% for year 2007-2008. Approximately 85% of the high schools reported use of OSS with services during 1999 -2006 school years, compared to 75% who used OSS without services climbing to 97% for 2003-2006. High schools indicated that 85 percent used the disciplinary action expulsion – transfer special school in 1999-2000 with a steady decline to 60% in 2007 – 2008. They indicated the use of ISS without services at 65% with a slight increase to 59% in 2007-2008. The disciplinary action expulsion – tutoring with services experienced a use by 73 percent of high schools in 1999 – 2000, decreasing to only 44% in year 2007-2008. Expulsion – transfer regular school lagged behind at 61% for year 1999-2000 experiencing an increase to 73% in 2003-2006. High schools that reported use of expulsion – without services were 57 percent in 99-00 decreasing to 34% in 2007-2008. The least used disciplinary action for high schools was corporal punishment at 40% in 1999-2000 but steadily increased to 73% in 2007-2008.

**Table 5: 1999 – 2008 Frequency Distribution of Disciplinary Actions by School Level and Year.**

	1999-2000				2003-2004				2005-2006				2007-2008			
	ELEM (N=577) 25.4%	MID (N=744) 32.8%	HIGH (N=768) 33.8%	COMBO (N=181) 8%	ELEM (N=715) 26.2%	MID (N=948) 34.8%	HIGH (N=924) 33.9%	COMBO (N=137) 5.0%	ELEM (N=715) 26.2%	MID (N=948) 34.8%	HIGH (N=924) 33.9%	COMBO (N=137) 5.0%	ELEM (N=618) 24.1%	MID (N=897) 35%	HIGH (N=936) 36.6%	COMBO (N=109) 4.3%
<b>DISCIPLINARY ACTION</b>																
Expulsion No Svcs.	7.6	33.7	<b>57.1</b>	34.9	7.1	<b>37.7</b>	53.8	43.2	7.1	37.7	53.8	43.2	<b>21.2</b>	25.5	33.5	57.9
Expulsion Tutoring With Svcs.	17.1	<b>59.9</b>	<b>73</b>	51.9	9.6	46.3	68.2	48.4	9.6	46.3	68.2	48.4	<b>21.1</b>	24	44.4	71.9
Expulsion Transfer Spcl School	35.1	<b>78.2</b>	<b>85.4</b>	64.1	28.5	68.8	72.6	53.4	28.5	68.8	72.6	53.4	<b>39.2</b>	47.8	59.5	75
Expulsion Transfer Reg. School	20.3	49.6	61.1	38.5	27.8	<b>56.5</b>	72.6	55.9	27.8	56.5	<b>72.6</b>	55.9	<b>32.9</b>	31.5	46.7	71.6
Outside Suspension No Svcs.	39.1	62.1	74.74	65.2	<b>70.2</b>	92.4	<b>96.8</b>	89.3	70.2	<b>92.4</b>	96.8	89.3	65.5	75.8	84.1	93
Outside Suspension With Svcs.	40.7	75.3	86.3	64.8	49.3	82.8	<b>89.6</b>	72.9	49.3	<b>82.8</b>	89.6	72.9	<b>56.2</b>	68.9	76.8	95.2
Inside Suspension No Svcs.	38.1	52.7	64.7	56.8	<b>44.3</b>	60.4	80.9	54.5	44.3	<b>60.4</b>	<b>80.9</b>	54.5	34.5	49.5	58.9	84.2
Inside Suspension With Svcs.	77.5	94.1	<b>97.1</b>	91.6	78.1	<b>95.4</b>	96.4	94.8	78.1	95.4	96.4	94.8	<b>80.6</b>	89.2	92.4	96.8
Corporal Punishment	57.7	58.7	39.5	<b>75.4</b>	70.7	69.2	61.7	86	70.7	69.2	61.7	86	<b>75.9</b>	<b>71.2</b>	73	80
School Probation	72.8	<b>92.4</b>	<b>95.3</b>	88.2	64.6	91.2	94.5	84.3	64.6	91.2	94.5	84.3	<b>74.4</b>	76.2	88	96.3
Detention - Saturday School	84.7	98	<b>98.3</b>	93.1	84.4	<b>97.5</b>	99.3	93.8	84.4	97.5	99.3	93.8	<b>92.8</b>	93.7	95.4	99



### Regression Analysis

Having examined the distribution of major variables by school level over the four time periods, the analysis moves to examine whether there is any relationship between them and the two primary dependent variables, disruptive behavior and disciplinary action. To accomplish this, multiple regression was used to analyze and detect the effects of independent variables on disruptive behaviors (statistical Model I) and disciplinary actions (statistical Model II) (see Table 6) for school years 1999-2000, 2003-2004, 2005-2006, and 2007-2008.

Prior to the regression analyses, a check for multicollinearity was conducted and all the tolerance levels were acceptable. Based upon the regression analyses, even though the amount of explained variance is small, statistically significant relationships were found to exist between the demographic variables and the types of disciplinary actions that are used by schools in response to the disruptive behaviors that were reported.

### Model I

In regression model I (Table 6) school size (.174,  $p < .001$ ) was found to be statistically significant for all reported years 1999-2008. The relationship between reported disruptive behaviors and school grade level (.152,  $p < .001$ ) has a significantly strong relationship for all reported years, 1999-2008. The variable percent special education students (.134,  $p < .001$ ) relates to the reporting of disruptive behaviors across all four time periods. This finding supports hypothesis 1 that schools with higher proportions of special education students report greater frequencies of infractions. Minority status (.119,  $p < .001$ ) was found to have a statistically significant relationship in the reporting of disruptive behaviors across all years (1999-2008) and supports hypothesis 4 that greater proportion of minority students report more infractions. For both years 1999-2000 and 2005-2006, percent limited English proficiency (-.049,  $p < .05$ ) was found to have a statistically significant relationship on disruptive behaviors reported. The variable urbanicity (-.051,  $p < .05$ ) was also found to relate to the reporting of disruptive behaviors, but only for year 2003-2004. In 1999-2000 the less safety procedure training (-.088,  $p < .001$ ) was reported as being received by educators, the less likely they were to report disruptive behaviors. Neither school prevention programs (hypothesis 2) nor classroom management -instructor training (hypothesis 6) were found to have a statistically significant relationship with the disruptive behaviors reported. The results therefore fail to support hypothesis 2 that schools without prevention programs report a greater proportion of disciplinary actions; or that schools reporting no teacher training in classroom management were predicted to report more infractions as stated in hypothesis 6.

## Model II

Regression model II (Table 6) in each year reports the net effects for disciplinary actions after the disruptive behaviors are introduced. All of the variables incorporated in model II are comparable to the variables in model I. In Model II, the level of the school (.426,  $p < .001$ ) explained 41 percent of the variation in use of disciplinary actions for all reported years 1999-2008. The size of school (.213,  $p < .001$ ) was found to have a moderate relationship with the outcomes of disciplinary actions and explained 21 percent of the variation for all reported years. As predicted in hypothesis 4, minority status (.120,  $p < .001$ ) was found to have a slightly weaker relationship, explaining only 12 percent of the variation in the use of disciplinary actions for years 1999-2008. Schools not located in urban areas were less likely to utilize more severe disciplinary actions (.085,  $p < .001$ ). Hypothesis 2 predicted that schools without prevention programs would report greater proportions of disciplinary actions, but the findings fail to support this hypothesis. While the data did not support hypothesis 3 regarding low versus high socioeconomic status influence on disciplinary actions, it is important to note that the current data support the general findings that school demographics (listed above) influence the rate and usage of disciplinary actions (suspensions/expulsions). This finding is consistent with research by Bruns et al, 2005; Skiba, Peterson, Reece, and Larson, 2001; and Raffaele et al, 2002.

Furthermore, statistically significant relationships were found for other variables that contributed to the use of disciplinary action. These include Urbanicity (.085,  $p < .001$ ) influencing disciplinary actions only in year 2007-2008; and percent schools with low/high limited English proficiency (-.087,  $p < .001$ ) only in year 1999-2000. Only instructor training in preventing violent behavior (.052,  $p < .05$ ) was found to contribute to the use of disciplinary action) in year 1999-2000. This finding supports hypothesis 5. Most notably, reports of disruptive behaviors (.244,  $p < .001$ ) was also found to have a moderate influence upon reported disciplinary action for all reported years.

**Table 6: Multiple Regression Results: Effects of Individual Variables on Disrupted Behaviors and Disciplinary Actions**

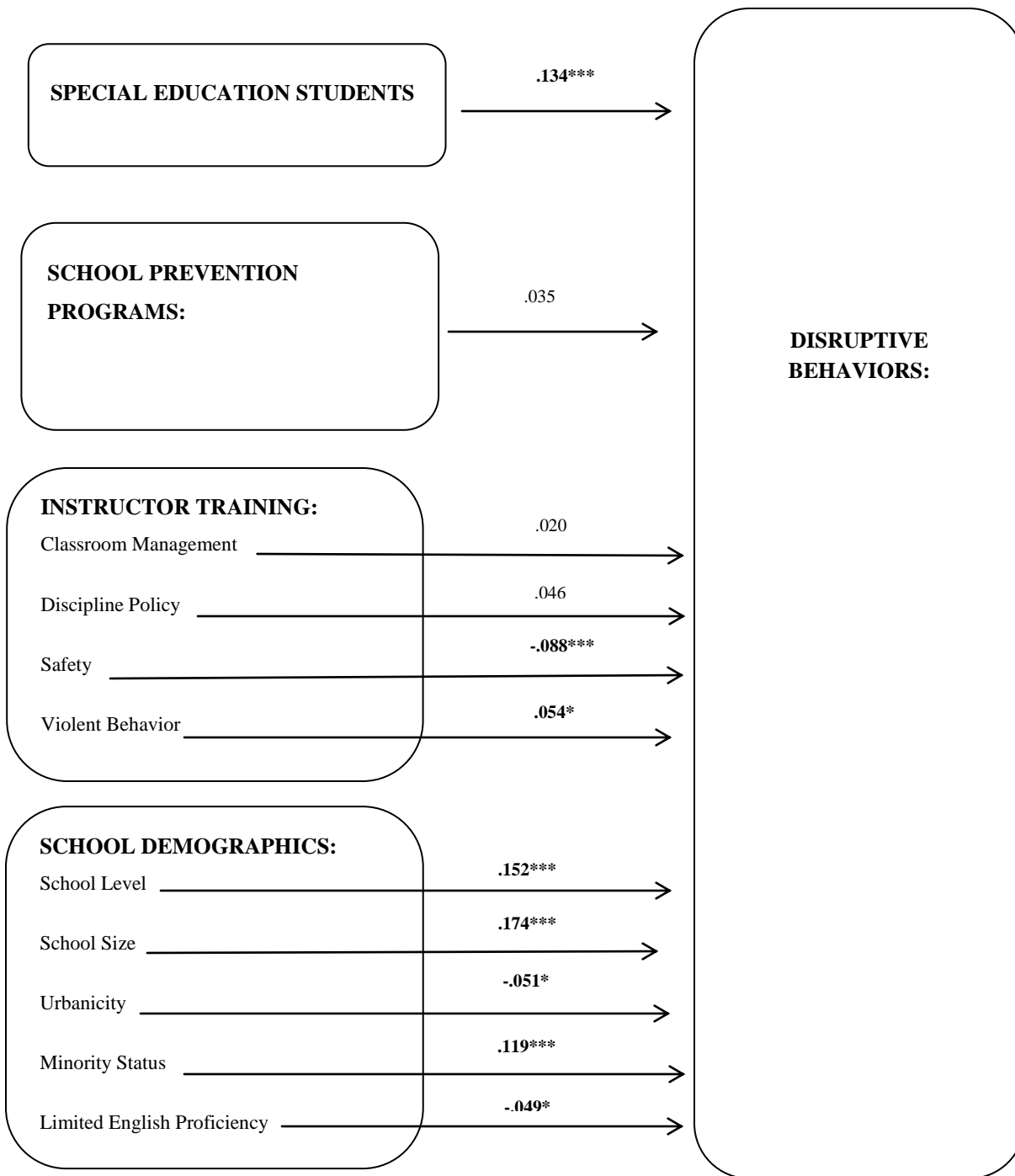
	1999-2000		2003-2004		2005-2006		2007-2008	
	Model I Disruptive Behaviors (N=1615)	Model II Disciplinary Actions (N=1603)	Model I Disruptive Behaviors (N=2034)	Model II Disciplinary Actions (N=2008)	Model I Disruptive Behaviors (N=1986)	Model II Disciplinary Actions (N=1960)	Model I Disruptive Behaviors (N=1995)	Model II Disciplinary Actions (N=1973)
<b>Target Variables</b>								
Percent Special Education Students	<b>16.56/.075**</b> (.01)	16.59/.027 (.01)	<b>1.75/.134***</b> (.06)	1.76/.014 (.04)	<b>1.75/.126***</b> (.06)	1.75/.019 (.04)	<b>1.73/.114***</b> (.06)	1.73/-.008 (.04)
Classroom Management - Instructor Training	.742/.007 (.16)	.741/.039 (.11)	.833/.02 (.16)	.834/.017 (.12)	.832/.009 (.16)	.832/.006 (.11)	.834/.000 (.15)	.834/.018 (.11)
Discipline Policy - Instructor Training	.939/.022 (.28)	.940/.024 (.20)	.771/.046 (.15)	.774/.030 (.10)	.771/.042 (.15)	.775/.024 (.10)	.706/-.011 (.13)	.708/.027 (.10)
Safety Procedures - Instructor Training	<b>.396/-.088***</b> (.15)	.395/.007 (.10)	.932/-.013 (.23)	.932/.003 (.16)	.933/-.017 (.24)	.933/-.001 (.16)	.912/.017 (.20)	.913/.025 (.14)
Violent Behavior Training - Instructor Training	<b>.456/.054*</b> (.14)	<b>.456/.052*</b> (.10)	.556/-.033 (.12)	.559/.026 (.08)	.555/-.036 (.12)	.557/.023 (.08)	.506/-.40 (.12)	.507/.02 (.08)
Percent Limited English Proficiency	<b>1.12/-.056*</b> (.18)	<b>1.12/-.087***</b> (.12)	1.19/-.024 (.12)	1.19/-.006 (.18)	<b>1.19/-.049*</b> (.12)	1.19/-.033 (.08)	1.20/.023 (.11)	1.20/-.026 (.08)

	1999-2000		2003-2004		2005-2006		2007-2008	
	Model I Disruptive Behaviors (N=1615)	Model II Disciplinary Actions (N=1603)	Model I Disruptive Behaviors (N=2034)	Model II Disciplinary Actions (N=2008)	Model I Disruptive Behaviors (N=1986)	Model II Disciplinary Actions (N=1960)	Model I Disruptive Behaviors (N=1995)	Model II Disciplinary Actions (N=1973)
<b>Target Variables</b>								
School Size	2.85/.159*** (.08)	2.85/.20*** (.06)	3.03/.129*** (.07)	<b>3.03/.213***</b> (.05)	3.02/.124*** (.07)	3.03/.208*** (.05)	<b>3.03/.174***</b> (.07)	3.04/.185*** (.05)
Percent Minorities	2.48/.088** (.07)	2.48/.10*** (.05)	2.64/.066** (.03)	2.64/.036* (.02)	<b>2.90/.119***</b> (.06)	<b>2.90/.12***</b> (.04)	2.95/.095*** (.06)	2.95/.094*** (.05)
School Grade Level	2.20/.086*** (.08)	2.20/.39*** (.06)	2.13/.144*** (.07)	2.15/.418*** (.05)	<b>2.13/.152***</b> (.07)	<b>2.14/.426***</b> (.05)	2.17/.117 (.07)	2.18/.370*** (.05)
Urbanicity	2.34/-.016 (.07)	2.34/-.001 (.05)	<b>2.19/-.051*</b> (.06)	2.19/.010 (.04)	2.19/-.030 (.06)	2.19/.034 (.04)	2.30/-.038 (.05)	<b>2.30/.085***</b> (.04)
School Prevention Measures (8-0)	4.76/.005 (.03)	4.76/.013 (.02)	4.74/.033 (.02)	4.73/-.022 (.02)	4.74/.035 (.05)	4.72/-.021 (.02)	4.82/-.005 (.02)	4.82/.006 (.02)
Disruptive Behavior		8.29/.194*** (.02)		8.04/.239*** (.02)		8.04/.234*** (.02)		<b>7.46/.244***</b> (.02)
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.058	.332	.076	.408	.082	.419	.086	.344

Note: Cell entries are given as regression mean/coefficient with the standard error given in parentheses.  
 \*=p<.05, \*\*=p<.01, \*\*\*=p<.001

### Causal Model 1

The relationships between the variables as predicted in the study hypotheses can be seen depicted in Causal Model 1 as shown in Figure 1. This model presents the likelihood that certain characteristics, i.e. percent special education students, instructor training, percent limited English proficiency, school size, percent minority, school level, urbanicity, and school prevention measures will relate to reports of disruptive behaviors. As previously reported, special education students, safety-instructor training, school level, school size, urbanicity, minority status, and limited English proficiency have a statistically significant relationship with disrupted behaviors. It is important to note that urbanicity ( $-.051, p < .05$ ) has a negative coefficient due to the coding scales used in this study. The severity of occurrence of disruptive behaviors ranged from 3 to 15. Urbanicity was coded from high to low (1=city, 4=town) and disruptive behaviors was coded from low to high, thus causing an inverse relationship. The explanation for the change with proportion of student limited English ( $-.049, p < .05$ ) is less concrete, and I can only speculate a possible reason why that as the level of English proficiency decreases, reported disruptive behaviors decreases. It may well be that as students of this minority group begin to assimilate with other English speaking students; they feel less need to act out; however, the data in the current study do not provide enough information to draw a definitive conclusion.



**Figure 1. Model 1 –Relationship between school characteristics and disruptive behaviors**

\*=p<.05, \*\*=p<.01, \*\*\* = p<.001



## Causal Model 2

With regard to how the independent variables and previously described dependent variable, disruptive behaviors, relate to whether or not disciplinary action is taken, Model 2 (Figure 2) portrays a relationship within which disruptive behaviors are affected by the other independent variables, i.e., special education students, prevention programs, instructor training, and school demographics. Looking at causal model 1 and model 2, the effect of the following variables decreased in their effects upon the dependent variable, disruptive behavior, when disciplinary action was entered into the model:

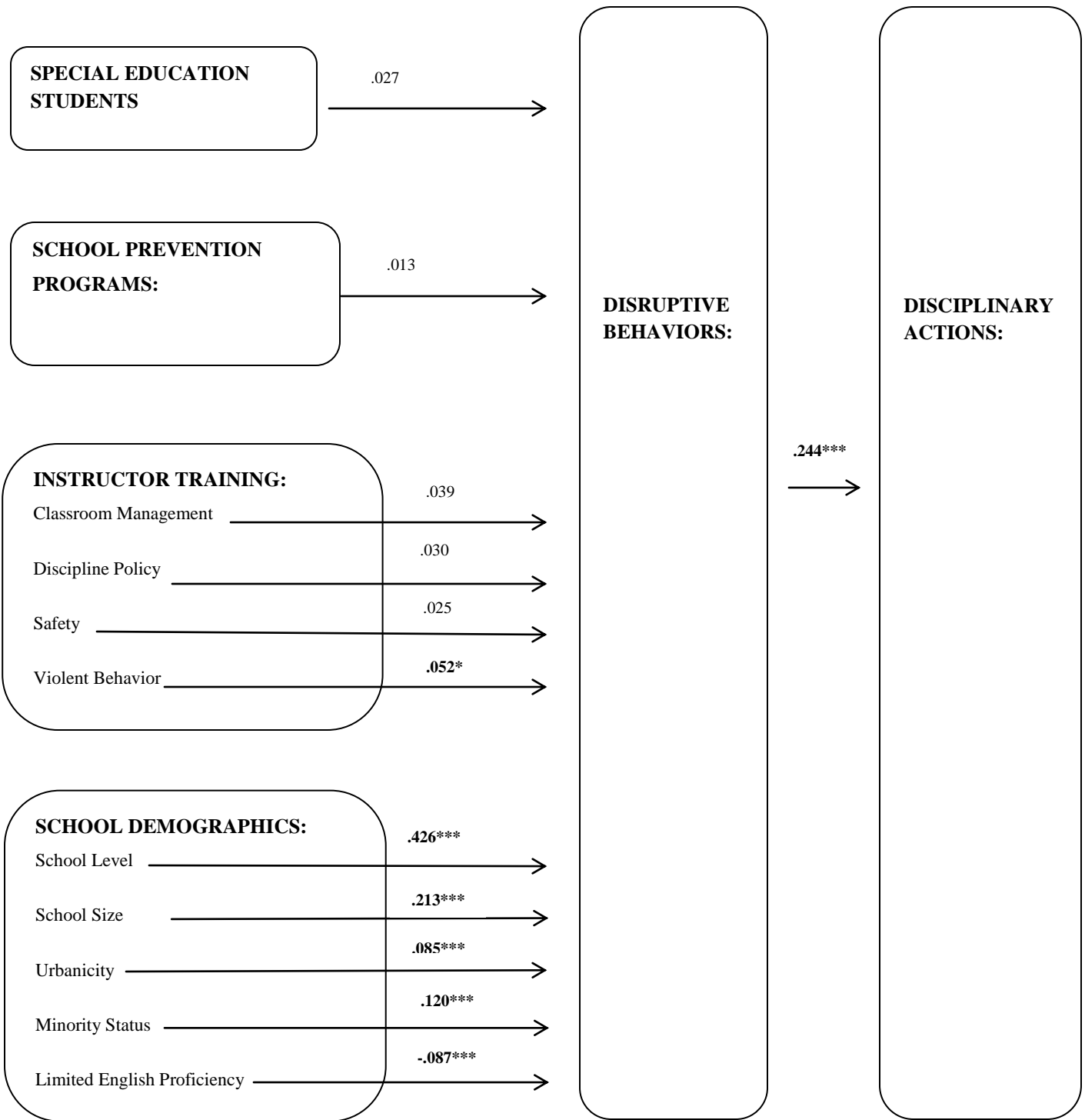
- Special Education Students **.134<sup>\*\*\*</sup>** to .027
- School Prevention Programs .035 to .013
- Discipline Policy-Instructor Training .046 to .030
- Safety – Instructor Training **-.088<sup>\*\*\*</sup>** to .025
- Violent behavior – Instructor Training **.054<sup>\*</sup>** to .052<sup>\*</sup>

The relationship of other variables increased from model 1 to model 2 when the disruptive behaviors were introduced as an intervening variable:

- Classroom management –Instructor Training .020 to .039
- School Level .152<sup>\*\*\*</sup> to **.426<sup>\*\*\*</sup>**
- School Size .174<sup>\*\*\*</sup> to **.213<sup>\*\*\*</sup>**
- Urbanicity **-.051<sup>\*</sup>** to **.085<sup>\*\*\*</sup>**
- Minority status .119<sup>\*\*\*</sup> to **.120<sup>\*\*\*</sup>**
- Limited English proficiency **-.049<sup>\*</sup>** to **-.087<sup>\*\*\*</sup>**

These changes in relative explanatory power demonstrate the relationship between certain school characteristics and the reporting of disruptive behaviors and the subsequent disciplinary actions taken.

\*=p<.05, \*\*=p<.01, \*\*\* = p<.001



**Figure 2: Model 2 – School Characteristics and relationship with disruptive behaviors and disciplinary action**

\*=p<.05, \*\*=p<.01, \*\*\* = p<.001

## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

The goal of this research was to examine if certain characteristics of educational institutions could be used to explain differential treatment of special education students in the reporting of disruptive behaviors and use of disciplinary actions. This study used variables previously identified in the (NCES) School Survey on Crime and Safety. The analysis yielded support for three of the hypotheses (1, 4, and 5). Hypotheses 2 and 6 were not supported, and hypothesis 3 could not be tested because of missing data for three of the four reporting years.

Based on the above regression analyses, it appears that a higher proportion of special education and minority students in schools are strongly related to the reporting of disruptive behaviors and the use of disciplinary actions. Additional findings indicate that school size, grade level, and location (urbanicity) are also highly influential upon the reporting of disruptive behaviors and use of disciplinary actions. This research supports the findings of the research by Dunbar et al (2002) who indicated that there were significant differences between rural and urban schools in their use of disciplinary actions, and the implementation of the zero tolerance policy. Additional findings in this research were that lack of teacher training (hypothesis 5 and 6) did not appear to have as strong a relationship to the reports of disruptive behavior or use of disciplinary action. Research by Boylan and Weiser (2002) and Bender and Bolden (1998) indicated special education students are targeted by poorly trained teachers was not supported as this study found no evidence of educator training deficiencies within the current sample population. However it is interesting to note that the analysis indicated that when schools reported their educators had more training in recognizing violent behavior, they were also more likely to report taking disciplinary action.

While school prevention programs did not appear to have a significant impact on the relationship between reported disruptive behaviors or the use of disciplinary actions, it was interesting to discover that most schools reported either implementing 6-7 of the measures or only implementing 1 measure. Of the prevention programs available, Hotline seemed to be the least employed, with its use steadily declining from 1999 thru 2008 for both middle and high schools. A possible explanation for this is that since elementary schools are smaller and more compact, it is understandable that they would not put into operation this particular program with younger students since the need for it would not be as great.

The analyses of the current study found that many of the elementary (50%) and middle schools (70-80%) reported the use of OSS with services for all data years. That is, a majority of lower level schools placed student outside the school but with services. Findings from the current study also align with the findings of Raffaele-Mendez et al (2002) in that reported disruptive behaviors were found to significantly relate to the use of suspensions and expulsions. The multiple regression analyses showed that school demographics were significant in relation to reported disruptive behaviors and disciplinary actions taken throughout all of the years; specifically school size, school level, and minority status. A statistically significant relationship was found between the reporting of disruptive behaviors and use of disciplinary actions. In looking at the data reported, it was noticed that the reporting trends for all variables across all school levels was consistently different for the year 2007-2008 in comparison to all other years 1999-2006. While explanation for this difference are beyond the scope of this study, it could be speculated that perhaps schools were able to find some effective methods to enforce the school policy and expected behaviors such that less disruptive behaviors and resulting disciplinary

actions were reported for 2007-2008 in middle and high schools. However, the trend for elementary schools was opposite to that of middle and high schools, in that they continued to report an increase in the use of disciplinary actions. More likely, the difference in response patterns may be attributed to educational institutions becoming more aware of how the information they are reporting is being evaluated and compared on a national level, and they wish to give the appearance that school environments have become safer.

Based on the results of this study, it appears that the stigma of being labeled a “special” education student appears to relate to the reporting of disruptive behaviors which in turn affects the use of the disciplinary actions, i.e. suspension and expulsions. Coupled with the other school demographic characteristics that appeared to relate to the application and use of disciplinary policies, further research is warranted. While the existence of school prevention programs did not appear to significantly relate to the outcomes of differential treatment nor impact the use rates of disciplinary actions, it is important to continue these efforts to reduce and or prevent future instances of school violence. Much the same can be said of the instructor training in classroom management, discipline policy, safety, and violent behavior. Generally speaking, training in these areas was not found to be significantly related in the current study. However, the effect of the percentage of special education students present in schools was important. Based upon this finding, it would only seem practical to expect that the continued training of educators in these areas may further reduce the proportion of special education students who are penalized for disruptive behaviors. Such training could also include better understanding of which behaviors may be beyond the control of the special education students.

The goal of the research was to conduct a secondary analysis of the previously administered national survey as an approach to better understand the implication and impact that disciplinary policies may have on minority groups, specifically special education students. The School Survey on Crime and Safety appeared to be thorough in the questions asked about preventions, procedures, types of occurrences, and resulting disciplinary actions. However in the future, it would be useful to ask more specific questions about the frequency of disruptive behaviors by various student populations, the nature of those behaviors and what types of measures are used for dealing with each type of occurrence. It would also be important to gather information on alternative solutions available in order to reduce suspensions and expulsions that could impede students' ability to obtain a quality education if they are removed from the educational setting.

### Implications for Future Research

As indicated above, this report of research on the relationship between special education students, instructor training prevention programs, school demographics and disruptive behaviors and disciplinary actions has provided a better understanding of how school environment and training relate to the presence of special needs students and their treatment. Despite the zero tolerance policy having been enacted over 15 years ago, there is still little research compiled to evaluate its impact on minority groups such as special education students. If this study were to be conducted again, it would help to gather information on the frequency and specific types of infractions of special education students. It would also be beneficial if data were collected on types of classroom management techniques most often used, and the specific types of instructor

training that can be directed at reducing instances of disruptive behaviors to better address the needs of minority populations. It would also be beneficial if there were an additional independent measure other than self-reports by the school and its personnel on a national level. Other questions that this study could not answer relate to the nature of specific disciplinary guidelines aimed at addressing unacceptable behaviors while maintaining student accessibility to educational services. In the future it is hoped that measures could be developed to better describe the effects that classroom setting, institutional management and public policy have upon student learning and experiences. This is of crucial importance because the goal of educational institutions should be to provide safe and positive environments that nurture students' creative and intellectual abilities, while providing the necessary support and encouragement needed for individuals to reach their full potential.

The range of disciplinary actions included in this study also merit further research. They cover a wide range of actions, some of which can result in excluding students without ensuring their continued education. In order to see the long term treatment effects of selected types of actions, future research could embark upon retrospective examination of institutional actions taken upon targeted students, such as those students who are suspended and or expelled. These data combined with follow up of students who do or don't graduate would yield a fuller picture of the benefits or harm associated with institutional mandates such as Zero Tolerance Policy.

Additional studies could be directed toward clarifying aspects of the Zero Tolerance Policy and its interpretation at the state and local school levels. More information is needed regarding this policy and its long term consequences. Currently there are few studies that test the policy's directives relate to selections of school discipline. There is a need for national level data

collection in order to research the way school districts implement the policy, the way educators use the policy as a classroom management technique, and in order to evaluate its possible use on the more vulnerable student populations.



## LIMITATIONS

This study included the following limitations:

- Data were restricted to the characteristics required for the national reports and not all of the characteristics that might affect student behavior and misconduct were addressed.
- The specific types of student “disability” of special education students that were included in the National Center for Education Statistics Indicators of School Crime and Safety are unknown.
- Race, sex, religion, or national origin of the teachers and administrators were not available in the data set.
- The data gathered were limited by the accuracy of the record keeping of school officials in the selected schools. It may also have been limited by the reluctance of school personnel to report infractions committed by special education students for fear of damaging their school’s reputation.
- Data regarding school characteristics and treatment practices are not available before the national Zero Tolerance policy was enacted. Consequently a comparison of trends before and after the policy was enacted is not possible.

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