

Restorative Practices: Impact on Decreasing Disciplinary Referrals

Brandon Gulley

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Degree of Master of Arts of Teaching

May 2019

## Table of Contents

Abstract	iii
I. Overview	1
Statement of Problem	2
Hypothesis	2
Limitations and Definitions	2
II. Review of Literature	4
Overview of School Discipline	4
The Impact School Discipline Has on Academic Performance	5
Restorative Practices	6
III. Methods	11
Design	11
Participants	11
Instruments	11
Procedure	12
IV. Results	13
Table 1: Measures of Central Tendency for Total Disciplinary Incidents	13

Table 2: Dependent t Test for the Total Disciplinary Incidents	13
Table 3: Measures of Central Tendency for Office Referrals	14
Table 4: Dependent t Test for Office Referrals	14
Table 5: Measures of Central Tendency for Suspensions	14
Table 6: Dependent t Test of Suspensions	15
V. Discussion	16
Implications of the Results	16
Threats to Validity	17
Connections to previous studies/literature	17
Implications for future research	17
Conclusion	18
References	19

## **ABSTRACT**

This paper explores sixteen published articles that report on School Discipline, The Impact School Discipline has on Academic Performance, and Restorative Practices. The purpose of this study examine how effective Restorative Practices are when implemented in school over a four-month period. The objective is to analyze the discipline data of a twenty-nine ninth graders to see if the implementation of Restorative Practices influences those students discipline data.

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Educators often seek ways to provide help and support for at-risk students and special needs student who struggle academically and personally. One such response is to provide PBIS and Restorative Circles. These two programs are designed to provide safety and educational opportunities for students who struggle in school. According to [www.pbis.org](http://www.pbis.org), Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (**PBIS**) is to improve the effectiveness, efficiency and equity of schools and other agencies. **PBIS** improves social, emotional and academic outcomes for all students, including students with disabilities and students from underrepresented groups. According to [www.restorativecircles.org](http://www.restorativecircles.org), Restorative Circles provide a safe, supportive arena where all school community members can talk about sensitive topics and work through differences. By participating in structured activities through quality intervention and support programs, students can develop new social and adjustment skills. Through their involvement in PBIS and restorative practices, students can receive one-on-one interaction with mentors and learn or remediate skills. PBIS is a productive strategy to start at the beginning of the school year for students to learn how to display appropriate school and classroom behavior (Yeung, 2016). Restorative Practices offers students a place where disagreements can be talked through and relationship can be repaired (Matsuda, 2019).

The literature reviewed in this study suggests that PBIS and Restorative Circles can benefit students' academic performance in school, prevent and reduce violence, and help students develop into responsible adult. According to Nocera, Whitbread & Parsons, students in PBIS and Restorative Circles have fewer behavioral problems and are better ability to handle conflicts as well as demonstrating improved self- confidence compared to students who

are not involved in these programs (2014).

### **Statement of Problem**

The purpose of this study is to determine how to reduce the disciplinary referrals in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade class in an alternative high school. More specifically this study explores whether the referrals of students separated from core class be reduced through two interventions, PBIS and Restorative Circles.

### **Hypothesis**

Restorative practices do not affect student disciplinary referrals.

### **Limitations and Definitions**

The study is limited for it only gathers data from one suburban alternative high school in Maryland. Critical terms used include:

**SWIS** is a web-based data entry, collection, and decision-making tool for school climate and behavior supports.

**PBIS** is a framework or approach for assisting school personnel in adopting and organizing evidence-based behavioral interventions into an integrated continuum that enhances academic and social behavior outcomes for all students. **PBIS IS NOT** a packaged curriculum, scripted intervention, or manualized strategy. This alternate school uses PBIS for identifying and teaching expectations, acknowledging appropriate behavior and responding to inappropriate behavior. The classroom expectations are R.I.S.E: R- Respect, I- Identify the Positive, S- Safe Actions and E- Effort all the time

**Restorative Circle** is a community process for supporting those in conflict. It brings together the three parties to a conflict – those who have acted, those directly impacted and the wider community – within an intentional systemic context, to dialogue as equals. Participants invite each other and attend voluntarily. This alternate high school uses Restorative Circles to build and maintain a healthy community in which all members feel connected and respected.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

This literature review seeks to explore the impact of restorative practices on decreasing disciplinary referrals. Section one provides an overview of school discipline. Section two explores the impact school discipline has on academic performance. Section three explores restorative interventions.

#### **Overview of School Discipline**

School discipline is vital to a student's success in the classroom. According to Baumann, "Generally, school discipline is defined as school policies and actions taken by school personnel with students to prevent or intervene with unwanted behaviors" as cited in Cameron (2006, p. 219). A 2005 study was conducted by Baumann which yielded the results that authoritative schools, schools which have high demand and responsiveness, have the best results when it comes to school discipline and academic performance. Indifferent schools, schools which have low demand and low responsiveness, yielded the worst results regarding school discipline and academic performance (Baumann & Krskova, 2015). Countries such as South Korea and other East Asian countries tend to enforce strict discipline in the school setting. These countries also achieve high academic results. According to Sadik and Ozturk (2018), 18 high school administrators felt that a disciplined school must have staff fulfilling their duties, academically successful students, complete educational materials, and a clean and orderly building. This 2018 study also suggested that discipline problems may be associated with student personality traits and the attitudes of the students' families (Sadik & Ozturk, 2018).

Another factor related to discipline problems is disproportionality and discrimination. According to Whitford, Katsiyannis, and Counts (2016), disproportionality exists in student discipline. Students of color and students who received special education services are disciplined in higher rates. Also referred to as discriminatory discipline, students as young as preschool age are receiving more and more out-of-school suspensions and referrals (Whitford et al., 2016). Recent studies have shown an overrepresentation of black students receiving disciplinary referrals and suspensions (Whitford et al., 2016).

### **The Impact School Discipline Has on Academic Performance**

A lack of school discipline contributes to lower academic performance. According to Sadik and Ozturk (2018), “Disciplinary problems or unwanted behaviors are behaviors that affect teaching and learning, make it difficult to achieve success, or impede success” (pg. 730). Suspension, in-school suspension, or ISS, and expulsion are three practices that can adversely affect academic performance. Suspension refers to the student being removed from the school environment for a certain number of days. In-school suspension refers to when a student is removed from their regular classroom and put in a separate classroom away from his or her peers. Expulsion refers to a student being permanently removed from the school environment. Schools with a majority of low-income students and urban schools have higher suspension rates. One problem that these three practices create is that being suspended or expelled is often the student’s preference over going to school (Noltemeyer, Ward, & Mcloughlin, 2015).

According to Noltemeyer et al., “schools with high suspension use have shown lower mean scores on state achievement test than schools with lower suspension use” (2015, pg. 225). This is most likely due to missed instructional time, students not being motivated to succeed following a suspension, preexisting learning and behavioral disabilities, and an increase of

opportunities to interact with negative influences when out of school. A recent study was conducted of 30,000 high school sophomores who had dropped out of school. The study concluded that drop out rates were higher for the students who had a history of being suspended (Noltemeyer et al., 2015).

### **Restorative Practices**

There have been many attempts to reduce those suspensions. Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, or PBIS, is a multi-faceted, evidence-based practice that focuses on classroom management and school-wide systems. PBIS helps teachers respond more appropriately to their students to best deliver behavior and academic support. In 2011, the federal government called for public school leaders to reevaluate their discipline policies and practices to combat disproportionality and to ensure fairness and equity for all students (Parsons, 2017).

Parsons (2017) reviewed six culturally responsive practices: cultural equality, cultural self-awareness, validation of other cultures, cultural relevance, cultural validity, and cultural knowledge. In the 1990s, many schools across the country enacted a zero-tolerance disciplinary philosophy designed to impose stricter sanctions on youth (Parsons, 2017). This led to an increase in out-of-school expulsions and suspensions. To help bridge the gap with student disciplinary infractions, School-Wide Positive Behavior Supports, or SWPBS, can be an effective alternative to traditional reactive, punitive approaches to problem behavior (Parsons, 2017).

Parsons (2017) also focuses on the efforts of low-performing middle school students in establishing preventative measures and interventions. Roosevelt Middle School, with a population of approximately 750 students in grades seven and eight, introduced a system that

allowed students to earn rewards for displaying certain behaviors. The sample in the follow-up study was a group of 145 randomly selected seventh and eighth grade students. Results show Total Office Discipline Referrals (ODRs) decreased 1,182 in the 2007-2008 school year to 1,485 in the 2008-2009 school year to 1,210 in the 2009-2010 school year. This was a 36% overall decrease. The results of this study are consistent with other studies that support the use of school-wide positive behavior supports and interventions in decreasing ineffective disciplinary practices, resulting in improvements in student behavior and school climate (Nocera, et al. 2014).

Bradshaw, Pas, Debnam, and Johnson (2015) address implementing PBIS over two years in high schools to help with bullying and other indicators or social disorders. The evidence-based programs that were implemented were bullying prevention program, check in and check out, check and connect, and life skills training. The project was designed by Maryland Department of Education (MDSE) along with two subcontractors to train administration, school counselors, and support staff. Random data was collected from students in grades 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> with parental consent. Students from 31 traditional high schools across twelve Maryland counties were involved as intervention schools. PBIS schools were trained by national coaches and trainers. Each school chose selected staff and faculty to become coaches using train-the trainer framework. There were three tiers provided in the training: check-in/check-out, school-based mentors, and group-based prevention intervention to youth exposed to trauma (Bradshaw et al., 2015).

Similarly, Yeung (2016) mentioned positive behavior interventions have resulted in improvement of academic gains and school behavior. PBIS is a proactive instructional approach to support prosocial behavior in schools. The implementation of PBIS involves building the

capability of teachers and staff to insert the monitoring and teaching of social skills into the school framework.

School interventions that put in place to address the needs of students come in many forms. Including enhancement of academic skills, counseling, mentoring/monitoring, and skills training for teachers. These interventions are designed to reduce the amount of out-of-school suspensions. Wilkerson, Afacan, Perzigian, Justin, and Lequia (2016) mentioned that by using those four interventions, the number of out-of-school suspension was reduced in six months. Wilkerson et al. (2016) break down the person who is responsible for suspending the students, the length of suspension, the type of suspension, and the reason for the suspension and gives insight on behavior-focused alternative schools. Students with poor school attendance, minimal credits earned, an excessive number of office referrals, and an excessive number of suspensions are placed at another location to better serve them. This research focused on 53 public schools in a Midwestern city in the United States. The district provided information including gender, special education status (SPED), free and reduced lunch status, and ethnicity for all students in the sample of 21,165 students. The alternative schools provide services, such as specialized curriculum, intended to meet students' social, emotional, or mental health needs. The student-to-teacher ratio is significantly lower in these alternative schools compared to traditional schools, and the students often have greater access to counselors, psychologists, or other related service providers than their peers in traditional schools (Wilkerson et al., 2016).

Dutton, Varjas, Meyers and Collins (2010) reviews the general education teachers perceptions regarding behavior management and intervention. The researcher believes that teachers' perspectives influence how they manage classroom behavior. This article explores teachers' perceptions through interviews and was designed to examine their knowledge and

perceptions about positive and negative behavior in school to gain an in-depth understanding of the strategies teachers use to manage behavior in the classroom (Dutton et al., 2010).

Restorative practice, teaching personal and social responsibility or TPSR, is a practice that provides opportunities to strengthen relationships and assist youth in developing peaceful conflict resolution skills. Student suspensions and expulsions often are connected to higher rates of future involvement with the criminal justice system. This typically is labeled the school-prison pipeline and it disproportionately impacts students of color and with disabilities (Matsuda 2019).

Hemphill, Janke, Gordon and Farrar (2018) review sport-based youth development. Sports-based youth development, or SBYD, refers to empowerment-based programs that prioritize the development of social skills that are transferable to settings in all phases of life. Restorative practices repair relationships, although this practice is mainly used in the educational setting. The three model components are: restorative essentials, restorative circles, and restorative conferences.

In other findings, da Silva (2015) stated that restorative circles have three elements: the pre-circle, the circle, and the post-circle. During the Pre-Circle, the facilitator helps describe the conflict in specific detail to both individuals. Both participants agree to the terms of the circle to resolve the conflict during the Circle element. During the Post-Circle, participants revisit actions that are taken that were mutually agreed upon. Some circles use talking pieces, objects which are held when speaking. Talking pieces are used to make sure participants do not speak over each other. Traditionally during the Circle, participants problem solve, come to an agreement, and come to a mutual understanding to remain in the same space.

School-based restorative justice programs in the United States have grown over the past five years. Restorative justice practice brings students, families, teachers, and communities together to build on those relationships that may have been tainted. Gonzalez (2012) mentions twelve states that use the restorative process: California, Florida, Illinois, Iowa, Oregon, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, New Mexico, Pennsylvania, and Virginia. All of these states use the process in the public-school system, local police departments, and with community ambassadors. The practice of restorative practice empowers individuals and communities through building healthy relationships. In the context of schools, these practices seek to empower students, parents, teachers, administrators and community members (Gonzalez, 2012).

Tacker and Hoover (2011) state that circles can be employed by educators as a daily part of students' academic sequence. Proactive circles can be employed to help students and educators "check in" with each other in order to keep the communication open amongst staff and students. Circles in which students get acquainted with one another can lead to building cohesion in the group and a sense of belonging and community during the first few weeks of school or when new students begin.

In conclusion school discipline plays a large part of students academic performance. When students are following school rules, students academic performance tend to be higher. The lack of school discipline can lower academic performance. Students graduation rates are lowered when students expectations are not followed.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODS**

#### **Design**

The purpose of the study is to analyze the methods to reduce the disciplinary referrals in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade co-hort within a population of students with Emotional Disabilities in an alternative high school. The effectiveness of two interventions: PBIS and Restorative Circles, were studied.

This study will use Unify and PowerSchool data systems to collect data for the purpose of determining how to reduce the number of discipline referrals in a ninth grade co-hort.

#### **Participants**

In an effort to gather reliable data, participants will consist of 9<sup>th</sup> grade students that have attended a suburban alternative school. Twenty seven students identified as a ninth graders participated in the study. However, 21 of those students are first time 9<sup>th</sup> graders. Of the 21 students, there are 5 girls; 15 boys; and 1 non-gender specific, studied ranging from ages 14-16.

#### **Instrumentation**

##### **Unify and PowerSchool**

This alternative school uses its school system data collection systems, Unify and PowerSchool. Unify gathers data within the county whereas PowerSchool gathers data within the school. Unify provides information from attendance, to discipline, to test analysis for the county. This will be useful for future comparison research. PowerSchool provides data more specific to the school and will allow for a more concise look at the participants data. Gathering data using these instruments will not require permission to access the data.

## **Procedure**

The participants in the research study have been identified as first-time 9<sup>th</sup> graders. The school has an established PBIS program and has implemented Restorative Circles at the start of the school year. The researcher will observe each co-hort to determine if the classes have a unified system for implementing Restorative Circles daily. The PBIS team will share how student points are gathered and how incentives are earned and how often. The researcher will then gather data from the previous school-year. Attendance will be considered along with the number of referrals each student received in each quarter. The type of infraction will also be considered when collecting data. Next, the data will be categorized amongst the co-horts; there are a total of 4 co-horts for the current 21 9<sup>th</sup> graders. The researcher will then gather current data from Unify and PowerSchool to compare the data from the same quarters of the previous year. There will be no specific ethnic groups targeted.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

This study examines the impact of restorative practices on decreasing disciplinary referrals. Data gathered included students total discipline referrals from September to October and January to February.

Analysis of the data were done using the paired  $t$  or dependent  $t$  test). Three dependent  $t$  tests were conducted. In each case a table of the measures of central tendency was also prepared; followed by the statistical dependent (paired)  $t$  test.

The first analysis was to see if there were overall differences between all the types of disciplinary incidents over the given time period.

**Table 1**  
**Measures of Central Tendency for Total Disciplinary Incidents**

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Total all discipline Sept Oct	2.621	29	3.5598	.6610
Total all discipline January February	3.966	29	5.4411	1.0104

**Table 2**  
**Dependent t Test for the Total Disciplinary Incidents**

Comparison	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Total all discipline Sept Oct – Total all discipline January February	1.3448	6.5426	-1.107	28	.278

$p > .05$  not significant

The analysis shows that there were no differences between all the disciplinary incidents using all data.

The second analysis was to see if there were overall differences between referrals.

**Table 3**

**Measures of Central Tendency for Office Referrals**

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Office Referrals Sept//Oct - Office Referrals	2.276	29	3.1156	.5786
January/February	3.586	29	4.7398	.8802

**Table 4**

**Dependent t Test for Office Referrals**

Comparison	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Office Referrals Sept//Oct - Office Referrals January/February	1.3103	5.6322	-1.253	28	.221

p>.05 not significant

Again the analysis show that there were no significant differences between office referrals.

The next analysis was to see if there were differences in suspensions.

**Table 5**

**Measures of Central Tendency for Suspensions**

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Suspensions Sept//Oct - Suspensions	.345	29	.6139	.1140
January/February	.379	29	.8625	.1602

**Table 6**  
**Dependent t Test for Suspensions**

Comparison	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Suspensions Sept//Oct – Suspensions January/February	-.0345	1.1175	-.166	28	.869

p>.05 not significant

Finally the analysis show there were no significant differences between office referrals.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **DISCUSSION**

The purpose of the study is to analyze the methods to reduce the disciplinary referrals in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade co-hort within a population of students with Emotional Disabilities in an alternative high school. The null hypothesis stated that the use of restorative practices would have no impact on school discipline. A quantitative method study will be conducted to analyze the effectiveness of two interventions: PBIS and Restorative Circles.

This study included 9<sup>th</sup> grade students that have attended an alternative high school from the start of the school year. Data was gathered in the months September, October, January and February for the total number of discipline referrals and the number days suspended for those 9<sup>th</sup> grade students. The results backed up the null hypothesis that Restorative Practices Interventions will have not have an impact on students disciplinary referral rate.

#### **Implications of the Results**

Based on the results of the study there was no difference between all the disciplinary incidents using all data. There was no significant difference between total disciplinary incidents September/October and January/February. There were no significant differences between office referrals September/October and January/February. Finally there were no significant differences in suspensions September/October and January/February. Overall Restorative Practices had no affect on students disciplinary referrals.

### **Threats to Validity**

This study on the impact of Restorative Practices presented several factors that could be looked at as threats to the validity of the study. Teacher may not always write student referrals whenever students display unpleasant behavior. Another threat could be the time frame of the data that was gathered. Missing the month of December may or may not have an affect on the data. Lastly the students attendance, depending on the students attendance data may have skewed the number of referral and suspensions.

### **Connection to Previous Studies**

The concept of restorative practices in schools are still in the developing stages. Previous research has stated when this concept is bought into school wide referrals and suspensions has decreased. Existing studies support the positive impact restorative practices has on schools. This study group was not able to support the previous and existing research for various reasons.

### **Implications for Future Research**

Future researches related to restorative practices should be done at regular comprehensive school instead of an alternative school. Utilizing an entire school year for data would really produce a more conclusive set of data so see If restorative practices are worth implementing into schools. Only working with one set of students will not give an accurate scope of the effectiveness of restorative practices.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of the study is to analyze the methods to reduce the disciplinary referrals in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade co-hort within a population of students with Emotional Disabilities in an alternative high school. The null hypothesis stated that the use of restorative practices would have no impact on school discipline referrals and suspension.

## REFERENCES

- Baumann, C., & H, Krskova., (2015) School discipline, school uniforms and academic performance. *The International Journal of Educational Management: Bradford* Vol. 30, Iss.6,
- Bradshaw, C. P., Pas, E. T., Debnam, K. J., & Johnson, S. L. (2015). A focus on implementation of positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) in high schools: Associations with bullying and other indicators of school disorder. *School Psychology Review*, 44(4), 480-498.
- Cameron, M. (2006). Managing school discipline and implications for school social workers: A review of the literature. *Children & Schools*, vol 28 No. 4, pp 219-227
- da Silva, A. (2015). Restorative circles and the missing link in conflict mediation. *Communities*, (166), 50-52.
- Dutton T., A., Varjas, K., Meyers, J., & Collins, A. S. (2010). General education teachers' perceptions of behavior management and intervention strategies. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions*, 12(2), 86-102.
- González, T. (2012). Keeping kids in schools: Restorative justice, punitive discipline, and the school to prison pipeline. *Journal of Law and Education*, 41(2), 281-335.
- Hemphill, M. A., Janke, E. M., Gordon, B., & Farrar, H. (2018). Restorative youth sports: An applied model for resolving conflicts and building positive relationships. *Journal of Youth Development*, 13(3), 76-96.
- Matsuda, M. (2019). Restoration Justice through Restorative Circles. *School Administrator: Arlington* Vol 76, Iss 2., 24.

- Nocera, E. J., Whitbread, K. M., & Nocera, G. P. (2014). Impact of school-wide positive behavior supports on student behavior in the middle grades. *RMLE Online*, 37(8), 1-14.
- Noltemeyer, A. L., Ward, R. M., & McLoughlin, C. (2015). Relationship Between School Suspension and Student Outcomes: A Meta-Analysis. *School Psychology Review: Bethesda Vol. 44 Iss. 2*, 224-240.
- Parsons, F. (2017). An intervention for the intervention: Integrating positive behavioral interventions and supports with culturally responsive practices. *Delta Kappa Gamma Bulletin*, 83(3), 52-57.
- Sadik, F. & Ozturk, i. H., (2018) *Discipline at the school: Examination of school administrators' views about discipline and disciplinary problems*. Pegem Journal of Education and Instruction: **Ankara** [Vol. 8, Iss. 4](#), 729-770.
- Tacker, M. K., & Hoover, J. H. (2011). Restorative circles in schools. *Reclaiming Children and Youth*, 20(1), 59-60.
- Whitford, D. K., Katsiyannis, A., & Counts, J. (2016). Discriminatory Discipline: Trends and Issues. *NASSP Bulletin*, 100(2), 117–135.
- Wilkerson, K., Afacan, K., Perzigian, A., Justin, W., & Lequia, J. (2016). Behavior-focused alternative schools: Impact on student outcomes. *Behavioral Disorders*, 41(2), 81-94.
- Yeung, A. S. (2016). Positive Behavior Interventions: the Issue of Sustainability of Postive Effects. *Educational Psychology Review: New York Vol 28, ISS. 1*, 145-170.