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THE OCCURRENCE OF STUDENT ABSENTEEISM FROM THE REGULAR CLASSROOM SETTING AND STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT ON THE SEVENTH GRADE MATHEMATICS MISSISSIPPI CURRICULUM TEST

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THE OCCURRENCE OF STUDENT ABSENTEEISM FROM THE REGULAR CLASSROOM SETTING AND STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT ON THE SEVENTH GRADE MATHEMATICS MISSISSIPPI CURRICULUM TEST

by

Joseph Gerard Amuso

A Dissertation
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ABSTRACT

THE OCCURRENCE OF STUDENT ABSENTEEISM FROM THE REGULAR CLASSROOM SETTING AND STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT ON THE SEVENTH GRADE MATHEMATICS MISSISSIPPI CURRICULUM TEST

by Joseph Gerard Amuso

December 2007

This quantitative study examined the variables of student absence from the regular classroom setting and student achievement on the Mississippi Curriculum Test for 7th Grade Mathematics. To examine these variables, the records of 274 seventh grade students from a single grade school in the southern United States were examined and analyzed. The first research question sought to discover whether or not there was a significant relationship between student achievement on the MCT and the total number of days of absence from the regular classroom setting. A single sample t-test was utilized to test for any such relationship. None was found. The second research question sought to discover any significant relationship between MCT test scores of students who had been subject to school suspension and those students who had not been suspended. Utilizing a second single sample t-test, a significant relationship was discovered between these variables. Those who were subject to school suspension scored significantly lower than those never subject to school suspension.

Ancillary findings in the study revealed that Black male students comprised a disproportionate amount of students who were numbered with in the grouping of suspended students. Also, Special Education students performed considerably lower on the state assessment than regular education students.
Recommendations for educators and policy makers include, use of alternative discipline models, individualized behavioral plans, increased use of alternative school settings for students with behavioral issues, and examination of minority disciplinary practices on the part of school officials, and increased analysis and flexibility with attendance requirements.

Suggestions for future research include the following: (1) Analyze student achievement on standardized testing assessments in school contexts which utilize alternative models of student discipline. (2) Analyze relationships between students' absence from the regular classroom and student achievement through a variety of assessment formats. Further research is suggested to look at these relationships with differing kinds of student assessments, including course grading and grade point averages.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

On January 8th, 2002, President George W. Bush signed into law legislation that has become commonly known as "No Child Left Behind" (NCLB). This transforming piece of legislation continues to change the face of public education in the United States. In short, it gives the various States’ departments of education a directive to establish new standards and models of accountability for every public school in the nation that wish to receive federal funding. NCLB mandates that all schools outline a timetable for improvement in student achievement in various academic areas. If student performance on standardized testing assessments and other academic indicators (OAI) are not at acceptable levels, and a prescribed level of growth is not met each year by each school, sanctions will ensue.

In order to meet federal standards Mississippi has implemented a plan to track adequate yearly progress (AYP) for all schools in the state (Mississippi Department of Education, 2004). This progress rate has been defined through a number of pertinent factors, both academic and otherwise.

Thus, every school is assigned a performance classification that hinges upon two factors. First, schools are expected to meet a certain level of growth each academic year as seen through standardized assessment results. Second, there is reference to the so called other academic indicators (OAI). This is in part assessed by the percentage of students who are achieving at certain levels of accomplishment on the aforementioned standardized assessments. In accordance with NCLB (2001), the acceptable percentage of
academic growth per year is with a minimum of 93% of a school’s overall average daily attendance (ADA) for a nine month academic year.

Schools not meeting their AYP are subject to various forms of sanction. In Mississippi, the timeline for sanctions due to inadequate school improvement under NCLB is as follows. After the first year of not meeting AYP, there are in fact no sanctions levied against the school. The second year a school does not successfully meet AYP, the school is placed in the category of school improvement year 1 and parents of children in that school are offered a choice to send their children elsewhere. For the third consecutive year of missing AYP, again the school is placed in school improvement and must offer supplemental educational services to students. In the fourth consecutive year of missing AYP, additional corrective actions are taken. In the fifth year of failing to meet AYP, a process of school restructuring may begin. During this time of restructuring, extensive reformatting of the school is planned. At year six of not meeting AYP, The restructuring plan of the previous year is implemented (NCLB, 2001). In short, the federal government, and the various state departments of education have set into motion a structure and process of definitive accountability for educators throughout the country.

In many districts, the accountability for student success is on placed upon the classroom teachers. If students in their classrooms are not meeting basic standards on state delivered standardized tests, teachers are subject to sanctions from their districts. As one can imagine, the pressure to have students perform is very high on these educators. However, the reality shows that the responsibility to perform at acceptable academic standards is not only the responsibility of teachers. As seen in the work of Dika, Granville and Singh (2002), there are many other factors which come into play when
examining a student's success or failure in the classroom. This study seeks to examine
the possible links between 7th Grade Mathematics Mississippi Curriculum Test (MCT)
scores and various factors connected to student absence from the regular school setting.
Although there may be many varied reasons for a student's absence from the regular
school setting, in many cases the decision to be truant is made on the part of the students
themselves. In their study, Kinder, Wakefield and Wilkin (1996), after conducting
numerous interviews from students in 7th grade and above, identified the following
reasons for student chosen truancy: the influence of friends and peers, truancy as a way to
seek peer social status and/or acceptance, poor relationship with teachers, perceiving
classroom content and instruction as being irrelevant or not stimulating, various family
issues, and the experience of bullying at school.

To combat these factors, Mississippi law is in place that seeks to ensure that students
are in attendance for a sufficient period of time per school year (Compulsory School
Attendance Law §37-13-91 of the Mississippi Code 1972). Truancy of students from
school is related to numerous issues and problems that plague society; economic,
criminal, educational and otherwise. Students are absent from school for a variety of
reasons, some reasonable, some valid, and some not.

As a part of different forms of assertive discipline plans utilized by school districts
across the nation, some student absences are the result of the school's decision to put a
student in out of school suspension (OSS) for disciplinary infractions. In the past few
decades, there has been a move to seek alternative disciplinary measures to out of school
suspension. In light of this, many districts have chosen to remove students from their
normal learning classroom as a result of misbehavior and place them in a program of in-
school suspension (ISS). Although programs vary from school to school and district to district, the basics of most programs of ISS are as follows; students show up to school and are placed in an alternative classroom setting apart from their regular classes. Although there is usually a qualified teacher assigned to oversee ISS, and in most cases, various assistants, including Special Education trained personnel, in the vast majority of programs students are placed in a school setting which does not afford the opportunity to ask questions of any particular subject area teacher or seek help with assignments from these teachers during their stay in ISS. In short, the broad learning environment of the regular classroom is lost to these students for the duration of their suspension (Short, 1988).

Statement of the Problem

This study seeks to examine various kinds of absences, i.e., student initiated or school imposed, and differences in student performance on the MCT 7th grade mathematics assessment. While having students out of the regular classroom instructional setting due to their decision not to be present and in our enactment of disciplinary consequences of various assertive discipline plans to include the removal of students from their regular academic setting, may these situations, school imposed and student chosen, be counterproductive to the goals of academic progress and proficiency? If our students are not in the classroom for a regulated period of instruction time, for reasons either excused or unexcused, can we really expect them to display the proper level of success and academic growth?
Research Questions

Is there a statistically significant difference between 7th grade students’ overall days of cumulative absence and students’ performance on the 7th grade Mississippi Curriculum Test in mathematics? Is there a statistically significant difference between students’ performance on the 7th grade Mississippi Curriculum Test in mathematics between those students who received school suspension and the performance of those students who did not receive suspension?

Statement of Hypotheses

In light of the research questions being proposed and in accord with the purposes of statistical analysis, the statements of hypotheses are presented in their null form.

Ho1: There are no statistically significant differences in total classroom absences from the regular classroom setting between students who scored advanced or proficient, and students who scored basic or minimal on the Mississippi Curriculum Test for 7th grade mathematics.

Ho2: There are no statistically significant differences between students’ performance on the Mississippi Curriculum Test for 7th grade mathematics between students who are absent from the regular classroom setting due to assignment to In-School Suspension and Out-of-School Suspension, and students not assigned as such.

Definitions

For the purposes of this study, there are certain terms that should be understood in context, with regard to their relationship with student truancy, academic assessment, and disciplinary practices within the school setting.
In-School Suspension – Disciplinary action taken by a school or school district such that the student receiving the ISS is denied presence in the regular classroom environment. The student may be present at a designated school district location where that student is afforded the opportunity to complete academic work in the presence of an educational professional. Assignment to ISS is usually only for a relatively short, fixed period of time.

Out-of-School Suspension – A disciplinary action taken on the part of a school or school district whereas a student is barred from the school setting, and denied the experience of a normal academic educational experience for a fixed period of time.

Truant – A student who is absent from school without permission, and/or without a legal valid reason for such absence.

Mississippi Curriculum Test (MCT) – The standardized test used in the state of Mississippi to assess student achievement in mathematics and English.

Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) – Primarily utilizes academic assessments to measure the progress of public schools, districts, and states and includes separate measurable annual objectives for the continuous and significant growth for each of the identified sub-groupings within.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) – Federal legislation signed into law in January of 2002 which mandates state governments to establish procedures to measure student academic achievement and growth and address levels of proficiency where applicable.

Average Daily Attendance (ADA) - The average nine month attendance at any given school
Assertive Discipline - A structured, systematic approach designed to assist educators in running an organized teacher-in-charge classroom environment. Often times, specific misbehaviors are addressed with a prescribed option of disciplinary consequences.

Delimitations to the Proposed Research Dissertation

This research study has a limited population from which information was obtained. This information was drawn from the records of one seventh grade class from a small southeastern state, and consists of 274 students who have taken the Mississippi Curriculum Test in mathematics during their seventh grade year.

The conclusions drawn from this research study may also be limited by the scope and breadth of the research sources examined and contained in the research base of the proposed study.

Inherent limitations may exist in the study in that there may be other research and data that may have strong influence upon the research findings, but are unknown to the researcher at the onset of the investigation. But this fact seems to be the case in all research, such that one cannot account for what is unknown before the fact (Daniel & Terrell, 1995; Gummesson, 1998).

Another limitation may be the very nature of the research method being a single case study, in that it may pose some challenges to the external validity of findings. Many researchers have challenged the ability to prove external validity with the use of such a method (Babbie, 1990; Churchill, 1991; Zikmund, 1991).

Justification of the Study

The face of public education in America has undergone dramatic change in recent years. Following a perceived crisis in American education in the past two decades, the
federal government stepped in with the No Child Left Behind act of 2001. The most striking concept of this piece of legislation is its emphasis on greater levels of accountability for schools in relation to student achievement. Although the factors related to student achievement vary greatly, the responsibility lies heavily on the institutions of public education to examine and analyze this data, and utilize it in order to best serve the educational needs of the students served.

There are numerous variables that are taken into consideration when addressing the issue of student academic performance and growth. Research points to issues connected to variables such as gender, age, learning styles, instructional styles, economic standing, etc. While all of these variables do stand in relationship to student achievement, this study seeks to examine the variable of student attendance and presence in the classroom for instructional time and its connection to student achievement. Available research also indicates very strong relationships between student truancy and drop out rates, crime, and other antisocial behaviors to be examined further in this study (Bell, Rosen, & Dynlacht, 1994; Huizinga, Loeber, and Thornberry, 1995; Rohrman, 1993).

In light of this available research, it seems vital to look at the relationship between student lack of attendance and students’ performance on standardized, state mandated tests. In many states, including the one to be utilized in this study, school accreditation levels and standing heavily hinge upon student success on these standardized tests. One must also take into consideration the heavy accountability levied on schools by “No Child Left Behind,” and the importance of both attendance and test scores in their relationship to calculating if a school is making annual yearly progress (AYP).
In reference to the examination of ISS and OSS rates of suspension and student achievement on standardized test scores, there are numerous issues to be explored. Due to the striking effects as seen in the research, the disciplinary practice of sending students out of school in OSS has been greatly replaced in many schools with programs of ISS. Research strongly supports the common sense assertion that, when at all possible, it is better to have students in a school environment rather than out of school without adult supervision and guidance.

The programs of ISS utilized throughout the country today and through the past three decades vary greatly in their implementation (Short, 1988). Some of these differences will be examined in the next chapter of this study. Regardless of specific implementation practices between programs, the overall practice of applying ISS to misbehaving students is effective universally inasmuch as it does remove students with disruptive behavioral issues from the classroom, providing an environmental barrier from the process of teaching and learning if it be only for a short period of time.

Given these realities and in the current context of increasing accountability for student academic success being placed on schools, it seems prudent to examine whether or not the common and widely used disciplinary practice of school suspension may in fact be in a negative relationship with respect to student academic success on standardized tests.
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The objective of this research study is to examine possible statistically significant relationships between 7th grade Mississippi Curriculum Test mathematics scores and the occurrence of student absenteeism, either student initiated or school imposed through out of school suspension and/or in school suspension. Issues and factors relevant to the many aspects which contribute to student absence from the traditional academic classroom setting are explored and presented in this section of the study. This review of pertinent literature is by no means meant to be exhaustive of any of the associated issues, but rather will be directed to the following purposes.

It is the main purpose of this section of the study to attempt to show the connection between this research topic and the already existing base of literature associated with issues of student absence and student academic performance. Second, it will attempt to show how the research study fits into the body of already existing literature and data associated with research on truancy, suspension, and student academic achievement. Sources, academic, empirical, governmentally generated, and otherwise, have been reviewed, analyzed, and interpreted in order to evaluate their pertinence and relevance in consideration for their inclusion into this segment of the study.

There are many factors that influence student educational outcomes including student achievement, attendance, and attitudes towards education. At present, there are 36 states in the union that utilize the No Child Left Behind accountability model in assessing their compliance to AYP (Mississippi Department of Education, 2004). The increasing demand for NCLB compliance for yearly growth has increased focus upon the
relationship between student achievement and school attendance. This in turn causes us to examine the effect of absences, both student decided absences and school imposed absences from the normal educational setting and its relationship to student achievement on a standardized assessment such as the MCT.

An Historical Move Toward Increased Accountability

The movement for increased accountability and standards in American public education was thrust into public view in 1983 with the release of the National Commission on Excellence in Education’s report entitled, A NATION AT RISK: The Imperative for Educational Reform. Roughly two years prior, then Secretary of Education, Terrel Howard Bell, asked the commission to make a report on the quality of education in America. The results of the report would send shock waves throughout educational systems across the nation. Although several areas concerned with the greater scope of the educational system were reported upon, what follows is an overview of the major findings of that report with respect to curricula and student achievement. With respect to overall educational course content across the nation, the committee reported that:

Secondary school curricula have been homogenized, diluted, and diffused to the point that they no longer have a central purpose. This curricular smorgasbord, combined with extensive student choice, explains a great deal about where we find ourselves today. We offer intermediate algebra, but only 31 percent of our recent high school graduates complete it; we offer French I, but only 13 percent complete it; and we offer geography, but only 16 percent complete it. Calculus is available in schools enrolling about 60 percent of all students, but only
6 percent of all students complete it (A NATION AT RISK: The Imperative For Educational Reform, 1983).

The implication of the above findings indicated that in the main, there was not any type of core curricular requirements or standards for most secondary students across the country. As well, there was strong indication that the level of rigor in the courses being offered and selected by students was less than academically and intellectually challenging. The lack of participation in the higher level courses mentioned above alludes to this fact quite directly. To drive this point home more forcefully, the committee also reported the following information with respect to what types of coursework American youths were engaged in:

Twenty-five percent of the credits earned by general track high school students are in physical and health education, work experience outside the school, remedial English and mathematics, and personal service and development courses, such as training for adulthood and marriage (A NATION AT RISK: The Imperative for Educational Reform, 1983).

In light of these findings, the committee recommended a number of reforms to address the academic shortfalls found evident throughout American public educational systems. The recommendations to be presented hereafter are concerned primarily with curriculum content and student outcomes. The following are some of the committee’s recommendations:

- The teaching of English in high school should equip graduates to: (a) comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and use what they read; (b) well-organized, effective papers; (c) effectively
and discuss ideas intelligently; and (d) our literary
heritage and how it enhances imagination and ethical
understanding, and how it relates to the customs, ideas, and
values of today’s life and culture.

- The teaching of mathematics in high school should equip
  graduates to: (a) geometric and algebraic concepts;
  (b) elementary probability and statistics; (c) apply
  mathematics in everyday situations; and (d) estimate, approximate,
  measure, and test the accuracy of their calculations.

- The teaching of science in high school should provide graduates
  with an introduction to: (a) concepts, laws, and processes of
  the physical and biological sciences; (b) methods of
  scientific inquiry and reasoning; (c) application of
  scientific knowledge to everyday life; and (d) social and
  environmental implications of scientific and technological
  development. (A NATION AT RISK: The Imperative For Educational
  Reform, 1983).

The evaluation of the commission and the ensuing call for change was a clarion call
for educational reform. However, it was not the only voice calling for change in the
educational system. For example, Brown University professor Ted Sizer had conducted a
five year study of high schools from various locations and of various demographic make
up from throughout the United States. His study ran from 1979 through 1984 and at its
conclusion he founded the Coalition of Essential Schools as a way of addressing the
shortcomings uncovered in his study. Amongst the several basic educational principals recommended, the organization suggested the following:

- The school should be focused on helping students learn to use their minds well.
- Less is more: Knowing few subjects thoroughly is more productive than learning little about many.
- The goals of a school should apply to all students.
- Teaching and learning should be personalized (The Coalition of Essential Schools Common Principles, n.d.).

The move and call for higher educational standards in American public education were furthered by educators like Ted Sizer and others of similar mindsets throughout the remainder of the decade. The next major thrust would come in 1989, when President George H. W. Bush met with the nation’s governors in Virginia to lay the foundations of what would eventually be Goals 2000: Educate America Act of 1994. Both George H. W. Bush and Bill Clinton focused upon the goals laid out in this summit as a guide for their educational policies throughout their respective presidencies. Some of the particulars of this set of goals were that by the year 2000:

- Every child will start school ready to learn.
- The high school graduation rate will increase to at least 90 percent.
- The nation's teaching force will have access to programs for continued improvement of their professional skills.
- U.S. students will be first in the world in science and mathematics achievement.
- Every adult American will be literate and will possess the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a global economy and exercise rights and responsibilities.
of citizenship. Every school in the United States will be free of drugs, violence, and the unauthorized presence of firearms and alcohol and will offer a disciplined environment conducive to learning. (GOALS 2000: Educate America Act, 2004).

We see in these goals the precursors to the present law of the land, “No Child Left Behind.” Although this law contains many complicated facets, the United States Department of Education describes the four basic pillars of the law as follows; “No Child Left Behind is based on stronger accountability for results, more freedom for states and communities, proven education methods, and more choices for parents (United States Department of Education, 1993).” Two of the pillars that are of particular importance to the proposed study are concerned with accountability and methodology. The United States Department of Education describes stronger accountability for results in this way, Under No Child Left Behind, states are working to close the achievement gap and make sure all students, including those who are disadvantaged, achieve academic proficiency.

Annual state and school district report cards inform parents and communities about state and school progress. Schools that do not make progress must provide supplemental services, such as free tutoring or after-school assistance; take corrective actions; and, if still not making adequate yearly progress after five years, make dramatic changes to the way the school is run (United States Department of Education, 1993). Amongst the specific goals of NCLB are the following, mandatory testing of students, tests must be aligned with approved standards, schools must demonstrate adequate yearly progress, and perhaps most strikingly, all students must reach an achievement level of proficient by the year 2014 (NCLB, 2004). The mandate of law is clear; the only acceptable outcome for
public schools districts across the country are increased student academic success and achievement.

With regards to educational methods to reach these goals, the United States Department of Education presents the following:

No Child Left Behind puts emphasis on determining which educational programs and practices have been proven effective through rigorous scientific research. Federal funding is targeted to support these programs and teaching methods that work to improve student learning and achievement... (United States Department of Education, 1993).

We see in the historical progression of the past few decades that the demand for greater levels of accountability for student achievement has become an expectation that now holds with it the authority of law.

Truancy – An Overview

It may be a reasonable assertion to conclude that a lack of attendance at school on a regular basis would have a negative effect upon a student’s standardized test scores. However, as Stoll (1990) suggests, there are multiple constituent factors that go into influencing a student’s academic performance on such assessments including gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status, language proficiency, parents, educational background, etc. All of these factors may be seen as being predictors of a student’s success or failure on standardized assessments and have been researched as such. To complicate the issue even further, there is no set definition in research circles as to the meaning of a school absence or truancy. In short, researchers may be using the same verbiage, but have very different operational definitions thereof. Stoll (1990) expresses that at present,
researchers and academics are in the process of agreeing on an overall operational definition of terms with regards to absence and truancy. For his part, Stoll defines truancy or excessive absences as an absence from school for no legitimate reason (Stoll, 1990).

Greater or lesser levels of student attendance have the potential to significantly impact levels of student achievement positively or negatively as has been shown in several previous research studies (Alspaugh, 1991; Brent & DiObilda, 1993; Fitchen, 1994; Levine, 1996; Mao, M. X., Whitsett, M. D., & Mellor, L. T., 1998; Paredes, V., 1993). These studies and others have suggested the long lasting negative effects of non-attendance not only to those students who are not present in schools, but to every other aspect of American Society; economic, social and otherwise. In some of the country’s major cities, student truancy rates reach as high as 30% (Railsack, 2004). As seen below, some of the statistical information on this topic may be cause for great concern:

Detroit’s forty public school attendance officers investigated 66,440 truant complaints during the 1994-1995 school year (Ingersoll & LeBoeuf 1997). In Chicago, a study conducted during the 1995-1996 school year indicated that the average 10th grader missed six weeks of instruction (Roderick et. al., 1997) In the state of Wisconsin during the 1998-99 school year, 1.6% of enrolled students, 15,600 were truant per day. Truancy accounted for 1/3 of total absences that year. (Legislative Audit Committee, 2007).

As previously mentioned, some U.S. cities report rates of student truancy as high as 30%. This rate was reported by Railsack in a 2004 report by the North West Regional Educational Laboratory concerning the issue of poor student attendance in American public schools.
A 1996-97 national study that reviewed discipline issues found that school principals identified school absenteeism, class cutting, and tardiness as the primary discipline problems in their schools (Heaviside, S., Rowand, C., Williams, C., and Farris, E., 1998).

These discipline problems also seem to cut across lines of gender. Research data indicates that boys are only slightly more likely to be sent to court for occurrences of truancy than girls. In statistics collected by the National Center for Juvenile Justice, 54% of all petitioned truancy cases between the years of 1990 and 1999 were for males, and 46% for females (Puzzanchera, 2003). However, there are higher occurrences of truancy and drop-out rates present in other demographic categories.

In their 1990 work, Why Children Reject School, Chiland and Young point to alarming statistics with reference to children and poverty in the United States. Their statistics were drawn from the 1987 report of the Committee for Economic Development. According to that committee report, 25 percent of children in the United States live in a state of poverty. Of this 25 percent, almost two-thirds of these children are White. Yet proportionately speaking, Black and Hispanic children are more vulnerable to fall into poverty, with 43 percent of Black children and 40 percent of Hispanic children living below the poverty level. Although twenty years old, there has been no dramatic statistical shift for the better in these levels since the issuance of that report. Chiland and Young (1990) state the following:

Almost 80 percent of those living in poverty are women and children, and half of those in poverty live in families headed by single parent women ...children of single parents perform more poorly in school than those with both parents at home. Their dropout rate is nearly twice as high and they constitute a large
segment of children identified as school failures, school refusers, and school
dropouts. Children born into poor, single-parent households are more likely than
other children to be the children of teenage parents and are more prone to become
teensage parents themselves (Chiland & Young, 1990, p. 7).

Research indicates a positive relationship between student truancy and increased
probability of impending delinquent activity, socialization problems, and educational
failure. If there is a lack of interest and commitment to regular school attendance, the risk
factor probability for substance abuse, delinquency, teen pregnancy, and dropping out of
school increase dramatically (Bell, Rosen, and Dynlacht, 1994; Huizinga, Loeber, and
Thornberry, 1995; Rohrman, 1993).

A study conducted by the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
found that when students are not present in the academic school setting they are more
prone to be involved in incidence of physical violence and to be in possession of
weapons. The study also indicated that students who are not in school are statistically
much more likely to smoke, use alcohol, marijuana and cocaine as well as being more
likely to be engaged in sexual intercourse (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention,

In addition to being prone to these negative behaviors, students who are frequently
truant tend to have the lowest rates of academic achievement. In their research study,
Ehren, Lenz, and Morris (1991) attempted to configure a model that would help predict
drop out rates from high school for fourth through eighth grade students. They found that
frequent absence and the number of D and F grades received were significant predictors
of eventual academic failure and occurrences of students dropping out of school.
Research has pointed to a vicious cycle of serious misbehavior, out of school suspension, and academic failure that can culminate in a student's dropping out of school or being expelled (Black, 1999; Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollack, & Rock, 1986; Mayer, 1995).

Causes of Truancy

Although there are as many reasons students go truant as there are truants, the particular causes for student lack of attendance in school can be placed in the following categories. According to Baker, Sigman, and Nugent, (2001), they are as follows:

Family: Often times, the attitude of the student’s family toward education can have a strong influence upon a student’s regular attendance at school. As well, there are issues concerning a lack of parental guidance and support that come into play with respect to a student’s truancy. Other familial issues including drug and/or alcohol abuse and a lack of knowledge concerning attendance laws are all issues that may have negative effects on a student’s regular presence in school.

Economics: Economic factors may include whether or not the student is employed, if they lack adequate transportation or childcare, if they are living in a single parent home, if they have a high rate of mobility or if their parents have multiple jobs.

School: Although school factors are numerous, they may include the following considerations. The school environment such as size, attitudes and dispositions of students, teachers, and administrators may all have effect upon student attendance rates. Also, a school’s lack of consistency in attendance policies, or lack of strong consequence to truancy, as well as a school’s lack of ability to engage a diverse student body in meaningful academic engagement all are contributing factors to a lack of attendance.
In many cases, the decision to be truant is made on the part of the students themselves. In their study, Kinder, Wakefield and Wilkin (1996), after conducting numerous interviews from students in 7th grade and above, identified the following reasons for student chosen truancy: the influence of friends and peers, truancy as a way to seek peer social status and/or acceptance, poor relationship with teachers, perceiving classroom content and instruction as being irrelevant or not stimulating, various family issues, and the experience of bullying at school.

In yet another research study, the reasons for students' truancy from class were found to generally fall into one of the following categories:

- They feel angry about something, whether at school or at home.
- Their friends or peers are truant.
- They want attention, even if it is for doing something negative.
- They feel that there are better things to do than go to school.
- They feel bullied.
- They may have learning difficulties or disabilities and find it less stressful to just skip school.
- They are bored with school (Rohrman, 1993).

Many factors similar to these were also found by Railsack in a 2004 study. Students offered the following reasons for their non attendance:

- Classes were viewed as boring, irrelevant, and a waste of time.
- Students did not have a positive relationship with their teachers.
- Students did not have a positive relationship with other students.
- Students were suspended too often.
• Students did not feel safe at school.
• Students could not keep up with the demands of schoolwork or had failing grades.
• Classes were not academically challenging enough, whereas students could miss class days and still obtain credit.
• Students could not go to school and work at the same time.

Even more recently there is research presented for the causes of student truancy. For example in Henry’s 2007 article entitled, Who’s Skipping School: Characteristics of Truants in 8th and 10th Grade, researchers see similar characteristics as the ones present in the earlier studies. This research was partially funded through the National Institute on Drug Abuse and had two objectives. The first was to ascertain the occurrence of recent truancy; that is, truancy that occurred in the 4 weeks prior to the data collection. Using the, 2003 Wave of Monitoring the Future, data was analyzed and Logistical regression was applied to the collected data. The results indicated that 11% of 8th graders and more than 16% of 10th graders had self reported being truant in the delineated time frame.

The second objective was to ascertain and identify the most salient predictors of the occurrences of truancy in those cases. The four predictors identified are having large amounts of unsupervised time after school, poor grades in school, low educational aspirations, and drug use.

Lounsbury (2004) and fellow researchers sought to examine personality traits of adolescent aged students too see if there were any connections between certain personality characteristics and the occurrence of student absenteeism. The pool of participants in their study included 248 seventh grade students, 321 tenth grade students and 282 twelfth grade students. In their study they sought out a connection between the
Big Five personality traits of Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Emotional Stability, Extraversion and Openness; and the more narrow traits of Aggression, Optimism, Tough-Mindedness, and Work Drive with student absenteeism.

The Big Five all showed significant correlations with occurrences of student absenteeism. The less broad trait of Work Drive did add a level of incremental variance in predicting absences beyond the influence of the Big Five traits. One of the possible values of this study might be in identifying potential truancy problems at an earlier stage in the educational process, allowing educators to be more proactive in dealing with absentee issues.

In some manner, students may be absent from the classroom on a regular basis due to their fears and not feeling secure at school. Statistics from the 1999-2000 school year give an idea of the issues that are present in American public schools which cause students to feel a lack of security. The following gives an indication of the percentage of public schools with specific types of criminal activity. Schools reported these issues as follows:

- Physical attack or fight without a weapon, 64%
- Threats of physical attack without a weapon, 52%
- Vandalism, 51%
- Theft or larceny, 46%
- Possession of a knife or sharp object, 43%
- Sexual harassment, 36%
- Possession or use of alcohol or illegal drugs, 27%

(National Center for Educational Statistics, 2004).
Effects of Truancy

Research indicates that students with the greatest rates of absenteeism, have the lowest rates of academic achievement, and because they are the students most likely to drop out of school, they have high dropout rates also (Dynarski & Gleason, 1999). The detrimental consequences of dropping out of school are well researched and documented. School dropouts have significantly fewer job prospects, make lower salaries, and are more often unemployed than young people who stay in school (U.S. Department of Education, 1993).

As one might reasonably assert, it is found that students who drop out of school before completion are also more likely to depend on welfare, experience unstable marriages, and serve time in prison than those who complete their schooling (Snyder & Sickmund, 1995; U.S. Department of Education, 1993).

Out of School Suspension

There are in fact situations where a student’s absence from school is imposed from the school itself. A student may be sent home from school for varying periods of time on OSS (Out of School Suspension). In most cases, this severe form of punishment is levied for serious infractions of school behavioral policies and/or other inappropriate behavior on the part of the student.

It is argued that it is most often utilized as a tool to maintain a safe and orderly school environment in that it removes from the school setting students who may pose a danger to other students and/or school personnel. In other cases, it is imposed after the build up of numerous minor infractions. However, some research suggests that in a majority of cases,
it is levied for preventable, minor offenses of school policy, not associated with
dangerous or violent behavior on the part of the student (Dupper, 1998).

Although OSS is a commonly used disciplinary tool in public schools, research that
suggests it is an ineffective means to the end of behavioral formation (McFadden &
Marsh, 1992). As is often the case, the students who most frequently are assigned to OSS
are the most vulnerable, academically, economically and emotionally (Skiba & Peterson,
2000).

Recent research suggests a strong link between school suspension and subsequent
antisocial behavior in youth to include both acts of violence and criminal activity.
Hemphill, Toumbourou , Herrenkohl , McMorris, and Catalano (2006) examined the data
within a cross-national longitudinal study on the advancement of antisocial behaviors of
approximately 4000 students from the ages of 12 to 16 years of age. The study included
youth from Victoria, Australia and the State of Washington. Upon utilizing a multivariate
logistical regression analyses upon the pertinent variables, it was concluded that school
suspension may indeed increase the likelihood of future antisocial behavior in youth.

As well as these implied social consequences, there are academic issues to be
addressed in light of the current national environment of high stakes testing and
educational accountability. Removing students from the controlled learning environment
of school may in fact hurt their ability to perform well on these increasingly important
assessments. On a number of levels, in the NCLB world of high accountability, these
disciplinary practices may do more damage than good.

Within the context of an assertive discipline plan, the disciplinary measure of OSS
seems to be quite straight forward and reasonable. If a student continues to be a
behavioral problem, then that student must deal with the negative consequences that the misbehavior brings with it. However in a larger view, it may be necessary to understand the greater context of school as an educational setting and not just the punitive aspects of school discipline.

Following in the philosophy of John Dewey, Adams (1992) is of the belief that the main purpose of public education is to produce responsible citizens. Public education is the main facilitator of socialization skills including the promotion of self discipline, cooperation and conformity to social norms. The school setting is the place where these skills are most fostered and promoted. If a student who lacks these skills is sent home, away from the educational setting, the likelihood of these skills being honed and mastered diminishes.

Hochman and Womer (1987) believe that the removal of a student from the instructional setting actually fails the student because the school does nothing to help guide and instruct the students as to the causes of their poor behavior, and doesn’t help direct them into positive ways of dealing with these issues. They suggest that, punishment for the sake of punishment does little to address the complex myriad of behavioral problems that students deal with in the modern context.

Costenbader and Markson (1998) describe a broad realm of behavioral management techniques. They conducted their study considering the behavior and experience of 620 middle and high school students in inner-city school settings. Their study utilized a fifteen item survey with questions centering upon issues of demographics, extracurricular activities, involvement with the criminal justice system, and the type of suspension served, either ISS or OSS. Those students who had been assigned OSS were given an
additional six question follow up form to fill out to assess the reasons for their assignment to OSS. The resulting data showed that the greatest reason for OSS assignment was physical aggression followed by verbal disrespect and use of profanity with staff members.

They considered the use of OSS as a form of behavioral modification to be the least effective of any practice. They suggest that for students who are frequently behavioral problems, it is often the case that they prefer to be away from the educational environment of school anyway. It may be contended that for these students, OSS is seen as a reward rather than as a punishment used to redirect their inappropriate and disruptive behavior.

In theory at least, it is hoped that the rendering of OSS as a punishment will be perceived by both the student and the parent, as one of the most forceful and severe punishments that a school can render next to full expulsion. In turn, it is hoped that this will hinder the student from repeating the offense upon return from the suspension. However, given the fact that research indicates that many students are suspended on multiple occasions for similar offenses, the efficacy of this form of deterrence must come into question (Costenbader & Markson, 1998; McFadden & Marsh., 1992; Skiba & Peterson 2000).

In a ten state survey consisting only of students with discipline documentation already in place, Costenbader and Markson (1998) discovered that of those students already disciplined with OSS, 42% of them had one or more previous suspensions.

Ambrose and Gibson (1995) found in researching their own middle school of approximately 500 students that 84 out of 89 suspensions were assigned to students who
had been suspended at some point already in that same school year. Fourteen of those 84 students had been suspended twice, ten of them had been suspended three times, four had been suspended four times, and two had been suspended five times during that school year. Given this kind of research, the argument for suspension as a form of deterrence and an effective form of behavioral modification is suspect.

Patterson (1985) is of the conviction that OSS can actually increase the probability of repeated behavioral issues from a child sent home for inappropriate behaviors. He focuses this belief on the fact that, for many students returning from their suspension time, their level of frustration tends to increase dramatically due to being behind academically as a result of their absence.

Perhaps one of the most striking correlations suggests that students who are assigned to OSS are five times more likely to become school drop-outs than those never assigned to OSS. Being placed on OSS is in the top three reasons for students choosing to drop out of school (Deridder, 1991).

In-School Suspension

It seems apparent through a review of various data that the issuance of OSS may be effective in separating potentially dangerous and/or unruly students from the regular school environment, but seems to accomplish little else in addressing the behavioral problems that were the initial cause of the OSS itself. In an attempt to address all of these issues, educators have developed various in-school programs which try to address the need for both separation, and engagement of the behavioral issues underscoring disruptive and/or potentially harmful behaviors of some students in the classroom setting.
For our purposes, in-school suspension can be understood as “a program to which a student is assigned because of disruptive behavior for a specific amount of time” (Sheets, 1996, p.87). Again for our purposes, we will use Sheets’ definition of disruptive behavior as being:

behavior that interferes with the student’s own learning and/or the educational process of others, and requires attention and assistance beyond that which traditional programs can provide or results in frequent conflicts of a disruptive nature while the student is under the jurisdiction of the school, either in or out of the classroom (Sheets, 1996, p.86).

Various forms of program implementation have developed over the past thirty some years to meet the differing needs of school districts and the children they serve. What follows is a brief overview of those various programs and points of focus for each.

One of the first formal expositions on ISS programming came in 1976 through an article in American School board Journal, by D. M. O’Brien. His article entitled, In-School Suspension: Are they the new way, features details of four schools in suburban Minneapolis that began utilizing an in-school suspension program in 1971. These earliest programs were established with the understanding that in order for disciplinary measures to be more effective, they must be about both education as well as being just forms of punishment. The Minneapolis programs were designed to be three quarters of behavioral education and one quarter of punishment. The main thrust behind those first ISS programs is summed up by O’Brien in his article when he writes, “the major purpose of the program was to teach students to accept the consequences for their actions and to make them think about what they’re doing” (p.36).

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In her research of various ISS programs being conducted during the 1980s, Paula Short (1988) identified the five most prevalent characteristics of ISS programs as practiced during that time:

- Students were isolated with no interaction with other ISS students or others in the school.
- Students ate their lunches in isolation in the cafeteria after other students had completed lunch.
- The average length of assignment to ISS was three to five days.
- Talking was not allowed and privileges were restricted.
- Regular classroom teachers sent assignments for the ISS students to complete.

(Short, 1988, p.11-12)

We see in the following decade of the 1990s that ISS programs around the country diversified somewhat in their approach. Although the punitive model of the past fifteen to twenty years was still widely utilized, new approaches developed to meet varying needs of school systems across the country. The basic punitive model utilized then and still in use in many systems shared the following characteristics:

Student referrals are for a specific duration of time, from two to ten days in length. Rules are extremely restrictive including minimum restroom use and no talking. Students spend their entire time in ISS completing assignments and doing punitive work, such as picking up trash or cleaning the cafeteria (Short, 1988, p.15-16)

Depending upon needs as assessed by individual schools and districts, other models of ISS were developed and enacted as well during this time frame. Some schools incorporated an academic model of ISS. The rational for this model was based upon the
assumption that student misbehavior was directly associated with poor academic ability and performance; therefore, by making students successful academically their disruptive behaviors will lessen or cease (Short, 1988). Short identifies three main characteristics that were prevalent in this model:

- Academic skills of the ISS student are measured, and learning difficulties are diagnosed and assessed for progress toward identified academic goals.
- Individual instruction in basic skills is provided with support resources available.
- The ISS teacher is trained in diagnosing learning difficulties and instructing basic skills development (p. 12).

The last model identified in Short’s research is the therapeutic model. The core assumption in this model is that student misbehavior results from a specific problem or crisis that the student is experiencing. Through a process of written reflection, the ISS student can ponder about the situation that led to their ISS assignment, and with the help of a teacher, they can analyze their own responses and seek out other more appropriate ways of dealing. The key to this process is that the student must accept responsibility and the consequences of his or her actions. Short describes the key features of this model as follows:

- Improvement of students’ self-image, communication, and problem solving skills, and understanding of the school environment
- Counseling techniques such as individual, group, and peer counseling; reality therapy; and outside referrals
- Staff development for teachers, parent training, and home and school survival training for students
• Identification and monitoring of student behavior control components during and after leaving the ISS program (Short, 1988, p.14).

In some cases school districts and individual schools practicing ISS programming approaches seek to integrate components from the aforementioned models. The Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy published an article of one such program being enacted in an urban U.S. middle school. In that program, the approach was non-punitive and required that students spend their time on academic writing activities as a vehicle to reflect upon their inappropriate behavior while attempting to improve their writing skills (Haley & Watson, 2000). The author describes the program design as such,

The program design included collaboration with the students to clarify the prewriting strategies, identify inappropriate behavior, and discover ways to improve such behavior. The objectives of the in-class literacy extension were (a) to strengthen the students’ ability to apply prewriting strategies and (b) to provide students with an opportunity to reflect on their behavior.

ISS Programs and School Personnel

As seen, much of the research on ISS programs throughout the country focuses on the structure of individual programs. But too, there is also a fair amount of research with regards to the specific role of various school personnel in the implementation of ISS programs. Administrators, regular classroom faculty, ISS teachers and staff, as well as other support personnel all have influential roles in effective implementation.

More and more, in the field of educational leadership, principals and other school administrators are seeing their leadership role in respect to being the instructional leader in their various school settings. This perspective as instructional leader has implications
to the implementation and maintenance of ISS programs. Like any other program within a school, it is imperative that the school principal be actively involved in the program in order for it to meet the desired goals. For example, the North Carolina State Department of Public Instruction (1986) presented an overview of their desired program of ISS and the professional role of schools administrators in the following:

At the beginning of the school year, principals of participating schools, along with the ISS teacher, should communicate complete information about the ISS program to all students, faculty, and parents. Special effort should be made to familiarize the faculties with the program's objectives and procedures. (p.74)

The point here is clear, as an instructional leader, it is the responsibility of the school principal and administration to clearly articulate the program implementation procedures as well as expectations and intended outcomes to the faculty and staff at large. People are much more inclined to cooperate and be supportive of an instructional program if they are aware of the procedures and intended objectives to which they are to be held responsible. They are also more inclined to buy into a program if it is evident that there is administrative support for its success.

Mizell (1978) alludes to this perspective when he expresses that the success of any academic program in part depends upon the commitment and leadership of those people involved in the implementation and execution of a given program. For the school principal and other involved administrators, it is vital that their commitment and enthusiasm for the program be clearly expressed to faculty and staff members who will be the chief facilitators of the given program.
In order to ensure proper implementation of ISS programs, several necessary steps must be taken on the part of administrators to ensure an attitude of “buy in” from regular classroom teachers. As Corbett (1981) expressed,

Assuming principals wish to ensure fidelity between what is intended and what actually occurs, four issues need to be resolved: 1) involvement of faculty, ISS teachers and aides; 2) training programs for everyone involved; 3) visibility and availability of the ISS program and personnel, and 4) efficient distribution of information regarding ISS. (p. 59)

If an ISS program is to be effective in meeting the needs of students with behavioral and/or academic issues, it must be viewed by all involved as a cooperative effort on behalf of the students. It cannot be seen by administrators and regular classroom teachers as being someone else’s program. By addressing the issues listed above, there is a greater probability of success in implementing and executing an effective ISS program.

Leatt (1987) summarized this belief in his article entitled, In-School Suspension Programs for at-risk Students:

The entire staff must embrace the program; they must know how they fit in and what the goals of the program are. Unless the program has the full support of the staff, who may well be required to sacrifice some time to make it work, it has little chance of success. The staff’s commitment will give the students the impression that teachers and administrators mean business and are serious about helping students find answers to their problems. It does not necessarily follow that all staff will feel comfortable with changes that are needed to facilitate the smooth operation of the program, but if
the staff had a clear role in the design of the program, there is a greater chance they will work with the new system. (p.19)

The disposition of staff members working directly in the ISS program too can have an effect upon program efficacy. Lawson (1987) described the necessary qualities that administrators ought to be looking for in their ISS staffing placements. The ISS director must be a disciplinarian for the students, an academic tutor for them, as well as a counselor. It is truly a professional challenge for anyone to take on even one of these roles for students today, but to help ensure a successful program, administrators must find potential staff that can exhibit a viable amount of each of these qualities.

A school district in North Carolina summarized this well in a district report outlining the desired traits of ISS staff as having an “interest in and concern for high-risk youth; positive interpersonal skills; knowledge of behavior management strategies; and the ability to plan, organize, and provide a variety of meaningful learning experiences (academic / therapeutic) within the classroom” (North Carolina State Department, 1986, p.1).

Suspension and Race

Although we do see a broad diversification of approaches and applications of ISS programs, there is still an issue of concern as to who gets assigned suspension. Part of the discussion of research available concerning suspension must focus on the issue of race. In light of this, many researchers have found that a disproportionate numbers of African-American males are assigned to ISS (Morgan, 1991).

Mendez and Knoff (2003) conducted a broad demographic study from 142 schools in a central Florida school district focusing on data from the 1996-1997 school year. They
were examining the claim of over-inclusion of African American students in the grouping of students given suspension for disciplinary infractions. From the information collected, they found that minority students were far more likely to be given suspension, and that they were given suspensions for less serious infractions than their Caucasian counterparts.

An extensive study by McFadden and Marsh (1992) found strong indication of both race and gender bias in the application of school discipline in one south Florida school district. Several types of data were collected and assessed in the study. The nature of the data included rates of discipline referrals, nature of disciplinary infraction, and nature of disciplinary consequence. The study sample was drawn from grades K through 12 and included the data from 4,391 disciplinary files from the various schools. In the school district’s discipline policy, there were twenty five categories of disciplinary violations with a vast majority, 80.5% of all violations falling within only seven of these categories. School administrators were afforded fourteen different types of possible disciplinary consequences to levy upon students in violation of this disciplinary code.

Upon analysis of this data, it was found that more than three quarters of the disciplinary referrals were given to male students, with African American students receiving more corporal punishment and OSS assignments. However, Caucasian students were more like to receive assignments to ISS for their rules violations. Most strikingly, African American students received a disproportionate number of discipline referrals and were far more likely to be repeat offenders. Other discrepancies with regards to race also surfaced.
Caucasian pupils comprised 57.9% of the student sample examined and received 46.1% of the discipline referrals, while African American students comprised only 22% of the total student sample, yet received 36.7% of the total discipline referrals examined. Of the total student sample it is significant in that 59.1% of Caucasian students and 23.0% of African American students were given assignments of ISS.

Skiba and Rausch (2004) present their findings of the relationship between students’ race, discipline and student achievement on the Indiana State Test of Educational Process in a report presented through the Center for Evaluation and Education Policy. They examine contributing factors for schools in Indiana with high rates of suspension (in the top 25% of the state), as opposed to schools with lower rates of student suspension. Their research examined the test results for the 2002-2003 Indiana State Test of Educational Process and attempts to correlate those test scores with rates of student suspension, student race, and levels of poverty. The main outcome from this research yielded the fact that schools with greater levels of suspension tend to have lower average passing rates on the testing mentioned.

Given the fact that there were several variables examined, and the possibility that these rates could have been skewed by the other pertinent factors of poverty and race, the researchers utilized a linear multiple regression analysis to control for multiple contributing factors. In essence, with the utilization of this statistical method, each of the contributing factors is parceled out with respect to the influence that the other factors may have on its statistical significance in the analysis. Even with these controls, the end statistical result indicated that the use of school suspension was the single most influential factor in estimating a student’s future academic success on the test. The study
concluded that race was a statistically significant factor in this estimation, but that poverty rate alone was not a major contributing factor.

Truancy, Suspension and Student Achievement

The research on the effects of student truancy on standardized test scores is somewhat mixed. For example, Tan, Lane and Coustere (1997) examined data collected in the Philippines and discovered that the number of days absent from school did, in fact, have a negative, statistically significant effect on standardized Mathematics scores. As stated earlier, Sparkes (1999) strongly indicates that truancy and unexplained absence from the classroom is strongly detrimental to student academic achievement which is also the underlying assumption of many educators.

Waters-Maze (2002) found significant correlations in her research study with reference to school suspension and student achievement on the Stanford Achievement Test. This research study compared data gathered from 532 student records from two middle schools and two high schools from the 2000 – 2001 school year. The results yielded a statistically significant negative correlation between disciplinary suspension and student achievement.

Other research indicates that there is no such strong relationship between these variables. Ladner (2005) examined the MCT language arts and mathematics scores for 144 second grade students from two schools in a southeastern state as they related to attendance rates and gender. There was found to be no statistically significant relationship between attendance and scores in that study.

As is seen in this chapter of literature review, the pertinent research on the subject of student absence and student assessment is varied and broad. The demands of renewed and
revised educational accountability run headlong into a complex field of variables connected to student presence in the classrooms of America’s public schools. It is the goal of this research study to add to this already broad base of research data. Ultimately, it is hoped that this research as well as the continuing research of many others will be used to assist educational professionals in their everyday efforts to make policy and procedural decisions that benefit the lives of the children and families they serve on a day to day basis.

The following chapter will attempt to set out the general methodology and procedures enacted in this research study. A general description of the participants sample, instrumentation, data collection procedures, review of hypotheses and assumptions of reliability and validity will all be addressed in detail in chapter III.
CHAPTER III
METHODOLOGY

The presentation of the prior chapter attempted to offer a brief overview of pertinent research concerning issues associated with the variables associated with this research study. Lack of student presence in the classroom may be caused by any number of reasons and its possible effect on student achievement has been presented in this study. Issues around student truancy to include those factors outside of school, school imposed absence from the regular class setting (to include In-School Suspension and Out-of School Suspension), and the possible link to student achievement on standardized state mandated testing was presented in brief, as a means to set the stage for this research study.

This chapter will attempt to set the parameters as to how this possible link between pertinent variables was achieved. This will include an explanation of included participants, procedures and the instrumentation of the collection of data analyzed and is presented in the next chapter of this study. Seventh grade students’ test scores on the 2005-2006 mathematics MCT were collected, compiled, and then analyzed with respect to the following variable sub-groupings: total number of days not present in the regular classroom setting, total number of days assigned to ISS, total number of days assigned to OSS, and total cumulative days of suspension to include ISS and OSS.

The basic outline of steps of execution for this research were as follows

Step 1: Based upon an examination and analysis of already existing literature related to the links between student achievement and the effects of student absenteeism, the basic scope of the research study was established.
Step 2: Given the parameters delineated in step one, an overview of the pertinent research and data was presented in the previous chapter of this study.

Step 3: The appropriate permissions were obtained from the intended schools district that was the source of data analyzed in this study. (See appendixes A and B) Also, the appropriate review and clearance was granted from the university's Institutional Review Board from which this research study is sponsored. (See appendixes C and D)

Step 4: The collected data was analyzed through utilization of the SPSS statistical analysis software, appropriate data analysis was produced and is presented in the following chapter. The specific statistical analyses utilized through the SPSS software was two single sample t-tests as well as other functions of the program that produce descriptive data. Conclusions and recommendations based upon this quantitative statistical analysis are presented in the final chapter of this study.

Participants Sample

The study sought to analyze information from a study sample of students from a single grade, 7th grade school in a small southern U.S. city. There are seven elementary schools in the school district that feed the school population of participants for this study. The total sample was comprised of 274 students of various ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic backgrounds. All of the students in the sample had taken the MCT 7th grade assessment in mathematics during the 2005-2006 school year.

Program Characteristics

The program of ISS to be used in this study is fairly similar to many other such programs around the country. The assertive discipline program of the school district is set up in "ladder" form. Depending upon the nature of the offense and the judgment of the
school administrator, students may be given a number of consequences. It is a seven step ladder with the imposition of ISS beginning at step four. Students may be assigned a varying number of days to ISS; however, the usual assignment is given in three or five day increments. Under ordinary circumstances, a student is not assigned more than five days of ISS at a time, although there is no limit to the number of times a student may be assigned to ISS in a given school year.

Characteristics of the program look somewhat typical of others as well. The students are monitored by one permanent ISS teacher and one teacher's assistant as well as one special education teacher. Teachers of students assigned to ISS are notified of the student's length of assignment and asked to supply school work appropriate for the duration of the ISS assignment. In general, regular classroom teachers of students assigned do not have direct contact with those students while they are in ISS. Also, in this specific program, the ISS classroom is located off site from any other school in the district, but ISS students are still afforded the opportunity to use school district transportation to and from the ISS site.

The presumption of the researcher here is that the program just described is fairly typical of the majority of ISS programs throughout the country. It is true that program implementations differ, but many districts simply have too many other educational priorities demanding funding and other resources to develop and implement the kinds of ISS programs that research suggests will lead to student behavioral change and academic success.
Instrumentation

The MCT is a criterion-referenced test first utilized in the state of Mississippi in 2001. In this study, it is the assessment from which student achievement will be determined in relationship to the occurrence of student absence from the regular classroom setting and regular classroom instruction. The MCT is also used in the state of Mississippi to assess student achievement in the areas of reading and language arts, but for the purposes of this study, only the results of the mathematics section were considered. With respect to content and format, the MCT is aligned with the state mandated curriculum frameworks in all three areas. According to the Mississippi Department of Education’s Office of Research and Statistics, the item/form tryouts live forms development and standards setting were revised on May 28th, 2003 (Mississippi Department of Education, 2003).

The possible range of scores from this framework is from 320 to 760. Within this framework, student achievement on the MCT is reported in the following categories:

Advanced (598 and above): Student consistently performs in a manner clearly beyond that required to be successful at the next grade level.

Proficient (568-597): Student demonstrates solid academic performance and mastery of the content area knowledge and skills required for success at the next grade level. Students who perform at this level are prepared to work on an even more challenging material that is required at the next grade level.

Basic (547-567): Student demonstrates partial mastery of the content area knowledge and skills required for success at the next grade level. Remediation may be necessary for these students.
Minimal (546 and below): Student is below Basic and does not demonstrate mastery of the content area and skills required for success at the next grade level. Student requires additional instruction and remediation in the basic skills that are necessary for success at the grade level being tested.

The 7th grade mathematics MCT assessment is divided into five reporting categories of student ability to include: Patterns and Algebraic Thinking, Data Analysis and Prediction, Measurement, Geometric Concepts, and Number Sense.

The reliability of the mathematics portion of the Mississippi Curriculum Test (MCT) was determined by those responsible for the construction of the assessment in 2001 and 2002. The reliability measure for the mathematics portion was established at .87 in 2001, and .89 in 2002.

With respect to the content validity of the MCT assessment, given the fact that both in content and form the MCT has been aligned with the Mississippi Curriculum Frameworks, one can assume proper validity of the assessment for the purposes of this study.

Data Collection Procedures

The appropriate permission to access and utilize the required data for this research study was obtained from the superintendent of schools of the intended school district. The data collected was contained in students' permanent records held at the school in hard copy as well as contained in the district's computerized data base. Appropriate authorization was also obtained from the Institutional Review Board of The University of Southern Mississippi authorizing this research study.
Hypotheses

Ho1: There are no statistically significant differences in total classroom absences from the regular classroom setting between students who scored advanced or proficient, and students who scored basic or minimal on the Mississippi Curriculum Test for 7th grade mathematics.

Ho2: There are no statistically significant differences between students' performance on the Mississippi Curriculum Test for 7th grade mathematics between students who are absent from the regular classroom setting due to assignment to In-School Suspension and Out-of-School Suspension and students not assigned as such.

Data Analysis

Hypotheses were tested using two independent t-tests. Through this form of analysis, the researcher analyzed the potential differences between the sample groups and the pertinent variables associated with each.

Conclusion

It has been the purpose of this chapter to give an overview of the general procedures and methodology utilized in the execution of this research study. In this chapter the target participation sample, manner of instrumentation, procedures of data collection, hypotheses, and form of data analysis were presented. The following chapter will seek to give a full statistical analysis of the data after the aforementioned procedures were approved and executed.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Introduction

This chapter of the research study presents the analysis of data drawn from 274 students from a single seventh grade school in the southern United States. The data collected was in relation to students’ scores on the Mississippi Curriculum Test for 7th grade mathematics from the school year 2005-2006. Along with this test data, student attendance data and discipline data was also analyzed. In addition to these sets of data, demographic information and other grouping data from the sample group was gathered to include; gender, ethnicity, Special Education status, and English Limited Learners (ELL) status. The data associated with test scores, attendance and suspension were analyzed using two independent t-tests. Prior to this testing, the initial data was reviewed for the presence of outliers and/or outcomes that might significantly skew the results and give a less true presentation of the intended statistical analysis of the study sample. No such indicators were found.

Sample Characteristics

The study sample was drawn from a 7th grade class from a single seventh grade school from a small city in the southern United States. Tables 1, 2, 3, and 4 present a breakdown of the sample characteristics concerning gender, ethnicity, Special Education students and ELL students.

The gender breakdown was 136 males and 138 females to comprise a total of 274 students in the sample group. Of these 274 students, the ethnic breakdown revealed the following: 145 White (52.9%), 100 Black (36.5%), 13 Hispanic (4.7%), 14 Asian (5.1%),
and 2 Indian (.7%). Students identified as being enrolled in Special Education comprised 9.9% or 27 students respectively. While those students enrolled as ELL comprised 3.6% for a total of 10 students.

Table 1

Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valid</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>49.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>50.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>274</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2

Ethnicity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valid</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>52.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>36.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>274</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3

Special Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valid</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3 (continued).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>247</td>
<td>90.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>274</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4

ELL Status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valid</td>
<td>Yes 10</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>264</td>
<td>96.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>274</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5 presents the descriptive breakdown of scores from the sample with reference to the Mississippi Curriculum Test for 7th grade mathematics. There were 173 of 247 students, or 63.1% who scored in the upper categories of either advanced or proficient. Those who scored in either of the two lower categories of basic or minimal numbered 101 students, or 36.9% of the total sample group. Table 6 presents a descriptive breakdown with reference to the occurrence of school suspensions from the sample group. With regard to rates of school suspension, the data indicated that 75.5% or 207 students had not been subject to school suspension of any type during the academic year, while 24.5% or 67 students had received at least one assignment to school suspension during the 2005-2006 school year.

Table 5

MCT Scoring Categories – Upper and Lower

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Table 5 (continued).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Upper</th>
<th>173</th>
<th>63.1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lower</td>
<td>101</td>
<td></td>
<td>36.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>274</td>
<td></td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6

Occurrence of School Suspension

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valid Not Suspended</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>75.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suspended</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>24.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>274</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Analysis

For the purposes of statistical analysis the research questions of this study were written and presented as null hypotheses. These hypotheses were tested using two single sample t-tests.

Hypothesis 1  

Ho1: There are no statistically significant differences in total classroom absences from the regular classroom setting between students who scored advanced or proficient and students who scored basic or minimal on the Mississippi Curriculum Test for 7th grade mathematics.

The descriptive statistics for hypothesis 1 are presented in Table 7, which specifies the, upper and lower score grouping, mean, standard deviation, and standard deviation of the mean for the full sample. The results indicate that there was not a statistically significant difference in absences between those students in the upper group (proficient or
advanced) and those in the lower group (basic or minimal) with $t(272) = .857, p = .352$. Therefore the null hypothesis was retained.

Table 7

Descriptive Statistics for MCT Score and Absences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score Cat.</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>SE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Upper</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>10.06</td>
<td>8.443</td>
<td>.642</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>9.21</td>
<td>7.086</td>
<td>.705</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hypothesis 2  Ho2: There are no statistically significant differences between students’ performance on the Mississippi Curriculum Test for 7th grade mathematics between students who are absent from the regular classroom setting due to assignment to In-School Suspension and Out-of-School Suspension, and students not assigned as such.

The descriptive statistics for hypothesis 2 are presented in Table 8, which specifies, the case of suspension, mean, and standard deviation for the full sample. The results indicate that there was a statistically significant difference on the variables of the occurrence of school suspension by score on the Mississippi curriculum Test for 7th grade mathematics with $t(272) = 2.50, p = .013$. Therefore the null hypothesis is rejected. Suspended students scored significantly lower than those students who were not suspended.

Table 8

Descriptive Statistics for Occurrences of Suspension and MCT Score

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score Suspension</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>578.06</td>
<td>55.726</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>558.43</td>
<td>57.306</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Ancillary Descriptive Results of Data

Descriptive breakdowns of data of groups within the study sample are noted here. Tables 9 and 10 represent the groupings of ELL and Special Education students in these two groupings. With respect to MCT scores for several sub-groupings, the data analyzed yielded the following. Of 10 total ELL students in the sample, 7 were in the upper half scoring category comprising 4% of that total grouping. Of the 27 Special Education students identified within the sample, 23 scored in the lower half category grouping and comprised 22.8% of all sample subjects within this lower scoring category.

Table 9

ELL Representation in Upper and Lower Scoring Categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Upper</th>
<th>Lower</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ELL</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Category</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10

Special Education Representation in Upper and Lower Scoring Categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Upper</th>
<th>Lower</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SPED</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Category</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td>22.8%</td>
<td>9.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An examination of the ethnic breakdown with respect to scoring categories noted in Table 11. Of 145 White students in the sample, 108 scored in the upper scoring grouping, and comprised 62.4% of that category. Of 100 total Black students in the total sample, 55 scored in the lower scoring category, and comprised 54.5% of that category. Of 14 Asian students included in the overall sample, 12 scored in the upper scoring category, comprising 6.9% of that category.
Table 11

Ethnic Representation in Upper and Lower Scoring Categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Upper</th>
<th>Lower</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>108</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Category</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>62.4%</td>
<td>36.6%</td>
<td>52.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td></td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Category</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>26.0%</td>
<td>54.5%</td>
<td>36.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td></td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Category</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6.9%</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An examination of suspension rates broken down amongst ethnic categories yielded the following result. Table 12 notes the representation of Black students in this category. The total category was composed 100 total students, 39 of which were Black and accounting for 58.2% of the total number of students assigned suspension for the 2005-2006 school year.

Table 12

Ethnic Representation of Black Students in School Suspension Categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Not Suspended</th>
<th>Suspended</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>61</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Category</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>29.5%</td>
<td>58.2%</td>
<td>36.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the 10 total ELL students in the sample, only 1 was assigned a school suspension in the course of the school year 2005-2006. This data is contained in Table 13 below.

Table 13

ELL Representation in School Suspension Categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ELL</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Not Suspended</th>
<th>Suspended</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Category</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.3%</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 14 presents the representation of Special Education students in the suspension categories. Of the 27 total Special Education students included in the study, only 4 were assigned a school suspension during the school year in question.

Table 14

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Special Education</th>
<th>Not Suspended</th>
<th>Suspended</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Category</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
<td>9.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Summary of findings

Of the two null hypotheses presented in the study one was retained and one was rejected. The pertinent results of these analyses are as follows:

1. Data obtained from students’ records of standardized test scores on the 7th grade Mississippi Curriculum Test for mathematics, and records of students’ total absence from the normal classroom environment revealed no statistically significant relationship between the two variables.

2. Data obtained from students’ records of standardized test scores on the 7th grade Mississippi curriculum Test for mathematics and student occurrence of school suspension revealed a statistically significant relationship between these two variables. Students who had received school suspension were more likely to be found in the lower scoring category of the test, entitled basic and minimal respectively.

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CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter V presents a summary of the research project’s findings, a presentation of conclusions, and recommendations for further study based upon those findings. The contents of the summary will restate the purposes of this research study, the two hypotheses examined, and then present the results that were discovered. The results and ancillary findings of the study will then be the focus of pertinent discussion. The chapter will conclude with implications for policy and practice, and recommendations for further research in the project topic area.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine and determine if there was a difference between the student test scores on the Mississippi Curriculum Test for 7th grade Mathematics, based upon the occurrence of their absence from the regular classroom setting and assignments to school suspension for disciplinary infractions. More specifically, the purposes of this study are expressed as such:

To examine if there is a statistically significant difference between 7th grade students’ overall days of cumulative absence and students’ performance on the 7th grade Mississippi Curriculum Test mathematics assessment.

To examine if there is a statistically significant difference between the MCT scores of those students absent from the regular classroom setting due to assignment to school suspension and those students not assigned as such.
Hypotheses’ Results

The two hypotheses examined in the study were presented in their null form, indicating that no statistically significant differences would be found. The results from the examination of the first hypothesis in fact did indicate no significant difference such that, there were no statistically significant differences between the total classroom absences from the regular classroom setting between students who scored advanced or proficient, and students who scored basic or minimal on the Mississippi Curriculum Test for 7th grade mathematics.

The second hypothesis however did indicate a statistically significant difference in that there was found to be a significant difference in the Mississippi Curriculum Test 7th grade mathematics scores between students who had been assigned to school suspension and those who had not. In the main, those assigned to suspension scored significantly lower than those who had not.

Discussion

The results indicated in this study in relation to student absence and performance on standardized testing do run contrary to previous studies of the topic. As reviewed earlier, other research has asserted more detrimental effects to student achievement with relation to absence. For example, as seen in chapter two of this study, Tan, Lane, and Coustere’s (1997) study conducted in the Philippines showed a statistically significant relationship between students’ absence and their performance in Mathematics in that, the more absent students were, the lower their performance.

Similar type results were found by Ehren, Lenz, and Morris (1991) in their study as they tried to configure a model that would effectively predict drop-out rates from high
school for fourth through eighth grade students. Their research indicated that frequent absence was in fact one of the likely predictors of eventual student failure.

The results of this study do not support the conclusions and implications of either of these studies or those like them. The results of this study do coincide with the findings of Ladner (2005) that too indicated a low correlation between students’ absence and performance on the Mississippi Curriculum Test. Given the review of existing research as presented in this study and in light of the findings presented, it can be accurately asserted that the research connected to absence and student achievement is somewhat mixed. Based upon the existing research presented, and the greater pool of research available, there may in fact be high correlations between high rates of absenteeism and low student performance, but it does not necessarily follow that the same relationship is true with respect to higher performing students.

With this stated, it must be asked as to whether educators and lawmakers, in their imposition of existing policies mandating high levels of attendance, are these policies in fact based in solid research, or are they grounded in assumptions based upon anecdotal information? One must also examine the connection and influence of funding issues connected with attendance mandates. In most localities, the amount of some governmental funding to school districts is hinged upon rates of attendance from elementary through secondary school. The reality of educational institutions both public and private is that funding and procurement of available monies is a priority for said institutions.

The results rendered in this study showed a significant relationship between rates of suspension and lower student achievement does coincide with existing research on the
subject. For example, Waters-Maze's (2002) study which examined student records for 532 students from two middle schools and two high schools did find a statistically significant negative correlation between disciplinary suspension and student achievement.

The results offered in this research study, combined with other existing research addressed throughout this study, raises the question of the efficacy of assertive models of discipline that commonly impose school suspension from the regular instructional classroom. In light of research presented previously in this study indicating the low rate of efficacy of suspension in changing student behavior, and in light of the negative instructional and performance implications of suspension, it would be beneficial for further research into alternative forms of discipline to modify student behavior and not detract from the purposes of learning and instruction.

In addition to the results discovered in the two hypotheses research questions of this study, there were also significant ancillary findings. As presented in Chapter IV of this study, there were significant observations made with respect to issues of race in relationship to both student achievement and rates of suspension.

In the results of the sample of this study, Black students comprised a considerable percentage of the students who performed in the categories of basic and minimum on the MCT mathematics assessment. In fact, Black students accounted for 54.5% of the total of students in this lower category, whereas White students comprised only 36.6% in the same category. This data takes on increased significance when examining the rates of extent of suspension for these two ethnic groups. For those students who had been suspended during the academic year, Black students comprised 58.2% of the total
category of students subject to suspension. In short, Black students were suspended more frequently as a group, and performed worse relative to all other ethnic groupings considered.

These results coincide with existing research and data related to suspension and issues of ethnicity. This observation of the data supports research offered by Mendez and Knoff (2003) in their study of 142 schools in a central Florida schools district where it was found that minority students were more likely to be placed in school suspension than their White counterparts, and that minority students were given suspensions for less serious rules infractions than their White counterparts as well.

McFadden and March (1992) examined the disciplinary files of more than 4,000 students from grades K-12 and also found that African-American students were far more likely to receive out-of-school suspension than their White counterparts.

The results of this study also coincide with the results found by Skiba and Rausch (2004) in their report presented through the Center for Evaluation and Education Policy.

As stated earlier in this study, they examined contributing factors for schools in Indiana with high rates of suspension (in the top 25% of the state), as opposed to schools with lower rates of student suspension. Their research examined the test results for the 2002-2003 Indiana State Test of Educational Process and attempts to correlate those test scores with rates of student suspension, student race, and levels of poverty. The main outcome from this research yielded the fact that schools with greater levels of suspension tend to have lower average passing rates on the testing mentioned.

Given the fact that there were several variables examined, and of the possibilities that these rates could have been skewed by the other pertinent factors of poverty and race, the
researchers utilized a linear multiple regression analysis to control for multiple contributing factors. In essence, with the utilization of this statistical method, each of the contribution factors is parceled out with respect to the influence the other factors may have on its statistical significance in the analysis. Even controlling for this mix of factors, the end statistical result indicated that the use of our school suspension was the single most influential factor in estimating a student’s future academic success on the test. The study concluded that race was a statistically significant factor in this estimation and that poverty rate alone was not the major contributing factor.

Given these consistent findings, it furthers a recommendation that school districts examine their disciplinary practices and examine the occurrence of racial bias in the execution of school disciplinary policies and its effect in relationship to student academic performance.

Results of this study with respect to Special Education students yielded a mix of results in that 23 of 27 of those students scored in the lower ranking on the MCT assessment. Given the nature of the various learning difficulties of students in this category, this low achievement is not necessarily surprising. However, in the category of students sent to school suspension, Special Education students were a very small percentage of this group. Of those same 27 students in the category, only 4 were assigned to school suspension as such, and comprised only 6% of the total of students in this category. A possible reason for this minimal showing may be the statutory requirement in dealing with behavior issues with Special Education students, and the mandated limits on the amount of suspension that Special Education students may receive within a school year without enacting other procedures of due process.
With respect to gender, the results of this study revealed that far more male students were subject to school suspension than their female counterparts. These results as well coincide with the research results rendered by McFadden and Marsh (1992). But we see that in achievement, the percentages of males and females in the upper scoring category were quite closely aligned. Males comprised 53.8% of the upper scoring category, whereas females comprised the remaining 46.2%

**Limitations of the Research Study**

As addressed in the first chapter of this study, there are two situations of limitation that are noteworthy concerning the results rendered in this study. The study data was obtained from a sample of 274 students. This is not a large sample from which to draw universal conclusions. However, the data and the conclusions drawn are still statistically significant and hold relevance in the greater research based discussion of the associated variables.

Also, the research sample used in this study was a single case study. The researcher is aware of this context and the conclusions and recommendations drawn from the results are put forth as such. It was too earlier noted in this study that due to these inherent limitations that the conclusions drawn were not, and are not intended to be universal or definitive, but rather are intended to be another source of relevant data to the existing body of research associated with this study. No other limitations to the study were encountered by the researcher.

**Implications for Policy and Practice**

In light of the findings and conclusions of this study, there are several recommendations made to both educational practitioners and policy makers. This study
revealed a significant relationship between low student performance and the occurrence of student suspension was found in this study, it is strongly recommended that school officials explore and consider alternative forms of disciplinary action when dealing with students with behavioral problems. Given the results of this study, and in the current context of heightened accountability, and in particular in the light of NCLB with reference to standardized student assessments, the common and increased use of school suspension for students with behavioral issues is counter productive to the greater goals of student achievement.

One option in addressing this issue is the increased development and use of alternative school settings for students with severe behavioral difficulties. The manner in which we address the needs of these students must be diversified, and appropriate educational contexts must be altered so that not only is beneficial behavior fostered, but also such that the varied educational and learning needs of these students can be addressed to increasing the probability of academic success. Increased programs in this vein would not only seek to make these students successful, but also add to the order and security of traditional school settings.

Currently, some school systems have introduced and are in the process of utilizing individual behavioral plans with students who encounter severe or continuing behavioral issues. As in the aforementioned recommendation, it is an attempt on the part of the educational structure to address the individual needs of students in the hope of increasing the probability of academic and educational success. Although sometimes difficult to accomplish in larger school settings, it does offer specific solutions to specific student
issues and may be more prone to success than many one size fits all assertive discipline plans currently used extensively in school districts around the country.

With respect to the results of this study in reference to attendance, what was discovered was no significant relationship between the total amount of school days absent and performance on state mandated standardized student assessment. It is recommended that policy makers reconsider the long standing assumption that a certain amount of attendance time is necessary for student success. It would be more efficacious to allow the individual learning needs of students dictate the amount of time necessary to master the knowledge of any specific curricula. In fact, if able students can master learning objectives and move on to the next objective or level, more energy could be focused on those students who need more intense and directed instruction. In part, the reasoning the rationale at work with this recommendation is similar to the notion behind the concept of non-Graded school structures.

An ancillary result discovered in this study revealed a large number of Black males making up a significant number of those students subjected to school suspension. It is recommended that school districts and those responsible for the execution of discipline policies examine their practices in respect to this minority group of students. Schools and districts need to do more in depth investigation into the causes of the disproportionate numbers of those students who are subject to school suspension. The possible causes for this representation may in fact be numerous, but given the numbers, educators need to examine this phenomenon and respond appropriately to increase the success of this minority grouping of students, both behaviorally and academically.
Suggestions for Further Research

In light of the findings of this study and the subsequent discussion of related issues, the following suggestions are presented for further research.

Suggestion 1

Given the strong relationship between student suspension and low achievement, it is suggested that further research be done in the examination of achievement in relation to other systems of student discipline and/or behavior modification. Might there be different rates of achievement within schools or systems that utilize a different system to deal with student discipline issues? In line with this, a comparative study of student achievement between schools with differing policies and procedures regarding discipline practices might yield beneficial results.

Suggestion 2

Possible relationships between students’ absence from the regular classroom and student achievement can be explored through a variety of assessment formats. Further research is suggested to look at these relationships with differing kinds of student assessments, including course grading and grade point averages.
August 28, 2007

Dr. Dufrene:

Mr. Joseph G. Amuso, doctoral student at the University of Southern Mississippi and assistant principal at Biloxi Junior High School, is willing to conduct a study to determine if there are differences between the level of student's attendance and their academic achievement as measured by the Mississippi curriculum Test for 7th grade mathematics.

The students' absence from school and the type of absence, i.e., illness, in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, etc., would also be taken into account.

I am willing to grant Mr. Amuso access to the student data for the years necessary within the scope of this study.

Mr. Amuso is aware that information gathered during the course of this study will identify no individual students and will be confidential.

Please contact me if you require additional information or have concerns related to this request.

Respectfully,

Paul A. Tisdale
Appendix B

TO: Joseph G. Amuso
1233 Esplanade Avenue #14
New Orleans, LA 70116

FROM: Lawrence A. Hosman, Ph.D.
HSPRC Chair

PROTOCOL NUMBER: 27073003
PROJECT TITLE: The Occurrence of Student Absenteeism From the Regular Classroom Setting and Student Achievement on the 7th Grad Mathematics MCT - A Study

Enclosed is The University of Southern Mississippi Human Subjects Protection Review Committee Notice of Committee Action taken on the above referenced project proposal. If I can be of further assistance, contact me at (601) 266-4279, FAX at (601) 266-4275, or you can e-mail me at Lawrence.Hosman@usm.edu. Good luck with your research.
HUMAN SUBJECTS PROTECTION REVIEW COMMITTEE
NOTICE OF COMMITTEE ACTION

The project has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Human Subjects Protection Review Committee in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services (45 CFR Part 46), and university guidelines to ensure adherence to the following criteria:

- The risks to subjects are minimized.
- The risks to subjects are reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
- The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered regarding risks to subjects must be reported immediately, but not later than 10 days following the event. This should be reported to the IRB Office via the "Adverse Effect Report Form".
- If approved, the maximum period of approval is limited to twelve months.

Projects that exceed this period must submit an application for renewal or continuation.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: 27073003
PROJECT TITLE: The Occurrence of Student Absenteeism From the Regular Classroom Setting and Student Achievement on the 7th Grad Mathematics MCT - A Study
PROPOSED PROJECT DATES: 08/25/07 to 11/01/07
PROJECT TYPE: Dissertation
PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATORS: Joseph G. Amuso
COLLEGE/DIVISION: College of Education & Psychology
DEPARTMENT: Educational Leadership & Research
FUNDING AGENCY: N/A
HSPRC COMMITTEE ACTION: Expedited Review Approval
PERIOD OF APPROVAL: 09/04/07 to 09/03/08

Lawrence A. Hosman, Ph.D.
HSPRC Chair
APPENDIX D

HUMAN SUBJECTS REVIEW FORM
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI
(SUBMIT THIS FORM IN DUPLICATE)

Protocol # 07073003

Name: Joseph G. Amuso
Phone: 228-869-8772

E-Mail Address: Joe.g.amuso@yahoocom

Mailing Address: 233 Explorade Ave #14 New Orleans, LA 70116

College/Division: College of Education/Psychology
Dept: Ed. Leadership & Research

Department Box #

Proposed Project Dates: From 9/1/07 To 11/1/07

Title: The occurrence of student absenteeism from the regular classroom setting and student achievement on the Peabody mathematics test: study

Funding Agencies or Research Sponsors: NA

Grant Number (when applicable): NA

New Project
Dissertation or Thesis
Renewal or Continuation: Protocol #
Change in Previously Approved Project: Protocol #

Principal Investigator: Joseph G. Amuso
Date: 7/17/07

Advisor: Date: 7/17/07

Department Chair: Date: 7/26/07

RECOMMENDATION OF HSPRC MEMBER

Category I, Exempt under Subpart A, Section 46.101 ( ), 45CFR46. Category II, Expedited Review, Subpart A, Section 46.110 and Subparagraph ( )

Category III, Full Committee Review.

HSPRC College/Division Member Date: 9-4-07

HSPRC Chair Date: 9-7-07

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