HANDBOOK OF CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

Research, Practice, and Contemporary Issues

Edited by
Carolyn M. Evertson
Vanderbilt University

Carol S. Weinstein
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

LEA LAWRENCE ERLBAUM ASSOCIATES, PUBLISHERS
2006 Mahwah, New Jersey London
Zero Tolerance, Suspension, and Expulsion: Questions of Equity and Effectiveness

Russell J. Skiba and M. Karega Rausch

Indiana University

INTRODUCTION

There can be no question that schools need sound disciplinary systems to maintain school safety and promote student learning. Indeed, in the face of multiple-victim homicides in the late 1990s, schools have been increasingly motivated to address issues of disruption and violence. Pressure from teachers who are concerned about the safety of their classrooms (Public Agenda, 2004) and from parents who wish to ensure school safety (Pew Research Center, 2000) have motivated schools and communities to search for methods that can promote safe school climates maximally conducive to learning.

Yet the climate of fear that has prevailed in recent years has also generated support for more punitive methods of school discipline, often under the broad rhetoric of zero tolerance (Noguera, 1995). Zero tolerance emerged from national drug policy of the 1990s and mandates severe punishments, typically out-of-school suspension and expulsion, for both serious and relatively minor infractions (Skiba & Peterson, 1999). The rise of zero tolerance philosophy has led to substantial increases in rates of out-of-school suspension and expulsion (Michigan Public Policy Initiative, 2003; Potts, Njie, Detch, & Walton, 2003; Wald & Losen, 2003).

Thus, schools face what is an apparently profound dilemma. To fulfill their responsibility to promote safe climates conducive to learning many schools and school districts increased their use of procedures that remove some children from the opportunity to learn. Under federal education legislation, No Child Left Behind, schools are under a mandate to use “only practices that are evidence-based, so only the best ideas with proven results are introduced into the classroom” (No Child Left Behind Act Fact Sheet, 2001). The purpose of this chapter is to examine what we know about the use of school exclusion as a disciplinary strategy. Are zero tolerance, out-of-school suspension, and expulsion effective methods for promoting safe and effective school climates? Are there effective alternatives that can keep schools safe without removing students from the opportunity to learn?
CONTEXT, HISTORY, AND CURRENT STATUS

Purposes of School Discipline

Although school discipline has increasingly come to be associated in the public mind with the use of punishment and school exclusion (Skiba & Peterson, 1999), there are in fact a number of important instructional and organizational purposes to any school disciplinary system:

- **Ensuring the safety of students and teachers.** Incidents of deadly school violence in the 1990s have drawn acute attention to the need to guarantee the safety of students and teachers. The most recent national data on school safety suggest that there has been a 50% drop in violent crimes committed at schools since 1992 (DeVoe et al., 2004), yet one in three teachers still report that physical violence is a very or somewhat serious problem at their schools (Public Agenda, 2004). Clearly, a primary purpose of school disciplinary systems must be to prevent incidents that could threaten the safety of students or staff.

- **Creating a climate conducive to learning.** Even beyond issues of physical safety, students cannot learn and teachers cannot teach in a school environment characterized by disruption, chaos, or frequent behavioral interruptions. Research in educational psychology has shown that student learning is largely a direct result of the amount and quality of instruction that students receive (Brophy, 1988; Fisher et al., 1981; Hattie, 2002; Reynolds & Walberg, 1991; Wang & Haertel, 1994; Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1997). Effective disciplinary systems should improve academic outcomes by increasing the amount and quality of time teachers can spend teaching, rather than responding to behavioral disruptions.

- **Teaching students needed skills for successful interaction in school and society.** It is interesting to note that the word discipline comes from the same Latin root as the word disciple: discipere, to teach or comprehend. Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary (1998) defines discipline as “The treatment suited to a disciple or learner; education; development of the faculties by instruction, and exercise; training, whether physical, mental, or moral.” Recent survey research indicates that a large majority of both teachers (93%) and parents (88%) believe one fundamental element of a school’s mission is to “teach kids rules so they are ready to join society” (Public Agenda, 2004, p.8). Children will always require socialization, instruction, and correction that shapes fundamentally egocentric behavior into interpersonal skills that make them capable of interacting successfully with others in school and beyond.

- **Reducing rates of future misbehavior.** Behavioral psychology defines the term punishment as something that reduces the probability of occurrence of some behavior (Alberto & Troutman, 2003; Driscoll, 2000; Maag, 2001; Skinner, 1953). One might then expect that those disciplinary interventions that are effective will lead to reduced rates of inappropriate or disruptive behavior in the school setting.

It is important to note that zero tolerance is not simply a strategy, but also a philosophy of school discipline (Skiba & Knesting, 2001). As such, there are a number of purposes for school discipline that are associated specifically with the philosophy of zero tolerance:

- **A belief in the deterrent function of school punishment.** An implied purpose of severe punishment is the deterrent effect on others who may witness that punishment (Noguera, 1995). Ewing (2000) argued that zero tolerance “appropriately denounces violent student behavior in no uncertain terms and serves as a deterrent to such behavior in the future by sending a clear message that acts which physically harm or endanger others will not be permitted at school under any circumstances.”
• **Remove troublemakers in order to improve the school climate for others.** Central to the idea of suspension and expulsion is the notion that removing the most persistently disruptive students will lead to substantial improvements in the learning climate for others. A large majority of middle and high school teachers agree with this proposition, noting that if persistently troublemaking students were removed from school, teaching and learning would be much more effective for the remaining students (Public Agenda, 2004).

• **What happens if we don’t punish?** This assumption is in some ways the inverse of a belief in the deterrent capability of punishment. Zero tolerance suggests that failure to punish misbehavior sufficiently will “send a message” that a school is not serious enough about safety (Larson & Ovando, 2001).

Before examining whether the disciplinary practices favored by a zero tolerance approach have been effective in meeting the primary purposes of school discipline, we review the background and definition of zero tolerance.

**Zero Tolerance: Background and Definition**

Zero tolerance first received national attention as the title of a program developed in 1986 by U.S. Attorney Peter Nunez in San Diego, impounding seagoing vessels carrying any amount of drugs. U.S. Attorney General Edwin Meese highlighted the program as a national model in 1988, and ordered customs officials to seize the vehicles and property of anyone crossing the border with even trace amounts of drugs, and charge those individuals in federal court. Beginning in 1989, school districts in California, New York, and Kentucky picked up on the term zero tolerance and mandated expulsion for drugs, fighting, and gang-related activity. By 1993, zero tolerance policies had been adopted across the country, often broadened to include not only drugs and weapons, but also smoking and school disruption. This tide swept zero tolerance into national policy when the Clinton administration signed the Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994 into law. The law mandates a 1-calendar-year expulsion for possession of a firearm, referral of these students to the criminal or juvenile justice system, and the provision that state law must authorize the chief administrative officer of each local school district to modify such expulsions on a case-by-case basis (Public Law 103-227, 1994).

State legislatures and local school districts have broadened the mandate of zero tolerance beyond the federal mandates of weapons, to drugs and alcohol, fighting, threats, or swearing. Many school boards continue to toughen their disciplinary policies; some have begun to experiment with permanent expulsion from the system for some offenses (Potts et al., 2003). Others have begun to apply school suspensions, expulsions, or transfers to behaviors that occur outside of school.

Since the passage of the Gun-Free Schools Act, some form of zero tolerance policy appears to have become prevalent in public schools. Defining zero tolerance as a policy that mandates predetermined consequences or punishments for specified offenses, the National Center on Education Statistics report, *Violence in America’s Public Schools: 1996–1997* (Heaviside, Rowand, Williams, & Farris, 1998), found that 94% of all schools have zero tolerance policies for weapons or firearms, 87% for alcohol, 79% for tobacco, and 79% for violence. It is important to note, however, that the NCES definition of zero tolerance is quite broad. One would expect that there are few school disciplinary policies that do not mandate some predetermined consequences for specific behaviors, and it is possible that the high prevalence rates reported for zero tolerance in the NCES study were due to an overly broad definition. A more typical and more limited definition of zero tolerance is as a disciplinary policy that is “intended primarily as a method of sending a message that certain behaviors will not be tolerated, by punishing all offenses severely, no matter how minor” (Skiba & Peterson, 1999, p. 373).
Frequency of Use of Suspension and Expulsion

Out-of-school suspension and expulsion are often viewed as a relatively linear response progressing from student disruption to office referral to school removal. It is important to note however, that any disciplinary action is the culmination of a complex process, not an isolated event (Morrison et al., 2001). Disciplinary actions are multiply determined by student behavior, teacher tolerance, school and classroom characteristics, and local and state policy. In addition, the length of out-of-school suspension can vary widely from a few hours or a day to 10 or more days. The most common cutoff in state law differentiating suspension and expulsion appears to be 10 days or less constitutes suspension, whereas removal for more than 10 days constitutes expulsion, but this is by no means universal (Skiba, Eaton, & Sotoo, 2004). Finally, because of the federal protections of free and appropriate public education (FAPE) for students with disabilities, those students are subject to a somewhat different set of disciplinary regulations for school removals exceeding 10 days (Yell, 1998).

These multiple sources of variation in the application of suspension and expulsion make it difficult to precisely estimate the exact frequency of out-of-school suspension and expulsion. Available national estimates suggest that 1.5 million American students missed at least 1 day of school because of out-of-school suspension or expulsion in the 1970s; over the past decade, that number had doubled and reached an estimated 2.6 million or approximately 7% of the student population (Brooks, Schiraldi, & Ziedenberg, 1999; U.S. Department of Education, 2000). Both state and local district reports suggest increases in out-of-school suspension rates at the local level (Raffaele-Mendez & Knoff, 2003; Rausch & Skiba, 2004a; Richart, Brooks, & Soler, 2003).

Studies of school discipline (Blewitt, 1993; Mansfield & Farris, 1992; Rose, 1988; Skiba, Peterson, & Williams, 1997; Uchitelle, Bartz, & Hillman, 1989) have consistently found that suspension is among the most widely used disciplinary techniques, and at the office level, perhaps the most frequently used response to office referrals. Reported schoolwide rates of suspension at the high school level vary widely, from a low 9.3% of enrolled students (Kaeser, 1979), to 33.6% of the students in a given high school (Morgan-D’Attio, Northrup, LaFleur, & Spera, 1996), to a reported suspension rate of 92% in one high school in East Baton Rouge, Louisiana (Thornton & Trent, 1988). Skiba et al. (1997), studying disciplinary referrals across all middle schools in one large urban school district, reported that one third of all referrals to the office resulted in a 1- to 5-day suspension, and 21% of all enrolled students were suspended at least once during the school year. In contrast, school expulsion appears to be used relatively infrequently relative to other disciplinary techniques (Heaviside et al., 1998). National and state data on the implementation of the Gun-Free Schools Act (Sinclair, 1999) show that fewer than 1 in 1000 students have been expelled for weapons violations under that law.

Rates of usage of suspension and expulsion also appear to be dependent on location and level served (e.g., elementary, middle, or high school), and do not appear to be spread evenly across schools. Out-of-school suspension rates appear to be highest in urban schools compared to usage rates at suburban, town, or rural locales (Massachusetts Advocacy Center, 1986; Rausch & Skiba, 2004a; Wu, Pink, Crain, & Moles, 1982). Specific to school level, suspension rates appear to be lowest in elementary schools, followed by middle and high school students. The slight drop in suspension rates for students who have been have dropped out and of suspension do not at schools in the top 10% of incidents (Rausch & Skiba, 2004a, Wu, Pink, Crain, & Moles, 1982).

Why Is Consideration

Oftentimes, controversy by removing an otherwi...
appear to be lowest in elementary school, increase and peak during middle school, and slightly drop from middle to high school (Raffaele Mendez & Knoff, 2003; Rausch & Skiba, 2004a). The slight drop in suspension rates from middle to high school has been hypothesized (Raffaele Mendez & Knoff, 2003) as being due to what has been termed the "pushout" phenomena: Students who had been suspended multiple times in middle school and early high school may have dropped out and thus not been present to be suspended in high school. Finally, rates of suspension do not appear to be evenly distributed across schools. One analysis found that schools in the top 10% of out-of-school suspension use accounted for 51% of all suspension incidents (Rausch & Skiba, 2004a).

Why Is Consideration of Efficacy Important?

Oftentimes, controversies about zero tolerance focus on the civil rights controversies aroused by removing an otherwise "good student" from school for what appears to be a relatively minor infraction. In response to the long-term suspension of an honors student for a sip of sangria, the St. Petersburg Times wrote in an editorial:

Zero tolerance policies are inherently unjust and irrational because they conflate harms. Accepting a cup of sangria for a good-bye toast is punished as severely as a student who gets drunk on school property. . . . Bringing a butter knife to school to cut an apple for lunch carries the same expulsion as toting a loaded magnum. Those harms are not equivalent, and if they are punished with equal severity, the system looks both unfair and nonsensical. ("Zero sense," 1998)

Strictures against cruel and unusual punishment are fundamental to our legal system. It may well be that school punishments greatly out of proportion to the offense arouse controversy by violating basic perceptions of fairness inherent in our system of law.

Important as such concerns are, they may be less important to frontline educators than ensuring the safety of school environments. It might well be argued that, unfortunate as occasional violations of students' rights are, out-of-school suspension and expulsion are necessary to maintain safe and productive school climates. Certainly, schools have the right and responsibility to use any and all effective procedures to ensure a school climate that is conducive to learning.

Yet out-of-school suspension and expulsion, by their very nature, are interventions that pose some risk to educational opportunity. One of the most important findings of educational psychology of the last 30 years is the positive relationship between the amount and quality of engaged time in academic learning and student achievement (Brophy, 1988; Fisher et al., 1981; Greenwood, 1996; Greenwood, Delquadri, & Hall, 1984; Greenwood, Horton, & Utley, 2002; Wang et al., 1997). In addition, models of youth violence and delinquency have identified school alienation-school bonding as one of the strongest variables in predicting delinquency (Hawkins, Dovcek, & Lishner, 1988). Thus procedures such as out-of-school suspension and expulsion that remove students from the opportunity to learn and potentially weaken the school bond must be viewed as potentially risky interventions.

Thus, questions about the usefulness of school suspension and expulsion are essentially questions of cost-benefit. Does the removal of troublesome students from school through suspension and expulsion provide sufficient benefits in terms of reducing disruption and affording a school climate conducive to learning to offset the risks to educational opportunity and school bonding that are inherent in disciplinary removal? The following sections review the literature on the efficacy of out-of-school suspension and expulsion in order to address that question.
HOW WELL DOES DISCIPLINARY REMOVAL WORK?

How effective is school disciplinary removal in preserving safe school climates conducive to learning, teaching students the behaviors they need to succeed in school, or deterring students from disruptive behavior? In the following sections, we examine the extent to which disciplinary removal might be considered an effective intervention, in terms of three criteria: (a) treatment fidelity, (b) educational outcomes, and (c) nondiscriminatory application.

Treatment Fidelity

Treatment fidelity, also referred to as quality of implementation (Gottfredson & Gottfredson, 2002) or treatment integrity (Lane, Bocian, MacMillan, & Gresham, 2004), refers to the extent to which an intervention is implemented as planned, and has been increasingly viewed as a key factor in judging the effectiveness of behavioral interventions (Lane et al., 2004). Unless an intervention can be implemented with some degree of consistency, it is impossible to attribute any changes in school climate or student behavior to that intervention.

For traditional disciplinary interventions, one might expect two indicators of treatment fidelity or treatment integrity. First, because removal from the opportunity to learn is in most cases the most extreme form of punishment a school could administer, one measure of treatment fidelity would be whether out-of-school suspension and expulsion are reserved for those offenses for which they are intended, that is, the most serious offenses. Second, because disciplinary techniques are intended as methods to change student behavior, one would expect that variations in the use of suspension and expulsion would be based largely on variations in student behavior, not on idiosyncratic characteristics of schools or school staff. Both of these aspects of the treatment integrity of disciplinary removal are reviewed next.

Are Suspension and Expulsion Reserved for Most Serious Offenses? What types of infractions are suspension and expulsion used for? Are they reserved for only the most serious and severe of school disruptions?

Looking across studies of school discipline, it is clear that school suspension tends not to be reserved for serious or dangerous behaviors. Fights or physical aggression among students are consistently found to be among the most common reasons for suspension (Costenbader & Markson, 1994; Dupper & Bosch, 1996; Imich, 1994; Skiba et al., 1997; Stone, 1993). Yet the majority of offenses for which students are suspended appear to be nonviolent, less disruptive offenses (Children’s Defense Fund, 1975; Raffaele Mendez & Knoff, 2003). After fighting, the most common offenses appear to be attendance issues (cutting class, tardiness, truancy) (Kaeser, 1979; Morgan D’Atrio et al., 1996; Richart et al., 2003) and abusive language (Imich, 1994; Keeser, 1979). Other common reasons for school suspension are disobedience and disrespect (Bain & MacPherson, 1990; Cooley, 1995; Raffaele Mendez & Knoff, 2003; Skiba et al., 1997), and general classroom disruption (Imich, 1994; Massachusetts Advocacy Center, 1986; Morgan D’Atrio et al., 1996; Rausch & Skiba, 2004a; Raffaele Mendez & Knoff, 2003), often framed as a “catch-all category” (Dupper & Bosch, 1996). Figure 41.1 represents the relative distribution of out-of-school suspensions in a single state, as reported by Rausch and Skiba (2004a); the data show that 5% of all out-of-school suspensions are in categories such as weapons or drugs that are typically considered more serious or dangerous, the remaining 95% of suspensions fell into two categories: disruptive behavior and other. These data are consistent with Stone’s (1993) conclusions in reporting the results of a national survey of 25 school districts representing over a million students: “It appears clear that on reviewing the data to determine if the crime fits the punishment, the answer is no” (p. 367).

One might expect that, used less frequently, expulsion would be reserved for more serious infractions. In one of the few reported studies of school expulsion in American education, Morrison and D’Incau (1997) found that student offenses resulting in expulsion tended to be offenses of moderate to high severity. The authors reported, however, that the majority of offenses in the sample they investigated were committed by students who would not generally be considered dangerous to the school environment. In the same statewide investigation reported earlier, Rausch and Skiba (2004a) found that 70% of all expulsions in the state fall into the categories of disruptive behavior and other. Some have suggested that zero tolerance and the increased involvement of law enforcement in schools has led to the “criminalization” of some relatively minor misbehavior (Richart et al., 2003; Wald & Losen, 2003). In general, although it appears that expulsion is reserved for serious infractions to a greater extent than suspension, the data are insufficient to assess whether that intervention tends to be reserved only for the most dangerous or serious of infractions.

Are Suspension and Expulsion Primarily a Response to Student Misbehavior? There can be little doubt that certain students are at increased risk for office referral and school suspension, and account for a disproportionate share of disciplinary effort (Tobin, Sugai, & Colvin, 1996; Wu et al., 1982). Eckenrode, Laird, and Doris (1993) reported that students with substantiated reports of abuse or neglect were significantly more likely to be referred for school discipline and somewhat more likely to be suspended, especially at the middle and high school level. Morgan-D’Atrio et al. (1996) reported that, of students who were suspended, 43% at the
high school level and 38% at the middle school level had clinically elevated scores on one or more student and teacher subscales of the Child Behavior Checklist (Quay, 1983).

Yet explorations of suspension and expulsion at the school district level (Massachusetts Advocacy Center, 1986; Skiba et al., 1997) have also found the use of disciplinary removal to be extremely inconsistent from school to school, suggesting that there are other sources of variation than student characteristics or behavior in school rates of disciplinary removal. Investigations have found possible contributions to rates of school disciplinary exclusions at both the classroom and school level. At the classroom level, Skiba et al. (1997) described one middle school in which 25% of classroom teachers were responsible for 66% of all referrals to the office. There also appear to be a variety of ways in which schools contribute to out-of-school suspension. Wu et al. (1982) tested the contribution of both student and school characteristics to a student’s likelihood of being suspended at least once during high school. As noted earlier, student behavior and attitude did make a significant contribution to the probability of suspension in that model. Regression analyses, however, showed that a number of nonbehavioral characteristics also made a significant contribution to the probability of being suspended, independent of other variables, including overall school suspension rate, teacher attitudes, administrative centralization, school governance, perceptions of achievement, socioeconomic disadvantage, and racial status. In the final model, including both student and school characteristics, Wu et al. (1982) reported that school and nonbehavioral student characteristics (e.g., race) made a more significant contribution to predicting school suspension than student behavior and attitude. This finding led them to conclude:

One could argue from this finding that if students are interested in reducing their chances of being suspended, they will be better off by transferring to a school with a lower suspension rate than by improving their attitudes or reducing their misbehavior. (pp. 255–256)

At least some of the variance in school rates of out-of-school suspension and expulsion appear to be attributable to differences in principal attitudes toward the disciplinary process. Qualitative findings in the national report Opportunities Suspended (Advancement Project/Civil Rights Project, 2000) suggest that building principals used out-of-school suspension in direct proportion to their stated support for zero tolerance policies and procedures. In a comprehensive study of the relationship of principal attitudes and disciplinary outcomes, Skiba et al. (2003) surveyed 325 principals regarding their attitudes toward zero tolerance, suspension, and expulsion, and violence prevention strategies. They found principal attitude and school disciplinary outcomes to be correlated: Rates of out-of-school suspension were lower, and the use of preventive measures more frequent, at schools whose principals believed that suspension and expulsion were unnecessary given a positive school climate.

In summary, treatment integrity is a key precursor to the effectiveness of an intervention (Lane et al., 2004): If an intervention is not implemented with sufficient fidelity, it may be impossible to even test whether it can be effective in changing student behavior. Findings about the implementation of out-of-school suspension raise questions about the integrity with which the interventions of suspension and expulsion are delivered. Contrary to expectations, suspensions and perhaps even expulsions are not reserved for the most serious or dangerous behaviors. Further, there is a very high level of inconsistency in the application of suspension and expulsion, and this variability appears to be due as much to classroom, school, or principal characteristics as to student behavior. Together, these findings raise concerns about whether the quality of implementation of out-of-school suspension and expulsion are sufficient to know whether they could be effective in changing behavior.

Outcomes of Disciplinary Action

As is the case with any discipline intervention, it is of central importance that those educational interventions judged an effective educational strategy for individual students be evaluated in terms of the outcomes associated with the intervention. Data on the outcomes of disciplinary action is essential for understanding the impact of these interventions on student behavior and academic performance. Rather, studies of suspension, ranging from 35% longitudinal investigations of the number of out-of-school suspensions received in late elementary school for student socioemotional functioning to studies examining the relationship between school discipline and academic performance, the evidence indicates that students who were suspended were less successful in the next four years of school than those who were not suspended.

Do Zero Tolerance Policies Work?

In the long term, students who are suspended or expelled from school have a higher likelihood of dropout and not graduating on time. For example, a national longitudinal study of sophomores in the U.S. found that the rate of dropout was only 10% for students who were not suspended, compared to 15% for students who were suspended (Rock, 1986). In a more recent study, Wehlage & Rutter (1996) found that students who were suspended from school were less likely to complete high school and were more likely to be involved in delinquent behaviors, such as vandalism and fighting, than students who were not suspended.

Unfortunately, the effectiveness of zero tolerance policies in reducing delinquent behaviors is debatable. While some researchers have found that these policies can be effective in reducing certain behaviors, others have argued that they are too vague and unenforceable to be effective. In this high school, knowledge and experience with the practice were variable, but generally, the practice was not consistently implemented.

In this high school, knowledge and experience with the practice were variable, but generally, the practice was not consistently implemented.
outcomes of disciplinary removal. As is the case with any frequently used educational intervention, consideration of effectiveness is of central importance. Federal educational legislation has increasingly mandated the use of only those educational interventions that are "evidence-based." Disciplinary removal could be judged an effective educational or behavioral intervention if it led to improvements in either (a) individual rates of disruptive or violent behavior or (b) overall school safety or school climate. Data on the outcomes of exclusionary disciplinary approaches are reviewed in the following sections.

**Do Zero Tolerance Suspensions and Expulsions Improve Student Behavior?** Behavioral psychology defines an effective punisher as one that reduces the future probability of responding (Skinner, 1953). Yet descriptive studies of school discipline have found no evidence of reductions in misbehavior as a result of the application of out-of-school suspension. Rather, studies of suspension have found high rates of repeat offending in out-of-school suspension, ranging from 35% (Bowditch, 1993) to 42% (Costenbader & Markson, 1998). A recent longitudinal investigation revealed that the strongest predictor of a middle school student’s number of out-of-school suspensions was the number of out-of-school suspensions he or she received in late elementary school (fourth and fifth grade), even after statistically controlling for student socioeconomic status (SES), racial categorization, special education status, teacher ratings of student behavior, and academic achievement (Raffaele Mendez, 2003). In a study of school discipline records for middle school students, Tobin et al. (1996) showed that students who were suspended in the first term of grade 6 were more likely to have discipline problems over the next four terms. Such results led the authors to conclude that for some students “suspension functions as a reinforcer (variable interval schedule) rather than as a punisher” (p. 91).

In the long term, school suspension has been found to be a moderate to strong predictor of dropout and not graduating on time. Analysis of data from the High School and Beyond study, a national longitudinal sample surveying 30,000 high school students, revealed that 31% of sophomores who dropped out of school had been suspended, as compared to a suspension rate of only 10% for their peers who had stayed in school (Eksstrom, Goertz, Pollack, & Rock, 1986). In a multivariate analysis of the same data base, discipline emerged as one of the stronger factors, along with poor academics and low SES, predicting school dropout (Wehlage & Rutter, 1986). Further, Raffaele Mendez (2003) reported that the number of out-of-school suspensions a student received as a 6th-grade student was negatively correlated with the probability that the student would graduate with his or her cohort of students 6 years later as a 12th-grade student. This relationship was stronger for African American students than White students.

Unfortunately, there is evidence that the relationship between school suspension and school dropout may not be entirely accidental. Ethnographic field studies of school discipline, interviewing administrators and observing the school discipline process, have noted that disciplinarians in troubled urban schools often view their role in large measure as dealing with persistent "troublemakers" who challenge the institution’s authority (Bowditch, 1993). Over time, as such students develop a reputation, disciplinary contacts afford administrators the opportunity to rid the school of its most troublesome students:

In this high school, the practice of cleansing the school of “bad kids” was quite widely acknowledged and equally appreciated by administrators, teachers, and counselors. Criticisms of the practice were voiced rarely, quietly, and confidentially behind closed doors. (Fine, 1986, p. 403)
In such a context, suspension may be used as a "pushout" tool to encourage low-achieving students and those viewed as "troublemakers" to leave school before graduation.

**Improved School Climate?** Rather than making a contribution to school safety, the increased use of suspension and expulsion seems to be associated with student and teacher perceptions of a less effective and inviting school climate. Schools with higher rates of suspension have been reported to have higher student-teacher ratios and a lower level of academic quality (Hellman & Beaton, 1986), spend more time on discipline-related matters (Davis & Jordan, 1994), and pay significantly less attention to issues of school climate (Bickel & Qualls, 1980). Wu et al. (1982) found that less satisfactory school governance was a significant predictor of the probability of a student being suspended at least once in his or her school career.

As noted, an important part of the purpose of school discipline is to maintain a school climate that is conducive to learning; thus one would in general expect a positive correlation between effective school discipline and levels of academic achievement. Emerging data, however, have revealed a negative relationship between the use of school suspension and expulsion and academic achievement. Skiba et al. (2003) reported that states with higher rates of out-of-school suspension had lower average scores on the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP), and Raffaele Mendez, Knoff, and Ferron (2002) found that student achievement in writing was negatively associated with out-of-school suspensions for middle and high school students.

The simple correlation between achievement and discipline could of course be due to a number of factors. For example, schools in more disadvantaged areas might have a higher percentage of difficult students who were both suspended and exhibited lower achievement. To test this hypothesis, Skiba and Rausch (2004) constructed a multivariate analysis investigating the relationship of school discipline and academic achievement, controlling for a number of demographic variables including the school's percentage of free- and reduced-lunch students (poverty), enrollment of African American students, and school type (elementary or secondary). Results indicated that higher school rates of out-of-school suspension were associated with lower passing rates on the state accountability test, regardless of the demographic, economic, or racial makeup of the school.

**Nondiscriminatory Application**

Federal education policy prohibits discrimination in the application or outcomes of educational interventions. The right not to be discriminated against on the basis of race, color, or national origin is explicitly guaranteed by the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Browne, Losen, & Wald, 2002). Yet almost 30 years of research has documented racial and socioeconomic disparities in the use of out-of-school suspension and expulsion. These concerns become especially acute if, as suggested by the previous findings, the intervention to which some students are disproportionately exposed appears to be associated with a host of negative educational outcomes.

**Disproportionality Due to Socioeconomic Status.** Studies of school suspension have consistently documented disproportionality due to socioeconomic status (SES). Research has found that students who receive free school lunch are at greater risk of school suspension (Skiba et al., 1997; Wu et al., 1982). Wu et al. (1982) also found that students whose fathers did not have a full-time job were significantly more likely to be suspended than students whose fathers were employed full time.

In a qualitative study of student reactions to school discipline, Brantlinger (1991) interviewed adolescent students from both high- and low-income residential areas about their reactions to school. He reported that the lower serious disciplinary in class discrimination, 3
del. on student appear to be differen social classes. Where moderate consequences receiving more seven (e.g., yelled at in front belongings).

**Disproportionality district-**

2 to 3 times that of ot punishment, and scho concern in the admini speciaally African Am. In one of the earliest Children's Defense Fu (OCR) data on school that exceeded White si were between 2 and 3 middle, and high scho

Since that report, n students has beet et al., 1978; Gregory, Center, 1986; McCa & Hwang, 1992; Raff Skiba, 2004a; Richart 1986; Thornton & Tre recent study of a large African American fending 1 school year (Rat White male (25%) an Raffaele Mendez & I suspensions for Afric greater than White stu increase from element.

Few investigations ethnic backgrounds at overrepresentation of Knoff, 2003; Rausch . (see e.g., Gordon, Del.

Although minority there have been only portiality. Those fi asciated with disparc to disciplinary di.
reactions to school climate and school discipline. Both high- and low-income adolescents reported that the lower-SES students were more likely to commit more frequent and more serious disciplinary infractions. At the same time, both groups pointed to systematic social class discrimination, agreeing that whether a student is punished for a given infraction depends on student reputation, achievement, and socioeconomic class status. There also appeared to be differences in the nature of punishment meted out to students of different social classes. Whereas high-income students were more likely to receive more mild and moderate consequences (e.g., teacher lecture, moving desk), low-income students reported receiving more severe consequences, sometimes delivered in a less professional manner (e.g., yelled at in front of class, made to stand in hall all day, going through one’s personal belongings).

Disproportionality Due to Minority Status. For over 25 years, in national-, state-, district-, and building-level data, students of color have been found to be suspended at rates 2 to 3 times that of other students, and similarly overrepresented in office referrals, corporal punishment, and school expulsion (Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002). Of particular concern in the administration of school discipline is the overrepresentation of minorities, especially African American students, in the use of exclusionary and punitive consequences. In one of the earliest presentations of statistical evidence concerning school suspension, the Children’s Defense Fund (1975) studied U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (OCR) data on school discipline, and reported rates of school suspension for Black students that exceeded White students on a variety of measures. Rates of suspension for Black students were between 2 and 3 times higher than suspension rates for White students at the elementary, middle, and high school levels.

Since that report, documentation of disciplinary overrepresentation for African American students has been highly consistent (Costenbader & Markson, 1994, 1998; Glackman et al., 1978; Gregory, 1997; Kaeser, 1979; Lietz & Gregory, 1978; Massachusetts Advocacy Center, 1986; McCarthy & Hoge, 1987; McFadden & Marsh, 1992; McFadden, Marsh, Price, & Hwang, 1992; Raffaele Mendez & Knoff, 2003; Raffaele Mendez et al., 2002; Rausch & Skiba, 2004a; Richart et al., 2003; Skiba et al., 1997; 2002; Streitmatter, 1986; Taylor & Foster, 1986; Thornton & Trent, 1988; U.S. Department of Education, 2000; Wu et al., 1982). In one recent study of a large and diverse school district, 50% of African American male and 30% of African American female middle school students experienced out-of-school suspension during 1 school year (Raffaele Mendez & Knoff, 2003), rates that were substantially higher than White male (25%) and White female (9.3%) middle school students. Further, recent analyses (Raffaele Mendez & Knoff, 2003; Rausch & Skiba, 2004a) have found rates of out-of-school suspensions for African American elementary school students that are between 4 and 7 times greater than White students. The magnitudes of these disproportionate rates tend to remain or increase from elementary through high school.

Few investigations have explored disciplinary disproportionality among students of other ethnic backgrounds and those studies have yielded inconsistent results. Although disciplinary overrepresentation of Latino students had been reported in some studies (Raffaele Mendez & Knoff, 2003; Rausch & Skiba, 2004a), the finding is not universal across locations or studies (see e.g., Gordon, Della Piana, & Keleher, 2000).

Although minority disproportionality in school discipline has been widely documented, there have been only a few studies that have provided data on the reasons for that disproportionality. Those findings are presented next, categorized by factors that appear not to be associated with disproportionality in discipline, and those that appear to make some contribution to disciplinary disparities.
Factors Not Associated With Disciplinary Disproportionality

Socioeconomic Status. Race and socioeconomic status are unfortunately highly connected in American society (Duncan, Brooks-Gunn, & Klebanov, 1994; McLoyd, 1998), increasing the possibility that any finding of disproportionality due to race is primarily a byproduct of disproportionality associated with SES. As noted, low SES has been consistently found to be a risk factor for school suspension (Brantlinger, 1991; Skiba et al., 1997; Wu et al., 1982). In its statement before the United States Commission on Civil Rights, the National Association of Secondary School Principals (2000) thus argued that racial disproportionality in the application of zero tolerance policies

is not an issue of discrimination or bias between ethnic or racial groups, but a socioeconomic issue… A higher incidence of ethnic and racial minority students being affected by zero tolerance policies should not be seen as disparate treatment or discrimination but in terms of an issue of socioeconomic status. (p. 3)

Yet it is clear that race makes a contribution to disciplinary outcome independent of socioeconomic status. Using a regression model controlling for school socioeconomic status (percentage of parents unemployed and percentage of students enrolled in free lunch program), Wu et al., (1982) reported that, even with socioeconomic effects accounted for, non-White students still reported significantly higher rates of suspension than White students in all locales except rural senior high schools. Similarly, Skiba et al. (2002) found that effect sizes describing the size of the disparity between Black and White school discipline remained virtually unchanged when SES was statistically controlled, and that in fact, SES proved to be a far less significant and consistent predictor when both SES and race were considered simultaneously.

Higher Rates of Disruption Among Students of Color. Implicit in the poverty hypothesis for disparities in discipline is the assumption that African American students may engage in higher rates of disruptive behavior than other students. If so, disproportionate punishment would not be an indicator of bias, but rather an appropriate response to disproportionate misbehavior.

Investigations of student behavior, race, and discipline, however, have yielded no evidence that African American overrepresentation in school suspension is due to higher rates of misbehavior. Multivariate studies have shown that students from schools with more non-White students tended to have higher rates of suspension, even after statistically controlling for student attitudes and behavior (Wu et al., 1982). In a survey study involving 1,125 students in the 7th, 9th, and 11th grades in a mid-Atlantic city, McCarthy and Hoge (1987) collected self-report data concerning both rates of school misbehavior and rates of receiving school sanctions. Results indicated that Black students were in general more likely to be punished, and more likely to report having been punished, on three particular sanctions: told to bring parents to school, sent to principal’s office for bad behavior, and suspended. Although there was no significant difference between the two groups on total school misconduct, two items (skipped class and carved desks) showed significant Black–White differences; both indicated levels of misbehavior that were significantly higher for the White students.

Indeed, it may be that African American students are suspended and punished for behavior that is less serious than other students. McFadden et al. (1992) reported that Black pupils in a Florida school district were more likely than White students to receive severe punishments (e.g., corporal punishment, school suspension) and less likely to receive milder consequences (e.g., in-school suspension). Further analysis of the data suggested that the African American students tended to receive these harsher punishments for less severe behaviors. These results are consistent with finding for less serious behavior.

In a study specific to school setting, and tested, analysis revealed differences in higher rates of teacher analyses by race revealed to the results for gender did not show a pattern significantly more frustration; smoking, vand: African American student loitering, behavior the referring agent. In: be explained through available evidence suggests disciplinary consequence.

Factors Associated

African American over enrollment of African American related to changes in school immediately after school enrollment. The disproportionality over reliance on exclusionary also have high suspension (Advancement analyses, (Felice, 1981) to suspension, minority argument that the consequences on youth; for such student a natural response to the.

There is some evidence that African American students originate middle schools, Skiba students in measures of suspended, probability that racial disparities be the fact that African office by classroom to.

Qualitative studies indicate racial disparities. In Cole (2002) analyzed many office referrals for flagrant violation of d to what the authors de
tunately highly con-
McLoyd, 1998), in-
ce is primarily a by-
tas been consistently
t al., 1997; Wu et al.,
Rights, the National
ial disproportionality
ut a socioeconomic
ed by zero tolerance
rms of an issue of

e independent of so-
ioeconomic status
free lunch program),
d for, non-White stu-
tudents in all locales
effect sizes describ-
e remained virtually
ved to be a far less
ered simultaneously.

t the poverty hypoth-
ents may engage
ation discipline
portionate mis-
yielded no evidence
higher rates of mis-
ith more non-White
/ controlling for stu-
g 1,125 students in
ge (1987) collected
of receiving school
ely to be punished,
tions: told to bring
ed. Although there
conduct, two items
nces; both indicated
mished for behavior
that Black pupils in
severe punishments
ld consequences
frican American
rs. These results are
consistent with findings that African American students are referred for corporal punishment for less serious behavior than are other students (Shaw & Braden, 1990).

In a study specifically devoted to African American disproportionality in school discipline, Skiba et al. (2002) described racial and gender disparities in school punishments in an urban setting, and tested alternate hypotheses for that disproportionality. Discriminant function analysis revealed differences by gender for 12 of the 32 possible reasons for referral; boys received higher rates of teacher referral for 11 of 12 of those behaviors. Similar discriminant function analyses by race revealed differences on 8 of the 32 possible reasons for referral; in contrast to the results for gender, however, the group receiving the higher rate of school punishment did not show a pattern of more disruptive behavior. White students were referred to the office significantly more frequently for offenses that appear more capable of objective documentation: smoking, vandalism, leaving without permission, and obscene language. In contrast, African American students were referred more often for disrespect, excessive noise, threat, and loitering, behaviors that would seem to require more subjective judgment on the part of the referring agent. In short, there is no evidence that racial disparities in school discipline can be explained through higher rates of disruption among African American students. Rather, the available evidence suggests that African American students are subjected to office referrals or disciplinary consequences for less serious or more subjective reasons.

Factors Associated With Disciplinary Disproportionality

African American overrepresentation in school exclusion does not seem to be related to overall enrollment of African American students (Larkin, 1979). There may, however, be an effect related to changes in enrollment: Disproportionality in school suspension appeared to increase immediately after school desegregation, especially in high-SES schools (Thornton & Trent, 1988).

The disproportionate discipline of minority students also appears to be associated with an overreliance on exclusionary or punitive discipline. Schools with higher rates of suspension in general also have higher rates of overrepresentation of African American students in suspension (Advancement Project, 2000; Massachusetts Advocacy Center, 1986). Multivariate analyses (Felice, 1981) have found significant relationships in urban schools among high rates of suspension, minority dropout rate, and student perceptions of racial discrimination. Bullara (1993) argued that the typical classroom management style in many schools, relying heavily on negative consequences, contributes to school rejection and dropout for African American youth; for such students, “staying in school or dropping out may be less of a choice and more of a natural response to a negative environment . . . which he or she is trying to escape” (p. 362).

There is some evidence suggesting that the disproportionate representation of African American students originates at the classroom level. In a study of disproportionate discipline in urban middle schools, Skiba et al. (2002) reported no difference between African American and White students in measures reflecting disciplinary treatment at the office level (e.g., number of days suspended, probability of being suspended given an office referral). Further analyses showed that racial disparities in out-of-school suspension rates could be almost entirely accounted for by the fact that African Americans were twice as likely as White students to be referred to the office by classroom teachers.

Qualitative studies have explored possible mechanisms for this classroom contribution to racial disparities. In an ethnographic observational study of urban classrooms, Vavrus and Cole (2002) analyzed videotaped interactions among students and teachers. They found that many office referrals leading to school suspension were not the result of serious disruption or flagrant violation of disciplinary codes. Rather, many referrals out of the classroom were due to what the authors described as a students’ “violation of implicit interactional codes,” most
often a student calling into question established classroom practices or the teacher’s authority. Those students singled out in this way were disproportionately students of color. The authors concluded that:

Suspensions are the result of a complex sequence of events that together form a disciplinary moment, a moment when one disruptive act among many is singled out for action by the teacher. This singling-out process, we contend, disproportionately affects students whose race and gender distance them from their teachers, and this subtle, often unconscious process may be one of the reasons why students of color often experience suspension in the absence of violent behavior. (p. 109)

Together, these results are highly consistent with suggestions that cultural discontinuities may create interactional patterns that increase the likelihood that African American students, especially African American male adolescents, will be removed from class. Townsend (2000) suggested that many teachers, especially those of European American origin, may be unfamiliar and even uncomfortable with the more active and boisterous style of interaction that characterizes many African American males. The impassioned and emotive manner popular among young African Americans may be interpreted as combative or argumentative by unfamiliar listeners. Fear may also play a role in contributing to overreferral. Teachers who are prone to accepting stereotypes of adolescent African American males as threatening or dangerous may be more likely to react more quickly to relatively minor threats to authority that might be ignored for other ethnic or racial groups, especially if such fear is paired with a misunderstanding of cultural norms of social interaction (Ferguson, 2001). Clearly, an important area for future research will be to identify more precisely the extent to which issues of teacher skill in behavior management or cultural competence contribute to disparate rates of office referrals or school exclusion.

Whatever the reason, racial disparities in school exclusion are not lost on students of color. Sheets (1996) interviewed students and teachers in an urban high school concerning their perceptions of school discipline. Both European American and ethnically diverse students perceived sources of racism in the application of discipline. But whereas European American students perceived racial disparity in discipline as unintentional or unconscious, students of color saw it as conscious and deliberate, arguing that teachers often apply classroom rules and guidelines arbitrarily to exercise control, or to remove students whom they do not like. In particular, African American students felt that contextual variables, such as a lack of respect, differences in communication styles, disinterest on the part of teachers, and “being purposefully pushed to the edge where they were expected and encouraged to be hostile” were the primary causes of many disciplinary conflicts (Sheets, 1996, p. 175). When asked to describe the rules of the school, European American students felt that there were clear rules regarding discipline that simply tended to be enforced differently for different groups; students of color, asked the same question, tended to insist that there were no rules.

In summary, it would be hard to argue that disciplinary removal constitutes nondiscriminatory practice. Rather, students of color, particularly African American students, and students from disadvantaged backgrounds are at increased risk of being removed from school through suspension and expulsion. These disparities cannot be explained simply by socioeconomic status or the behavior of students themselves. Rather, the evidence suggests that these disparities are at least in part a product of cultural discontinuity or insufficient training in culturally responsive classroom management practices. These data make a case that the use, and especially the overuse, of disciplinary removal carries with it an inherent risk of racial disparity.

Such findings are especially troubling given the generally negative outcomes that have been found to be associated with the use of out-of-school suspension and expulsion. Together, the data indicate that minor increases in disciplinary term are associated with higher costs. The right to a free and impartial school system is a basic human rights. The right to a fair and responsible environment. In the view of some, this is the depth. Among the key concerns are the need for addressing per capita enforcement and the treatment of students who disrupt or troublemakers. When this happens, students who remain yet as data on zero tolerance phi guarantee treatment individual school safety or improved school level, it is high school completion rates of representation. This overrepresentation rates of behavior; ratli are cultural misunderstandings that may be challenged by data. Given a mandate and better able to demon
The right to a free public education was a hard-fought right. Expelling or suspending children from school denies them their right to an education. The denial of this right is especially troublesome when we consider that many students are expelled for ambiguous violations of school policy. (p. 60)

Summary: The Failure of Zero Tolerance as a Disciplinary Paradigm

There can be no question that schools must use all effective methods at their disposal to prevent violence, and to ensure a school climate that is maximally conducive to learning. Schools have a right and responsibility to minimize disruptions that can threaten the integrity of the learning environment. In the wake of frightening violence in our schools in the 1990s, there can be little doubt over the depth of the consensus around these propositions.

Among the key words in that understanding however, is the term effective. In the climate of fear generated by real and perceived threats to the safety of schools, many schools and school districts adopted the “get-tough” deterrent philosophy of zero tolerance as an intuitive method for addressing perceived threats to school safety. It makes logical sense that strict levels of enforcement for both major and minor incidents will be effective in sending a message to students that disruption will not be tolerated. It is intuitively appealing to think that removing troublemakers will be effective in improving and strengthening the school climate for those students who remain.

Yet as data on zero tolerance, out-of-school suspension, and expulsion have emerged, they have overwhelmingly failed to support these “common-sense” notions that lie at the heart of the zero tolerance philosophy. Suspension and expulsion appear to be used too inconsistently to guarantee treatment integrity. There is no evidence that zero tolerance makes a contribution to school safety or improved student behavior. Rather, higher levels of out-of-school suspension and expulsion are related to less adequate school climate, lower levels of achievement at the school level, a higher probability of future student misbehavior, and eventually lower levels of school completion. Finally, over 30 years of consistent data concerning African American overrepresentation in suspension and expulsion indicates that disciplinary school exclusion may carry inherent risks for creating or exacerbating racial and socioeconomic disadvantage. This overrepresentation is not explainable by appeal to socioeconomic status or differential rates of behavior; rather, more promising explanations for racial disparities in school discipline are cultural mismatch, especially in classroom behavior management, or insufficient school resources that may create an increased reliance on suspension and expulsion. Together, these data indicate that the actual benefits of removing a child from school for disciplinary reasons are in no way sufficient to counterbalance other concerns created by those interventions in terms of loss of educational opportunity and threats to school bonding.

ARE THERE EFFECTIVE ALTERNATIVES TO DISCIPLINARY REMOVAL?

Given a mandate under No Child Left Behind to use only effective strategies, one might presume that over time pressure will increase on schools to develop disciplinary approaches that are better able to demonstrate the capability to maintain safe school climates with a lower risk to
student learning. In the short term, however, it is unrealistic to expect that schools will simply cease suspending and expelling disruptive students. Indeed, in the absence of knowledge of other effective strategies, the abrupt removal of the tool many administrators believe is their only or best option (Skiba et al., 2003) could simply increase school disruption and chaos. Thus, it becomes extremely important to examine the available alternatives to suspension and expulsion, and the potential for their effective implementation in schools. To what extent do alternative interventions exist? How widely are they implemented? What is the process by which schools begin to move away from ineffective and punitive discipline toward more evidence-based procedures?

Evidence-based Prevention Strategies: Internal Validity

At the national level, there can be little doubt that effective alternatives for reducing the threat of youth violence have been identified. In the last 10 years, a number of research efforts and panels on school-based prevention of youth violence have been convened or sponsored by the federal government, including the Sherman et al. (1997; see especially Gottfredson, 1997) report to Congress, the Blueprints for Violence Prevention series (Mihalic, Irwin, Elliott, Fagan, & Hansen, 2001), the Department of Education and Juvenile Justice Early Warning, Timely Response guide (Dwyer, Osher, & Warger, 1998), and reports from the U.S. Surgeon General (Elliott, Hatot, Sirovatka, & Potter, 2001) and the Centers for Disease Control (Thornton, Craft, Dahlberg, Lynch, & Baer, 2000). These panels have in general relied on stringent methodological criteria to identify effective and promising programs for reducing youth violence. Their findings have been remarkably consistent with each other, and with scholarly reviews (e.g., Gagnon & Leone, 2001; Greenberg et al., 2003; Tolan & Guerra & Kendall, 1995; Zins, Weissberg, Wang & Walberg, 2004), in outlining an emerging conceptual model, and in identifying programs that appear to be most effective within that model.

In 1993, the American Psychological Association released its report Violence and Youth: Psychology's Response (APA, 1993) addressing what was then widely perceived as an epidemic of youth violence. That report framed youth violence prevention efforts in terms of a three-tiered primary prevention model. Since the publication of that report, a large number of researchers, policy makers, and professional organizations have articulated similar threecomponent prevention models as applied to mental health (Maizek & Haggerty, 1994), youth violence in general (Elliott et al., 2001; Tolan et al., 1995), or school violence in particular (Dwyer et al., 1998; Larson, 1994; Sprague et al., 2001; Walker et al., 1996). The model became the centerpiece for efforts of the U.S. Department of Education to address school violence in a series of publications intended to provide guidance to America’s schools concerning the prevention of violence (Dwyer et al., 1998; Dwyer & Osher, 2000). Although there is of course some variation in the definition of each of the three tiers of prevention, in general, school-based primary prevention approaches apply increasingly intensive interventions across three levels:

Figure 41.2 represents the three levels of a primary prevention model. As applied in school settings, the framework acts as a useful schematic for organizing violence prevention and school disciplinary interventions. The three levels in that model include:

- **Primary prevention:** To promote a safe and responsive climate for all students, primary prevention efforts, such as conflict resolution (Johnson & Johnson, this volume), bullying prevention (Hyman, this volume), social-emotional learning (Elias & Schwab, this volume), or improved classroom management (Carter & Doyle, this volume; Emmer & Gerwels, this volume), are implemented schoolwide.
schools will simply cease to be effective if the knowledge of the school climate is not properly disseminated. To what extent is the process of discipline towards more effective strategies for reducing the number of students involved in disruptive behavior? (Mihaly, et al., 2003; Tolan & Furlong, in press). Primary prevention approaches to create a safe and positive school climate are applied universally, addressing issues of day-to-day disruption and school climate. Secondary prevention strategies of early identification and early intervention are applied to a smaller proportion of the school population that may be at risk for violence or disruption, while effective response strategies and intervention are in place for those students who are already engaging in disruptive behavior.

- **Secondary prevention**: At the secondary or indicated prevention level, schools implement early screening or identification efforts for children who may be at risk for violence (Walker & Shinn, 2002), and programs such as anger management or mentoring that can reconnect students with schools and other institutions.

- **Tertiary prevention**: Despite our best efforts, it is likely that there will always be some level of disruption, aggression, and perhaps violence requiring an appropriate response. Tertiary prevention interventions such as multisystemic therapy are targeted at those students who have already engaged in violence and disruption. Such efforts are characterized by a planned and coordinated response that seeks to minimize the future damage of aggression to the child and others (Bear, Webster-Stratton, Furlong, & Rhee, 2000; Walker & Shinn, 2002).

**Evidence-based Prevention Strategies: External Validity**

Unfortunately, the existence of an extensive and relatively consistent data base on school-based intervention for violence prevention does not in any way guarantee that those strategies will be implemented as intended in actual school settings. G. Gottfredson et al. (2000) surveyed a nationally representative sample of school principals and teachers regarding the implementation...
of prevention programs at their school. Survey results indicated that more than 50% of reporting principals reported the presence of a prevention activity in most of the 20 prevention categories surveyed. Yet surveys of teachers found that implementation of prevention activities was typically at a level that would be considered unacceptable for guaranteeing efficacy. Of particular interest, the prevention practices that were reported to be most widely used were not necessarily those identified in evidence-based literature, but were instead procedures that tended to be less widely researched with respect to their impact on behavior (e.g., changes in class size or promotion practices).

Indeed, some findings have raised questions about the capability of schools to implement prevention programs with an acceptable degree of treatment integrity. Gottfredson, Gottfredson, and Skroban (1998) attempted to implement a multicomponent violence prevention strategy in a single middle school. The program was designed to include only interventions with previous demonstrations of effect, such as life skills training (Botvin, Mihalic, & Grotts, 1998), and violence prevention curricula (Guerra & Slaby, 1990). Despite levels of training of school personnel that were well in excess of typical research practice in school settings, however, Gottfredson et al. reported that few of the components of the program were received by more than 60% of the students, and the intensity of the interventions was also lower than expected.

It has been suggested that the problem of implementation of evidence-based violence prevention programs in school settings may lie in the nature of the research enterprise itself, with its emphasis on internal validity and experimental control. Shoenwald and Hoagwood (2001) argued that the majority of evidence-based practices have been developed under “test tube conditions” that fail to mirror the realities of school settings. In the main, the programs most often identified as “effective” or “promising” entail implementation that includes the presence and guidance of highly trained professionals, researchers, or graduate assistants, often accompanied by an large influx of grant support (Gottfredson, 2001). These additional resources enable researchers to maintain the rigorous experimental conditions that are critical to ensuring internal validity judgments about their treatments. Yet paradoxically, such arrangements probably also limit the applicability of evidence-based procedures in real-world school settings, because those settings typically lack access to highly trained researchers, graduate assistants, and large amounts of discretionary funds. In response to this issue, Jensen, Hoagwood, and Trickett (1999) have suggested that it may be necessary for prevention researchers to reverse their priorities; that is, to begin by developing treatments that are “sensible . . . , feasible, flexible, and palatable” (p. 209), and to move on to the demonstration of experimental control only after such practical concerns are met.

Improving the Implementation of Alternatives to Out-of-School Suspension and Expulsion

Thus, extensive reviews using rigorous criteria have identified a range of alternatives to suspension and expulsion for maintaining school safety and school discipline. Yet there is also cause for skepticism concerning the extent to which empirically validated methods of violence prevention are, or even could be, implemented in schools. Together, these facts suggest that the most critical challenge facing alternative approaches to school discipline is to find effective methods of improving the school-based implementation of proven effective practices in school discipline and school violence prevention.

A number of strategies have been designed to improve implementation of such alternatives and are typically characterized by an attention to the process by which schools implement effective alternatives tailored to local needs. The Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) model focuses on providing comprehensive, positive, and locally generated systems of proactive resources to schools (Ritter, this volume). Of local educators, coroners and other relevant data intervention suggestion to these concerns, implementation. Tests of its efficacy, expansion, (Blackman, 2003), as well

Using a Process

An alternative to infusions occurring in intervention to reach more positive teaching (Berliner, 1998) that our knowledge is associated with a variety of economic approaches to other issues in schools (Rausch & Ritter, 2004). Principals in one of the schools' use in schools attempting to exclusionary school

Skiba et al. (2004) is a relaxation of academic interview explicitly remove a student that expressed a committee discipline was not one expectations with school conducted in-service training of conflict resolution. Alternatives to violence and violence, the response and increased support, reported creative alter students even after being
re than 50% of ref-
re the 20 prevention
vention activities
nting efficacy. Of
widely used were
ad procedures that
or (e.g., changes in


t teachers to imple-
tegrity. Gottfredson,
tent violence pre-
tclude only inter-
t (Botvin, Mihalic,
990). Despite levels
h practice in school
of the program were
ventions was also
based violence pre-
teprise itself, with
Hoagwood (2001)
ed under “test tube
the programs most
cludes the presence
ssists, often ad-
itional resources
ritical to ensuring
arrangements prob-
bd school settings,
graduate assistants,
en, Hoagwood, and
achers to reverse e
feasible, flexi-
ental control only

f alternatives to sus-
ite. Yet there is also
methods of violence
ese facts suggest that
es is to find effective
ve practices in school

of such alternatives
1 schools implement
entions and Supports
generated systems of

proactive resources to schools, especially classroom teachers (Lewis, Trussell, Sunderland, & Richter, this volume). A school PBIS plan is typically created and implemented by a team of local educators, community members, and parents who review their school’s discipline and other relevant data to identify areas of concern, generate positive and support-focused intervention suggestions to change the contextual variables hypothesized to be contributing to these concerns, implement selected interventions, and track or modify the effects of the intervention. Tests of implementation have documented decreased rates of office referrals, suspensions, expulsions, and improvements on measures of school climate (Rosenberg & Jackman, 2003), as well as decreased time spent on discipline at the administrative level (Scott & Barrett, 2004). A second approach that has shown some success in school-wide restructuring of disciplinary practices is the Safe and Responsive Schools (SRS) model (Skiba, Peterson, Miller, Ritter, & Simmons, in press). The goal of the SRS approach has been to increase the knowledge base of teachers and administrators concerning what works in discipline and violence prevention, and to develop school safety plans responsive to student needs. The process leads participating schools through a strategic planning process involving local needs assessment, review of best practices, and tailoring a local plan matching intervention strategies with school concerns. Again, results have been encouraging: highly favorable assessments of the treatment acceptability of the process were matched by substantial reductions in rates of out-of-school suspension and expulsion (Skiba et al., in press).

Using a Process–Product Approach: What Works in Practice

An alternative to infusing research-based strategies into school settings is to explore “naturally occurring” interventions and strategies, that is, practices already used in classrooms and schools to reach more positive outcomes. In the early 1980s, such process–product studies of classroom teaching (Berliner, 1989; Brophy, 1988; Emmer & Everstson, 1981; Fisher et al., 1981) revolutionized our knowledge of effective teaching, by examining academic achievement outcomes associated with a variety of instructional and classroom management practices. A process–product approach might also be used to identify currently effective disciplinary strategies across a variety of economic and demographic profiles, in the hopes of disseminating those effective approaches to other similarly situated schools. Skiba and colleagues (Skiba et al., 2002; Skiba, Rausch, & Ritter, 2004; Rausch & Skiba, 2004b) have begun piloting this approach, interviewing principals in one midwestern state to identify disciplinary practices that are currently in use in schools attempting to maintain a safe and productive learning climate without resorting to exclusionary school discipline.

Skiba et al. (2004) reported that the strategies reported by these principals in no way involved a relaxation of academic standards or behavioral expectations. Most of the principals who were interviewed explicitly stated that they had no hesitation in using suspension or expulsion to remove a student that they deemed a realistic threat to school safety. But these principals also expressed a commitment to the use of a wide range of alternatives to ensure that exclusionary discipline was not overused. Most reported that they had put in place some process to clarify expectations with school staff concerning what constitutes an appropriate office referral, and conducted in-service training in classroom management. Many of the schools reported the use of conflict resolution, life skills training, or bullying prevention programs to instruct students in alternatives to violence for resolving interpersonal conflict. For students at risk for disruption and violence, the responding principals described programs for promoting parental involvement and increased support, such as mentoring. Finally, a number of these schools and school districts reported creative alternative programs that continue to provide educational opportunities to students even after being suspended or expelled from school.
There is limited evidence suggesting that such an approach can have substantial effects on both school discipline and school levels of academic achievement. In one middle school (Rausch & Skiba, 2004b), the programs and philosophies implemented by a new principal and building-leadership team saw a 1-year drop in the out-of-school suspension rate from 50.67 to 18.53 incidents per 100 students, and this lower rate remained consistent over a period of 4 years. In addition, the change in the disciplinary climate appears to have been concurrent with improved achievement outcomes; with the change in leadership that brought a different philosophy and programmatic approach to student discipline, scores on the state accountability test, which had been substantially below the state average, have been consistently above the average achievement rate for middle schools in the state.

Although these data must be regarded as preliminary and merely suggestive of positive outcomes, they also argue that a return to the process-product research paradigm would be fruitful in the domain of school discipline. Such an approach may have important implications for practice and dissemination. An examination of current effective practice may address the difficult issue of the external validity of preventive disciplinary alternatives: One might well expect that school practitioners would be more amenable to implementing disciplinary interventions already implemented and tested by their peers in practice.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The current status of research and practice in school discipline provides a double quandary. On the one hand, the most widely used disciplinary procedures in schools today—out-of-school suspension and expulsion—are associated with a high of negative outcomes, including recidivism, lower achievement, and school dropout. These concerns are exacerbated by the fact that students of color, particularly African American students, are disproportionately exposed to these outcomes by being overrepresented among those who are suspended or expelled. On the other hand, although a number of procedures have been identified that clearly lead to more positive outcomes, these procedures do not appear to be implemented in schools with a frequency or fidelity that could be expected to yield improved outcomes.

The recent history of school disciplinary policy has seen an increasing reliance on school exclusion through suspension or expulsion. Yet the findings of recent research on school discipline have begun to challenge the notion that preserving a school climate conducive to learning requires the removal of students who engage in disruption. Indeed, emerging data have begun to document a negative correlation between school levels of suspension and expulsion and school achievement (Raffaele Mendez et al., 2002; Skiba et al., 2003). If that finding continues to be validated, one might expect that positive alternatives that can maintain an orderly school climate without reducing educational opportunity would join the evidence-based procedures that schools are mandated to use under No Child Left Behind.

Recommendations for modifying or moving away from a zero tolerance model have begun to emerge. Educational professionals and policy makers wishing to move toward best-practice school discipline and violence prevention programs might consider advocating for the following:

1. Reserve zero tolerance disciplinary removals for only the most serious and severe disruptive behaviors, and define those behaviors explicitly. Balancing the need to protect against the most serious infractions with the absence of efficacy data for the extension of zero tolerance to less serious offenses, a best-evidence approach suggests restricting zero tolerance to only the most serious of infractions, such as possession of firearms on school property.

2. Replace one-size, wherein response to core zero tolerance, with reserving seven. Less serious of even minor figs range from ins counseling.


4. Expand the ardent behavior. Zero tolerance from school effective altern effective pre and teachers.

5. Implement pr alienated stud effective progrs high levels of might also seek supported strat of school comm

6. Improve colla and mental beh behaviors of th and the problem one agency to Clarke, 1990), youth-serving: of providing ac behaviors.

7. Evaluate all st all disciplinai behavior and th. There is no re standard of ac behavior or sc security, or cla determine whe school safety, resources will a school’s cha
2. Replace one-size-fits-all disciplinary strategies with graduated systems of discipline, wherein consequences are geared to the seriousness of the infraction. In response to community concerns about punishments that do not fit the crime under zero tolerance, many school districts are implementing graduated systems of discipline, reserving severe punishment for only the most serious, safety-threatening offenses. Less serious offenses, such as classroom disruption, attendance related behaviors, or even minor fights among students are met with less severe consequences that might range from in-school suspension to parent contact, reprimands, community service, or counseling.

3. Define all infractions, whether major or minor, carefully. Garibaldi, Blanchard, and Brooks (1996) argued that inadequate reporting and definition allow greater room for individual bias to emerge in the disciplinary process. Carefully drawn definitions of all behaviors subject to the school disciplinary code protect both students from inequitable consequences and school officials from charges of unfair and arbitrary application of school policy.

4. Expand the array of options available to schools for dealing with disruptive or violent behavior. One must assume that school boards or administrators implementing zero tolerance policies are not doing so because they take pleasure in removing children from school. Rather, many school disciplinarians may simply be unaware of more effective alternatives. School psychologists can play a critical role in the development of more effective disciplinary systems by becoming aware of best practice knowledge on effective preventive alternatives and disseminating that information to administrators and teachers.

5. Implement preventive measures that can improve school climate and reconnect alienated students. Osher, Sandler, and Nelson (2001) noted that many of the most effective programs in the nation for dealing with student disruption are characterized by high levels of student support and community. Solutions to the zero tolerance dilemma might also seek to shift the focus from swift and certain punishment to using research-supported strategies like conflict resolution and bullying prevention to improve the sense of school community and belongingness.

6. Improve collaboration and communication among schools, parents, juvenile justice, and mental health to develop an array of alternatives for challenging youth. The behaviors of the most challenging of youth can seriously disrupt school environments, and the problems faced by those youth and their family often exceed the abilities of any one agency to address them. System of care and wraparound approaches (Burchard & Clarke, 1990), in which education, mental health, juvenile justice, and other community youth-serving agencies collaborate to develop integrated services, offer promise as a way of providing additional resources to schools to address the most serious and challenging behaviors.

7. Evaluate all school discipline or school violence prevention strategies to ensure that all disciplinary interventions, programs, or strategies are truly affecting student behavior and school safety. Accountability of instruction has become a national priority. There is no reason why behavioral or disciplinary procedures should be held to a lower standard of accountability. The implementation of any procedure addressing student behavior or school violence—whether it be zero tolerance, conflict resolution, school security, or classroom management—must be accompanied by an evaluation adequate to determine whether that procedure has indeed made a positive contribution to improving school safety or student behavior. Without such data, there is the danger that time and resources will be wasted on strategies that sound appealing, but in fact do little to decrease a school’s chances of disruption or violence.
SUMMARY

Clear and effective school discipline systems are critical in maintaining safe school environments conducive to learning. Yet the evidence has failed to support disciplinary exclusion as an intervention capable of ensuring such a climate. Viewed as behavioral interventions, out-of-school suspension and expulsion appear to lack treatment fidelity, are associated with negative outcomes in terms of school climate, student behavior, student achievement, and school dropout, and show consistent evidence of racial and socioeconomic disparities. Fortunately, effective alternatives are emerging, many with strong empirical support. Although problems of implementation clearly remain to be solved, school reform strategies such as Positive Behavioral Supports and Safe and Responsive Schools appear to hold promise as methods for improving the implementation of effective school disciplinary policies and practices. The challenge for research and practice will be to identify ways to increase the implementation of effective disciplinary systems that maintain school safety without removing students from the opportunity to learn.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The authors thank Edmund Emmer, The University of Texas, Austin, for his review of this chapter.

REFERENCES


Interventions for academic and behavior problems II: Preventive and remedial approaches (pp. 1–26). Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychologists.


