

# EDJJ NOTES

A publication of the National Center on Education, Disability, and Juvenile Justice  
June 2003 [www.edjj.org](http://www.edjj.org) Volume 2, Number 4

## In the News

### **School Characteristics Related to the Use of Suspension**

by  
Christine A. Christle  
C. Michael Nelson  
Kristine Jolivette

Considerable evidence suggests that a history of suspension from school accelerates youths' progress along a pathway to delinquency and life-long failure. Suspension has been related to school failure, dropout, delinquency, and criminal behavior. Students who are suspended tend to receive lower grades, are more likely to have learning or emotional disabilities, or to have academic skill deficits.<sup>1</sup> These students are three times more likely to drop out of school,<sup>2</sup> and over 80% of incarcerated adults have dropped out of school.<sup>3</sup> Vicki Reed, the director of Placement Services for the Kentucky Department of Juvenile Justice, reported that it is unusual to find a youthful offender among the state's population of incarcerated youth who has not been suspended from school (personal communication, October 11, 2002). While a number of state and federal initiatives have focused on reducing the use of suspension, it is one of the most common disciplinary consequences used in

schools for student problem behaviors and rates of its use continue to rise.

It may seem obvious that suspension should be reserved for extreme behavior problems that pose physical danger to others, yet researchers have found that minor offenses, such as disobedience, disrespect, attendance problems, and classroom disruption commonly result in suspension.<sup>4</sup>

Ironically, as much as suspension is used, it is not effective in reducing the behavior problems it is intended to address. For example, research indicates that students who exhibit the most challenging behavior have been suspended multiple times, yet

*(Article continues)*

### **IN THIS ISSUE**

- **In the News: School Characteristics Related to the Use of Suspension**
- **EDJJ Professional Development Series**
- **Research to Practice: Grouping for Instruction (Part II)**
- **Recommended Reading**

About EDJJ

EDJJ is a technical assistance, training, research, and dissemination center designed to develop more effective responses to the needs of youth with disabilities in the juvenile justice system and those at-risk for involvement with the juvenile justice system.

The center is a collaborative project of the University of Maryland, University of Kentucky, Arizona State University, American Institutes for Research, and The Pacer Center.

suspension does not appear to reduce subsequent undesired behavior.<sup>5</sup> Research also indicates that suspension is used disproportionately with students who are: (a) male; (b) from low socioeconomic families; (c) of a minority ethnic background; and (d) identified as having a disability or low academic competence.<sup>6</sup>

We conducted our study to determine which school characteristics show the strongest relationship to school suspension, and how schools reporting high suspension rates differ from schools reporting low suspension rates. We examined suspension rates in 161 Kentucky middle schools (schools not reporting data for both 2000-01 and 2001-02 academic years and those that did not include grades 6, 7, and 8 were not selected for this study), using both quantitative and qualitative procedures. We identified a number of school characteristics that are differentially related to school suspension. These results suggest some changes that schools can make to reduce their rates of student suspension.

Our research was conducted in three stages. At Stage 1, we performed correlational analyses of data from two academic years (2000-2001 and 2001-2002) obtained from the annual reports by the Kentucky Department of Education and the Kentucky Center for School Safety. At Stage 2, we performed statistical analyses (MANOVA) to compare 20 middle schools with the highest suspension rates (HSS, mean = 62.94) to 20 middle schools with the lowest suspension rates (LSS, mean = 2.47) on a number of variables that we identified (from the literature and Stage 1 analyses) as being related to rates of student suspension. In Stage 3, we selected four schools from each Stage 2 group as case examples for closer examination. Teams of three trained observers made one-day visits to the schools and gathered information using administrator surveys, staff interviews, and

on-site observations. During site visits, observers surveyed the school campus, independently noting the interactions of students and adults, the routines, and the physical condition of the schools. They interviewed school personnel and spent time in common areas, such as the cafeteria, library, and gymnasium. Observations were also conducted in sixth-grade classrooms, where they noted the physical arrangements, transition routines, instructional activities, and teacher and student interactions and behaviors.

Analysis of Stage 1 data revealed several school-level characteristics that were differentially related to suspension rate. The number of documented board of education violations (i.e., infractions of school district rules), low socioeconomic status (as measured by the percentage of students enrolled in the Federal Free and Reduced Lunch Program, FRLP), the number of reported law violations on school grounds, student grade retention rate, and dropout rate were significantly associated with higher rates of student suspension. On the other hand, average daily student attendance rate, academic achievement scores (as measured by the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills-CTBS), and majority ethnicity (as measured by the percent of Caucasian students) were associated with lower suspension rates. School size, as measured by the number of students enrolled, and the gender breakdown of the student body were not significantly related to suspension rate. The school characteristics identified in this analysis, as well as other school characteristics that have been identified by other researchers, were examined further in Stages 2 and 3.

Stage 2 analyses revealed statistically significant differences between the HSS and LSS on most of these variables, in directions that were predicted from Stage 1 correlations. The LSS reported higher rates of attendance, academic achievement, and

percent of Caucasian students than did the HSS. High suspending schools reported higher dropout rates, more board of education and law violations, and more students from low socioeconomic backgrounds than LSS. Retention rates were not significantly different between the two groups.

In addition, we examined other characteristics that are provided in the Kentucky web-based school report cards (i.e., the mean amount of spending per student, teacher to student ratio, and average years of experience of the teachers). The only significant difference between schools in the HSS and LSS groups was on the average amount of money spent per student per year. Surprisingly, this figure was higher for HSS than for LSS. On the other hand, considering the loss of Average Daily Attendance (ADA) funds, it is not surprising that suspension is costly for schools. When a student is absent in Kentucky, the school loses \$19.00 per day in ADA funds. Given that 202,972 instructional days were lost due to student suspensions during the 2001-2002 school year,<sup>7</sup> as much as \$3,856,468 could have been lost in ADA funds.

The findings from Stage 3 of our research included the identification of several patterns and themes that support and clarify the information gained from our previous analyses. Governance and leadership emerged as important variables that distinguished HSS from LSS. Staff from the HSS did not communicate overall confidence and positive attitudes about their administrators, as opposed to staff from the LSS group. The observers gave the HSS low ratings on leadership and the sense of a team atmosphere between administration and staff. In fact, the administrator's approach to student discipline appeared to be more important than school demographic or student background data in predicting a school's use of suspension. These findings

suggest that governance and leadership of a school strongly influence student outcomes, either positively or negatively.

Another pattern that emerged in Stage 3 analysis was differences in staff behaviors between HSS and LSS. Observers noted many more authoritative behaviors (e.g., talking down to and scolding students) in the HSS. Conversely, more interactions between staff and students at the LSS were inferred as caring and respectful. The characteristics and behaviors of the teaching staff also contribute to predicting a school's use of suspension and thus, impact student outcomes.

We found two patterns in relation to school structure and programming. First, there was an overall difference in the ambience of the HSS and the LSS. The LSS were cleaner, brighter, and had a more relaxed decor (e.g., restaurant style cafeterias, artistic displays) that mirror life outside of school, as opposed to the HSS, which tended to have more institutional environments. The second pattern was a difference in behavioral programs. The LSS were consistent in their focus on positive, proactive disciplinary measures rather than reactive, punitive strategies. For example, observers described the LSS schools as orderly, yet relaxed. Conversely, observers described a discernable tension in the HSS resulting from uncoordinated attempts to maintain order through punitive and exclusionary disciplinary practices.

Our findings suggest that, although student characteristics (e.g., poverty) affect student outcomes, certain school characteristics can impact student outcomes either positively or negatively. Overall, schools having economically poor, diverse student populations also had lower academic scores, lower attendance rates, less parent involvement, and more board of education and law violations. However, our results also suggest that, to counter the negative

impact of student and family demographic factors, positive influences involving the certain school characteristics need to be intensified. These include: (a) school governance and leadership (e.g., administrator experience, philosophies, disciplinary style); (b) staff characteristics and behaviors (e.g., teaching style, behaviors, attitudes); and (c) school structure and programming (e.g., physical condition, rules, policies, disciplinary procedures, academic focus).

#### *Summary*

The results of this study indicate that several school characteristics appear to be differentially related to suspension rate. It is noteworthy that our findings were consistent across different stages of this study. For example, student infractions of school rules (i.e., board of education violations) were positively related to suspension rate as evidenced by the correlational analysis in Stage 1, the MANOVA in Stage 2, and the administrator surveys in Stage 3. Lower socioeconomic background of students, (i.e., the percentage of students enrolled in the FRLP) was related to higher suspension rates, as was dropout rate across the first two stages of analyses. The negative relationships between suspension and attendance rates, academic achievement (i.e., CTBS scores), and percentage of students of Caucasian ethnic background were confirmed by both Stages 1 and 2 results. An interesting finding in the Stage 2 analysis was that the amount of spending per student was positively related to suspension rate.

We also obtained consistent results across the various assessment strategies used in Stage 3. Family involvement was negatively related to suspension rate, as evidenced by both administrator and school staff responses. The need to reduce suspension rates in HSS was corroborated by both administrator and staff opinions.

The administrators and staff from the HSS agreed on the resources needed to reduce student behavior problems. These included: (a) alternative education; (b) more teachers to reduce class sizes; (c) more counselors; and (c) increased parent involvement. Interestingly, HSS administrators expressed a need for more professional development training for teachers. On the other hand, HSS staff expressed the need for better and more active administrators. This suggests a disconnect between administration and staff that also was noted by the observers.

#### *Recommendations*

There is no single, quick fix for school improvement. Therefore, school personnel should use strategies that address the full range of school characteristics (i.e., student and family issues, governance and leadership, staff behaviors characteristics, and structure and programs).

- Personnel at both the HSS and the LSS voiced the need for greater parent involvement. One of the LSS has developed several strategies for increasing parent involvement, including school-sponsored family picnics and “Good News” postcards that are regularly sent to parents reporting positive student behaviors.
- The observers noted that the staff they interviewed were aware of their school’s problems and voiced realistic solutions. Thus, administrators who work together with their teachers may find sufficient knowledge and expertise within the school walls to address their problems.
- The need for quality professional development was a theme echoed by both staff and administrators at both HSS and LSS in this study. Schools wishing to reduce their suspension rates should focus on staff training in the areas that were cited, including (a) behavior management; (b) engaging instruction; and (c) diversity and culture.

- Another theme that was repeated by administrators and staff was the need for school-wide behavior planning and consistency regarding behavioral expectations and consequences. A wealth of information and resources are available to school personnel through the Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (<http://www.pbis.org>). School-wide positive behavior support is gaining recognition as a successful approach to student discipline across the country, with schools reporting 20-60% reductions in office discipline referrals and suspensions. For change to be realized on a school level, the approach must be implemented school-wide, and it must be sustained.

In summary, our study demonstrates that a number of school characteristics are differentially related to rates of student suspension. Hopefully, our findings shed some light on the suspension phenomenon and facilitate the identification of alternatives to the use of school exclusion as a disciplinary procedure. We believe that keeping students engaged in school and attempting to make schools more supportive, inviting environments for students and adults will contribute to the prevention of delinquency.

<sup>1</sup>Costenbader, V., & Markson, S. (1998). School suspension: A study with secondary students. *Journal of School Psychology, 36*(1), 59-82.

<sup>2, 4</sup>Skiba, R., & Peterson, R. (1999). The dark side of zero tolerance: Can punishment lead to safe schools? *Phi Delta Kappan, 80*, 372-382.

<sup>3</sup>Coalition for Juvenile Justice. (2001). *Abandoned in the back row: New lessons in education and delinquency prevention*. Washington, D.C.: Coalition for Juvenile Justice.

<sup>7</sup>McCoy-Simandle, L., & May, D. C. (2002). *Kentucky 2001: Safe schools data report*. Richmond, KY: Kentucky Center for School Safety.

<sup>5</sup>McCord, J., Widom, C. S., Bamba, M. I., & Crowell,

N. A. (Eds.). (2000). *Juvenile crime, juvenile justice*. Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press.

<sup>6</sup>Skiba, R., Peterson, R. L., & Williams, T. (1997). Office referrals and suspension: Disciplinary intervention in middle schools. *Education and Treatment of Children, 20*(3), 295-316.

## EDJJ Professional Development Series

Sarup Mathur, Ph.D.

Youth in the juvenile justice system challenge the abilities of educators and other professionals to discover effective ways to teach and rehabilitate them. Teachers, administrators, and other correctional professionals may enter the juvenile justice system without adequate preparation for their jobs. Regardless of their expertise, experience, or knowledge in subject area content, they are seldom prepared for the demands of the setting. Thus, there is an urgent need for ongoing, coordinated professional enhancement opportunities for administrators and practitioners in these systems to develop a habit of reflective practice. The juvenile justice system needs to develop a sustainable professional development program that assures quality preparation of professionals and serves as a preventative model to educator attrition.

EDJJ offers technical assistance, training, and professional development opportunities designed to expand skills of professionals, which in turn, builds an agency's training capacity. For example, the *EDJJ Professional Development Series* reflects best practices in adult learning and follows the facilitation model of instruction. EDJJ has redefined teaching and learning in the juvenile justice system by producing this highly relevant, and useful professional development series. For over a decade, EDJJ personnel have been involved in producing and sponsoring research-based information

regarding special education in the juvenile justice system. The EDJJ professional development team is committed to providing participants with highly practical training that can be immediately implemented when they return to their own settings. The purpose of these professional development experiences is to provide participants with relevant content and the instructional tools and strategies to immediately impact their students.

The *EDJJ Professional Development Series* is designed to empower these professionals by: (a) presenting current knowledge in specific areas; (b) providing opportunities to develop and elaborate upon that knowledge base; (c) encouraging them to share real life experiences with colleagues and peers; and (d) helping them enhance their personal and professional satisfaction. System-wide changes in the professional development processes are only possible when all the stakeholders within the juvenile justice system commit themselves to growth and change. EDJJ Professional Development processes are geared to improve student achievement outcomes through innovative professional development strategies based on research and principles of effective instruction.

EDJJ Professional Development objectives include the following:

- Create opportunities for teachers and administrators in the juvenile justice system for professional enhancement and present comprehensive and current information relevant to correctional special education.
- Provide teachers and administrators with training materials and methods that are effective.
- Provide the training sites with access to technical assistance, training resources, supports, and guidance.
- Provide opportunities for technical assistance and professional

development via distance education, on-line modalities and alternate formats.

- Encourage professionals involved in the juvenile justice system to develop professional enhancement plans of life-long learning opportunities.
- Advocate for accountability to enhance professionalism and the quality of juvenile justice training.
- Promote collaborations and linkages among individuals, agencies, and organizations that address the needs of youth at-risk.
- Serve as a resource for building the capacity of juvenile justice training programs.
- Continue to develop, modify, and disseminate EDJJ resources.
- Offer individualized professional enhancement opportunities to meet the needs of professionals involved in serving youth in the juvenile justice system.
- Enable professionals to integrate evidence-based practices and apply concepts and skills in real life situations.
- Provide research-based best practices in the areas of transition, curriculum development, instruction, assessment, and public policy.

The *EDJJ Professional Development Series* benefits all professionals serving students who are involved in or are at-risk for becoming involved in the juvenile justice system. This may include individuals from education, law enforcement, social work, parole, probation, rehabilitation counseling, the judiciary, social service agencies, and parents.

The *EDJJ Professional Development Series* includes a set of eight modules on the following topics:

- Module 1. History of the Criminal Justice System
- Module 2. Characteristics of Incarcerated Youth with Disabilities
- Module 3. Overview of Special Education
- Module 4. Overview of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)
- Module 5. Assessment of Individuals with Disabilities in the Juvenile Justice System
- Module 6. Curriculum for Individuals with Disabilities in the Juvenile Justice System
- Module 7. Instructional Methods and Strategies
- Module 8. Transition Services for Youth with Disabilities in the Juvenile Justice System

If you or your site or agency would like to have more information regarding this training series, please visit our website [www.edjj.org](http://www.edjj.org) and fill out the **EDJJ Professional Development Survey**. We are interested in finding out about the availability, quality, and relevance of the existing professional development activities offered in your institution or agency. We also want to know about your views for improving the professional development system for educators/caretakers serving children and youth in or at-risk for involvement in the juvenile justice system.

### **For More Information**

If you have any questions or need more information regarding the EDJJ Professional Development Series, please contact [Sarup.Mathur@asu.edu](mailto:Sarup.Mathur@asu.edu)

## **Research to Practice**

### **Grouping for Instruction**

*This is Part 2 of a two-part series on promoting positive student interaction and academic achievement through student grouping*

In Part 1 of this two-part series on grouping for instruction, we discussed two methods that addressed individual student needs, yet also provided an opportunity for instruction and structured peer interaction. Specifically, reciprocal peer tutoring and reciprocal peer revising of writing assignments were discussed. In part two, the benefits and methods for using classwide peer tutoring (CWPT) are discussed.

Typically, the entire class participates in CWPT simultaneously. First, students are paired and the pairs are separated into two groups within the classroom. Each session last approximately 30 minutes and can be implemented from two to five days per week. Within a session, each student spends 10 minutes acting as the tutor and 10 minutes as the tutee. Students are then provided approximately 5 minutes to record their individual points. Points may be earned individually for correct responses, error correction, and for following the tutoring procedures. To increase self-management and positive student interactions, teachers may designate certain instances where the tutor provides the points to the tutee. For example, the tutor may record points for correct responses and correcting errors, while the teacher records points for adhering to the CWPT procedures. At the end of the week, teams meeting a certain criteria level may earn a special reinforcing activity.

To implement CWPT, the teacher must identify the specific procedural steps and expectations for students to follow. Students should be taught the exact procedures through a simple three-step process. First,

the teacher explains and posts the exact list of procedures. Then, the teacher models the peer tutoring process and allows students to participate in role playing. Lastly, the teacher provides an opportunity for the students to use the process and receive feedback on their correct use of the format.

CWPT is effective for youth in general education, special education, and language minority students.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, it is effective for students in all subject areas and through high school.<sup>2</sup> There has been some concern that CWPT may not be effective for tasks that require higher level thinking skills. However, CWPT was recently used to help students learn beginning algebra skills. CWPT was equally as effective as independent practice and offered students the added benefit of positive social interactions with peers.<sup>3</sup> Also relevant to juvenile correctional schools, CWPT is appropriate for use in a heterogeneous class, where student academic levels vary greatly.

Peer tutoring has several benefits including: (a) promoting active student responding; (b) providing student's opportunities to correct errors; (c) providing students with immediate feedback; and (d) teaching self-management.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps most importantly for youth in juvenile correctional schools, CWPT offers a structured, task-focused opportunity for positive social interaction. The dual benefit of providing an effective instructional approach to learn academic concepts and promotion of positive social interaction makes CWPT a valuable tool for juvenile correctional educators.

<sup>1</sup>Arreaga-Mayer, C. (1998). Increasing active student responding and improving academic performances through classwide peer tutoring. *Intervention in School and Clinic*, 34(2), 89-94, 117.

<sup>2,4</sup>Olson, J. L., & Platt, J. M. (2000). *Teaching children and adolescents with special needs* (3rd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill.

<sup>3</sup>Alsopp, D. H. (1997). Using classwide peer tutoring to teach beginning algebra problem-solving skills in

heterogeneous classrooms. *Remedial and Special Education*, 18(6), 367-379.

## Recommended Reading

Sheri Meisel, Ph.D.

At times, it may be difficult to access information related to youth with disabilities and juvenile justice. However, there are some recent publications that are excellent resources for educators, correctional professionals, policymakers, researchers, youth advocates, and parents. This issue, we highlight three publications:

### ***Addressing the Needs of Youth with Disabilities in the Juvenile Justice System: The Current Status of Evidence Based Research***

Published by The National Council on Disabilities (May 2003), this report summarizes and assesses the state of knowledge about children and youth with disabilities who are at risk of delinquency and involvement in, or who have already entered, the juvenile justice system. By highlighting what is known about addressing delinquency and the diverse needs of this population, it aims to inform discussions among policymakers, practitioners, and researchers. The report is available at [www.ncd.gov/newsroom/publications/juvenile.html](http://www.ncd.gov/newsroom/publications/juvenile.html).

***AdvocCasey***, the Annie E. Casey Foundation policy magazine, devotes the Spring 2003 issue to juvenile justice. The magazine is available free online at <http://www.aecf.org/publications/advocasey/spring2003/>.

***Invisible Punishment: The Collateral Consequences of Mass Imprisonment***  
Edited by Marc Mauer and Meda Chesney-Lind for The Sentencing Project (May

2003). Leading scholars and advocates in criminal justice explore the far-reaching consequences of thirty years of "get tough" policies on prisoners, ex-felons, and families and communities. Contributors to the report explore "invisible punishments" from disenfranchisement and disqualification from public housing, welfare benefits, and job training, to greatly increased exposure to fatal diseases.

Copies are \$26.95 and can be ordered by calling (800) 233-4830.

For more information about The Sentencing Project see [www.sentencingproject.org](http://www.sentencingproject.org).

### EDJJ NOTES

Vol.2, No. 4, June 2003

A free bi-monthly on-line newsletter of the National Center on Education, Disability, and Juvenile Justice (EDJJ). EDJJ is a technical assistance, training, research, and dissemination center that is jointly funded by the Office of Special Education Programs, U.S. Department of Education, and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention of the U.S. Department of Justice. This publication is supported by Grant No. H324J990003, U.S. Department of Education.

Editor: Joe Gagnon  
George Mason University  
Graduate School of Education  
4400 University Ave. MSN 4B3  
Fairfax, VA 22030

Project Director: Peter Leone  
University of Maryland  
Department of Special Education  
1308 Benjamin Building  
College Park, MD 20742

**To subscribe to EDJJ Notes or for change of address, visit [www.edjj.org](http://www.edjj.org)**

**Disclaimer:** The opinions stated in this newsletter are those of the authors and do not represent the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, or U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Policy (OJJDP). No endorsement of the Office of Special Education Programs, the U.S. Department of Education, or OJJDP should be inferred.