

**IN-SCHOOL SUSPENSION: PERSPECTIVES AND PRACTICES
OF SECONDARY PRINCIPALS IN WEST VIRGINIA**

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While suspensions can improve a school’s culture and increase the learning of students who remain in class, suspensions can have a negative impact on the learning of those who are suspended. When students are assigned to out-of-school suspension, they may spend the day fishing or playing video games. Even students who are assigned to in-school suspension (ISS) may not get enough work to keep them busy – nonetheless learning – through the school day. For those students, a day in ISS constitutes a loss of learning. And yet, ISS is one of the few consequences routinely assigned by public school leaders in the United States. This study employed survey research and follow-up interviews to investigate the beliefs of public school principals in middle and high schools across West Virginia. Also considered are factors that influence the design of ISS and potential improvements to ISS.

Survey results and interview findings suggest that the design and implementation of ISS in any given school is influenced by district leadership, district policy, prior practice, and district resources. Results indicate that district finances and the availability of appropriate people to staff ISS are seen as having the greatest impact on the kind and consistency of ISS. Current practices involve staffing solutions, the availability of classrooms and technology, as well as curricular options, but the principals surveyed and interviewed in this study were focused largely on the staffing of ISS and less on other features of ISS. While many principals envisioned only an

academic ISS, most favored an approach that is both academic and therapeutic, an approach that provides both coursework and character education in ISS.

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1.0 PROBLEM OF PRACTICE

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), states and local education agencies are being asked to take a hard look at disciplinary practices that have the effect of excluding students from the classroom or depriving them of an education. Under part A – Improving Basic Programs Operated by Local Educational Agencies – section 1111 enumerates the mandatory components of state plans. Section 1111(g)(C)(ii) asks “how the State educational agency will support local educational agencies receiving assistance under this part to improve school conditions for student learning, including through reducing ... the overuse of discipline practices that remove students from the classroom” (p. 45, 2015). To meet that directive, the West Virginia Department of Education (WVDE) has included a new data point in its new Balanced Scorecards: each middle and high school must report on the use of out-of-school suspension (OSS), and the use of OSS will count against schools in the rankings released annually by WVDE. Presumably, this will have the effect of discouraging principals from assigning OSS.

Yet, one of the greatest threats to academic achievement is disruptive student behavior. As one researcher writes, “Disruptive student behaviour not only impedes learning outcomes for students but also impacts negatively on teacher efficacy and wellbeing” (Moore, 2014, p. 107). That same study notes that the most common concern cited by teachers is classroom behavior. It

is a concern also for parents and policymakers. In my experience as a school principal, the majority of interactions with parents involved misbehavior and our responses to it. Most of the incoming phone calls were from parents who felt that we had overreacted to their child's misbehavior or underreacted to a classmate's misbehavior. They would feel, for instance, that a detention was not enough punishment or that a suspension was "too harsh."

In West Virginia, administrators must work within a range of punishments that runs from warnings to detentions to in-school suspension (ISS) to out-of-school suspension (OSS). Ironically, the most "severe" of these punishments – OSS – is often the most appealing to students. ESSA targets OSS following concerns about the disproportionate application of exclusionary practices and their effect on the academic achievement of underperforming populations, but another problem with OSS is that a consequence can hardly be expected to correct behavior if the punishment feels more like a reward. Nor will that consequence serve as an effective deterrent if other students regard the punishment as a vacation. Another drawback to OSS is that it seems contradictory or paradoxical if used as a response to tardiness, truancy or skipping classes: it makes no sense to throw students out of school because they were not in school. Alternative education placements, meanwhile, are extremely expensive.

So it would seem that ISS is a better approach. In many schools, no one doubts the effectiveness of ISS. In two schools where I have worked, ISS was staffed by a teacher, either a teacher assigned full-time to ISS or a series of teachers assigned to ISS as a duty for one period per day. The staffing of ISS gets attention in several articles that describe effective programs. Sheets (1996) argues that ISS needs a devoted individual: "Any other method of staffing the program will result in frustration that defeats the program's purpose" (p. 89). But we could not afford a staff member for ISS in the schools where I served as principal; nor could we provide a

different teacher each period as a rotating duty in ISS. Rather, students were put in a conference room and monitored by office staff – mostly secretaries. To me, that kind of supervision seemed less than adequate. Furthermore, when students were assigned to ISS, teachers were asked to send assignments and assessments, but teachers did not always have the time to provide lessons or materials for students in ISS.

1.2 INQUIRY SETTING

West Virginia public schools are distributed across 55 county systems. Those 55 counties include 834 elementary and secondary schools. Morgan County, for instance, has six schools: Berkeley Springs High School, Warm Springs Middle School, Warm Springs Intermediate, Widmyer Elementary, Pleasant View Elementary, and Paw Paw Elementary and High School. Of those six schools, only one – Warm Springs Middle School – has a room and a teacher devoted to ISS. Berkeley Springs High School has an alternative education program for longer placements but no ISS for assignments of a week or less and nothing on Saturdays; disciplinarians at Berkeley Springs rely extensively on after-school detentions and OSS. Relative to other high schools in the state, Berkeley Springs is a medium-sized school with many of the same financial, spacial and curricular limitations that might impact ISS. This study will describe the state of ISS in public middle and high schools of various sizes across the state of West Virginia. Neither private nor charter schools were included in the scope of this study, and only where their schools serve grades K to 12 will principals be able to comment on elementary ISS.

1.3 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Discipline policy is academic policy, since consequences either increase time on task or decrease student access to instruction. And while suspensions improve the culture and learning for everyone else in the class and school, suspensions clearly have a negative impact – at least in the short term – on the learning of the student suspended. In most high schools, that negative impact is observed but not measured: it can be observed by walking by the ISS room on a day when a student is serving ISS. Walking by that room in the afternoon is likely to reveal a solitary student staring at the wall or doodling in a notebook or sleeping on folded arms. Therein lies my problem of practice: students are assigned to ISS without enough schoolwork to get them through the day, and, as a result, their day in ISS constitutes a loss of learning.

Mintrop (2016) makes several important distinctions about problems of practice. For one thing, they “revolve around focal or core practices that need improvement within organizations” and they are “collectively owned problems of the organization” (p. 25). These areas of inquiry should also connect to the strategic goals of an organization (p. 28) but be mindful of material limitations and human resources (p. 29). My problem of practice does just that: it connects to broader concerns about exclusionary practices and student achievement, and it holds potential to improve the design or practice of ISS. Of course, it is my hope that this dissertation will prove useful even to administrators outside of West Virginia.

1.4 INQUIRY QUESTIONS

During this inquiry, it was presumed that in-school suspension is an important tool for student discipline and school culture – for deterring disruptive behavior and maintaining an orderly and scholarly environment. The inquiry did not question whether ISS should exist; nor did the research collect data on the demographics of students who are suspended in West Virginia. Rather, the inquiry focused on the attitudes of principals and the approaches applied in their schools. By surveying and interviewing public school principals across West Virginia, I sought to investigate the following overarching inquiry questions:

- A) What form does in-school suspension take in schools across West Virginia?
- B) What are principals' beliefs related to the purpose, effectiveness and design of in-school suspension?
- C) What other factors – including district leadership, prior practice, district policy and district finances – exert the greatest influence on ISS?
- D) How would principals describe the ideal in-school suspension?

These research questions were informed by my experiences as a principal, my conversations with colleagues, my work with professors, and the literature review that follows.

2.0 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 SUSPENSION AS PUNISHMENT

This research is rooted in both theoretical concepts and pragmatic concerns. The questionnaire that is at the heart of this inquiry includes questions tied to the literature but also questions that spring from my experience as a building principal. The concepts that undergird this research are theories of punishment, as described by Thom Brooks (2015). In *Punishment*, Brooks describes several general theories, including retributivism (p. 15). Rooted in religion, this theory argues that we punish people because they deserve it: they get what they deserve. Punishments, then, should be proportionate to crimes. Brooks describes retributivism as a “backward-looking theory of punishment.” Deterrence, on the other hand, is a “forward-looking theory” (p. 36). Brooks explains, “The state punishes to make good on its original threat to punish crimes: these threats would lack substance if the state failed to make good on its promise” (p. 40). According to Brooks, deterrence lacks evidence: “The big problem for deterrence theories is that punishment does not appear to have much, if any, confirmed deterrent effect” (p. 42), and “Increasing prison sentences may be popular with the public, but the evidence is that such policies place greater pressures on taxpayers for no substantive improvement upon recidivism rates” (p. 42). Another common criticism is that exposure to the prison population can be a negative influence, that it sometimes turns incarcerated offenders into professional criminals (p. 43). In some schools, the

same criticisms could be applied to in-school suspension where first-time offenders might be placed in a room with frequent visitors.

Brooks also describes corrective theories. “A rehabilitation theory of punishment holds that punishment should aim at the reformation of offenders and assist their transition from criminal to law abiding citizen. Rehabilitation is successful where criminals come to reject crime out of choice” (p. 51). Brooks writes, “Reformation is achieved where criminals understand the wrongness of their past actions and choose against further criminal activity. Part of this reformation will include some acknowledgement of regret” (p. 52). Perhaps for this reason students assigned to ISS are often required to write apology letters to their victims, whether teachers or fellow students. Brooks notes that therapeutic treatment is often a component of rehabilitation (p. 53), and some of the scholars who have described the ideal ISS have insisted on the importance of therapy (Sheets). Furthermore, many proponents of rehabilitation argue that the goal of punishment should be to morally educate the offender. (Brooks, p. 56). Likewise, many disciplinarians try to include a character education piece or social and emotional learning in ISS.

Restorative justice also gets a chapter from Brooks. The focus here is on relationships, including the relationship between the offender and victims. Restorative justice recognizes that criminality damages the relationship between offender and victim and that two-way communication can be more effective in healing both than imprisonment (p. 64). This theory, however, may be less applicable to the kinds of behaviors that land students in ISS as it requires the participation of all those affected by the misbehavior at hand (p. 65). This is simply not possible in schools, where student discipline is a matter of federally protected privacy.

The more detail the public has about a case, the less likely it will be to criticize the punishment as being too lenient. This has implications for school leaders who must operate with confidentiality. Indeed, the public almost never knows the whole story about a student's transgressions and consequences. Interestingly, Brooks fails to address protection, a concept that could constitute its own theory of punishment, at least here in America, where concerns about public safety dominate the public discourse regarding law and order.

2.2 SUSPENSION AND PROGRAMMING

Much of the recent research on student behavior focuses on preventative efforts or programs. One review of the literature covers three holistic approaches: ecological systems of classroom management, positive behavior support (PBS) programs, and social and emotional learning (SEL) programs (Osher, Bear, Sprague & Doyle, 2010). Ecological approaches address behavior indirectly by reshaping the student environment. PBS targets behavior by focusing on the purposes of bad behavior and rewards for good behavior. SEL programs target behavior with a focus on managing emotions and responses to peers. All three of these approaches are designed to prevent misbehavior. Another approach to school culture and student behavior is billed as both preventative and corrective: restorative justice has been the focus of numerous studies, first in prisons and then in schools (Gonzalez, 2012.) Still, a great deal of research has been done on the most common consequences or punishments, including in-school suspension and out-of-school suspension (OSS).

A study of suspension in middle schools in Kentucky finds that PBS programs are associated with reduced rates of suspension (Christle, Nelson & Jolivette, 2004). Christle and colleagues compared middle schools with lower suspension rates to middle schools with higher rates and looked for corresponding characteristics. The researchers used an administrator survey, staff interviews, and direct observations to collect data from eight schools – four with lower rates and four with higher rates. Christle and colleagues concluded that socioeconomic background of students was positively related to suspension, as were the number of disciplinary infractions and crimes reported by a school. They also found that the four schools with lower suspension rates “were cleaner, brighter, and had a more relaxed decor” (p. 522) and “reported using a variety of successful incentive programs to promote positive academic and social behavior” (p. 523).

While the Christle study involves mixed methods, most research on suspension could be described as either quantitative or qualitative. Some of the writing on the subject is anecdotal, describing the experiences of practitioners, while other articles view the subject through a legal lens. The pages that follow highlight first quantitative research on suspension, then qualitative research, and finally anecdotal and legal articles. To put it another way, this review of the literature moves from investigative work to prescriptive work. It is worth noting that most of the investigative work in recent years has dealt with disproportionality – in particular, with the disproportionate use of suspension with black students and special education students. Disproportionality is seen both in the assignment of suspension and in the perceptions of students and parents. Research could also be divided between that which deals with fairness and that which deals with effectiveness – who gets assigned suspension versus how to design suspension. For my part, as a superintendent in a county with minimal diversity, I am less interested in the

who and more interested in the *what*, but all of the research described below contributes to my understanding of suspension.

2.3 SUSPENSION AND ACHIEVEMENT

Arcia's work (2006) is exemplary of research on the relationship between suspensions and academics. She conducted "longitudinal retrospective analyses on suspensions, achievement, and long-term enrollment status of students in a large, urban school district" (p. 359). For academic achievement, she used "pre- and postsuspension reading achievements of suspended students" compared to "those of a comparison group matched on grade, gender, race," socioeconomic status and ELL status (p. 359). To her credit, Arcia conducted a long study over three years and included a significant number of students: data were used on 49,327 students who had been suspended and 42,809 who had not been suspended (p. 361). Arcia also eliminated error by downloading data directly from the district's student database (p. 361). Interestingly, Arcia groups together in-school and out-of-school suspensions and treats them as one and the same, arguing that both ISS and OSS disrupt learning since both remove students from the classroom (p. 361).

Arcia summarizes her findings in this paragraph:

Findings indicated a clear association between presuspension reading achievement and suspension rates. Students with lower achievement were subsequently suspended more than students with higher achievement. As may be

expected, there was also a marked association between suspensions and subsequent achievement. The more days that students spent in suspension, the less students gained in reading. Last, findings suggested a strong association between suspensions and drop-out rates. Students who were suspended more days dropped out at higher percentages than did students with fewer suspensions. (p. 367)

Arcia claims no more than an “association,” cautioning that “readers should bear in mind that student behavior is a determinant of both achievement and suspensions” (p. 368). Arcia admits that the effect of ISS and OSS on learning and attendance has not been determined (p. 368). However, her study does confirm that children who misbehave are less apt to succeed in school. Still, scholars in the years since have read this research as if it proves causality: Morris and Perry, for instance, cite Arcia’s study and say it “suggests that suspension greatly impedes academic progress” (2016, p. 71). However, an “association” is not an impediment. Arcia raises a concern that learning does not take place when students are not in their classrooms (p. 368), but studies described below reveal that learning can take place in ISS.

Noltemeyer and colleagues conducted a meta-analysis of studies like Arcia’s – studies that measured attendance and academic performance before and after the intervention of suspension (2015). Using six databases, the researchers coded studies searching for those that “report at least one quantitative measure of suspension rate (in-school or out-of-school) and at least one quantitative measure of one of the outcome variables,” namely academic achievement or school dropout (p. 228). In the end, they used 53 cases from 34 studies (p. 229), but this meta-analysis also proves nothing causal. The authors conclude, “The results revealed a statistically significant inverse relationship between each type of suspension (i.e., ISS, OSS, combined, and not reported) and academic achievement,” but they add that “causality cannot be inferred” (p.

234). At best, hard research shows a *correlation* between suspension and academic failure, so this is an area where mixed methods may be necessary. Noltemeyer and colleagues describe their meta-analysis as “a technique that integrates findings across multiple studies to reveal patterns that exist across the research literature” (p. 227). These patterns include treating ISS and OSS as if they were the same thing. Another problem is focusing only on the achievement of the students who are suspended rather than those who are left in the classroom.

2.4 SUSPENSION AND RACE

The same could be said about a growing body of literature that focuses on disproportionality: these studies also focus on the students who are suspended and not the students who are left behind in more disciplined environments. Morris and Perry (2016) used “advanced multilevel methods that capitalize on the rich explanatory power of longitudinal and hierarchical data” and applied those methods to state and district data from an urban school district in Kentucky (p. 71). Morris and Perry seem to be focused on OSS (p. 73), and, to their credit, theirs is a three-year study. But what is most notable about this study is the flawed notion that whatever comes last must be an effect and whatever comes earlier must be a cause: “To reduce concerns about reverse causation (i.e., low academic performance leading to suspension), scores from the end-of-year MAP testing are used in this analysis, making it unlikely that any suspensions occurred following testing” (p. 73). And because students who were suspended then scored poorly on reading and math in the state’s Measure of Academic Progress, Morris and Perry conclude, “Our

study presents evidence that disparate suspension lowers school performance and contributes to racial gaps in achievement” (p. 83-4).

In another recent study, Freeman and Steidl published quantitative research on “racist disciplinary patterns” across the state of Georgia (2016). They used data from two U.S. Department of Education sources, but to meet the requirements of hierarchical linear modeling, they “selected districts that contain more than four junior high schools or high schools” which “leads to an exclusion of a number of districts in Georgia, particularly rural districts” (p. 175). Freeman and Steidl “create a suspension imbalance ratio by comparing the proportion of black students enrolled in a school and the proportion of suspensions (both one-time and multiple) administered to black students” (p. 175), and they find “patterns of disciplinary disparity in secondary schools in Georgia” (p. 178). But the authors do not control for the severity or level of misbehavior; instead they reference other research in other school districts that showed “little evidence of significant racial variation in actual infractions” (p. 178). Interestingly, Freeman and Steidl also find that “increasing levels of segregation decrease the racial suspension imbalance significantly for black students” (p. 180). Integrated schools show greater imbalances in suspension rates, and white and Hispanic students seem to face less severe punishments than their African American peers in integrated schools (p. 181).

Earlier, Mendez and Knoff (2003) conducted similar research in Florida. The authors analyzed district data on students who had OSS in 142 schools across a diverse, countywide district in west central Florida (p. 34). Mendez and Knoff begin with demographic data that shows that “many more males than females experienced at least one suspension” and “Black students were much more likely to experience a suspension than were White or Hispanic students” (p. 37), whose numbers were comparable to each other’s (p. 38). Across races and

genders, the use of OSS increased in middle school and then declined again in high school (p. 38). Mendez and Knoff also consider which infractions result in the most suspensions, and, surprisingly, find that disobedience and insubordination are the most common infractions resulting in OSS. The authors then crossreferenced racial data with infraction data to find that black students were disproportionately suspended for disruptions while white students were overrepresented when it came to suspensions stemming from substance possession, including tobacco, and weapons possession (p. 40).

Mendez and Knoff note, “A major limitation of the current study is that it involved only one school district” (p. 49). In that district in Florida, however, Mendez and Knoff found that “students at the greatest risk for suspension were male, Black, and in middle school” (p. 49). In a similar study, Sullivan and colleagues (2013) report, “Risk of suspension was greatest among Black males and Black students with disabilities” (p. 107). Sullivan and colleagues (2013) “used multilevel logistic regression and multinomial logistic regression to estimate students’ risk of receiving one or more suspensions” (p. 99). The authors used school and district data “from one diverse urban school district in Wisconsin” (p. 102) to look at the relationships between individual and school characteristics. They found that students were more likely to be suspended if they attended larger school or schools with higher percentage of special education students (p. 107). On the other hand, parent involvement was seen as attenuating the odds of being suspended. But, even when controlling for parent education and SES, black students “were still more than three times as likely to be suspended as White students” (p. 108).

2.5 SUSPENSION AND DISABILITIES

Another Sullivan study focused on students with disabilities (2014). As in the previous study in which Sullivan and colleagues wrote that “exclusionary discipline strategies” are “ineffective for reducing unwanted behavior” (2013, p. 99), Sullivan and colleagues state here that “suspension is ineffective for reducing inappropriate behavior” (2014, p. 199). In the study of students with disabilities, Sullivan et al. used “archival data from a diverse urban school district” (2014, p. 201) in Wisconsin (2014, p. 202) and hierarchical generalized linear modeling to determine which disability categories faced the highest risk of suspension. The authors conclude that “suspension is particularly problematic among students with ED” (2014, p. 205). The overall suspension rate for this group (47%) was commensurate with the national average, but “nearly one third of the students with ED received multiple suspensions, nearly twice the proportion that received a single suspension, suggesting that this disciplinary consequence is both disproportionately applied and ineffective” (2014, p. 205). Yet Sullivan et al. offer this caveat: “we could not disentangle behavior, referral, and suspension in the present analysis” (2014, p. 207).

2.6 SUSPENSION AND PERCEPTION

As seen above, quantitative studies of suspension often address demographics – who gets suspended – and rationale – why they get suspended. Other quantitative studies research student perceptions of suspension. Kupchik and Ellis (2008) conduct more research related to race, this time asking “whether African American and Latino and Latina students, and particularly males, perceive school safety practices as less fair overall, less well communicated, and less evenly applied than White students do” (p. 549). The safety practices in question include suspensions but also security guards, metal detectors and locker searches. This study relied on data collected by the U.S. Department of Justice (p. 556), a data set that was urban rather than rural (p. 557). Kupchik and Ellis conclude, “African American students give significantly lower ratings than White students of the fairness of school rules and rule enforcement, overall, but the ratings of Latino/a students are not significantly different than those of White students” (p. 561), a finding that corresponds with Mendez and Knoff’s data on suspension rates (2003).

Costenbader and Markson (1998) made an effort to survey both urban and rural students in their “exploration of the perceptions of these students” regarding both ISS and OSS (p. 63). A total of 620 surveys were analyzed, and, “Students who reported that they had been either internally or externally suspended responded to an additional set of six questions regarding their perceptions of these events” (p.69). Unlike Mendez and Knoff (2003), Costenbader and Markson report, “Physical aggression was the most commonly reported reason for suspension in both settings” (p. 69). In this survey, females indicated that they were suspended for less violent violations, and “Rural students reported significantly more incidents of suspension for nonviolent

behavior, talking back to school staff, than did inner-city respondents” (p. 70). Costenbader and Markson also report that students who had been suspended were less interested in academic achievement than students who had not been suspended (p. 74). The authors share a list of interventions that suspended students claimed would be more effective in changing their behaviors and addressing root causes.

2.7 SUSPENSION AND THEORY

These quantitative investigations are not without suggestions and prescriptions. Mendez and Knoff, for instance, acknowledge that “persistent problematic behavior” can “make it difficult to maintain a positive learning environment for other students” (2003, p. 45). Still, they write, “there is a need for administrators to determine if disproportionate suspensions among various racial groups exist in their schools” (p. 44). Mendez and Knoff recommend Saturday school and a more “rehabilitative” ISS (p. 46). They also discuss the need to track multiple suspensions, to address the increased incidence in middle schools, and to consider the root causes of misbehavior, especially disobedience and insubordination, since these “infractions are far less serious and more amendable to intervention than more serious infractions like weapons and narcotics possession” (p. 48). Ultimately, Mendez and Knoff argue that suspensions can be reduced through preventative programming such as PBS (p. 48).

Nor are these quantitative studies unfettered by critical theories. Morris and Perry reference several “scholars of race,” and discuss “racial bias” and “racial inequalities” (2016, p.

82). In attempting to explain racial discrepancies, Freeman and Steidl reference contact theory and racial threat theory (2016, p. 174). Describing racial threat theory, they write, “As the relative size of a minority population increases in a given location, dominant group members are likely to perceive a growing threat to their economic, political and social position” and to “implement increasingly punitive state-control mechanisms to maintain the current balance of power” (p. 174). Kupchik and Ellis (2008) have something similar in their reproduction theory, the idea that discipline is used to reproduce the status quo, including racial inequalities (2008, p. 567). Zero tolerance policies, such as Pennsylvania’s Act 26, can be seen as the result of racial threat or as an example of reproduction theory. Gregory and colleagues synthesize much of the quantitative research on “The Achievement Gap and the Discipline Gap” (2010). In their article, they reference “difference selection,” a hypothesis from juvenile justice research that “asserts that ethnic minorities are more likely to be arrested because they are more likely to be picked out for wrongdoing despite similar levels of infractions” (p. 62). Many of the scholars researching suspension, it would seem, oppose suspension.

Skiba et al. (2011) exhibit many of these critical tendencies. In the results of their quantitative study, they find “differential selection at the classroom level and differential processing at the administrative level” both of which “make significant contributions to the disproportionate representation of African American and Latino students in school discipline” (p. 102). In plumbing explanations for this disproportionality, they discuss poverty, stressors associated with poverty, and “cultural mismatch” (p. 87). Since teachers are overwhelmingly white women and the offenders are disproportionately black males, this theory goes, teachers may mistake passion for aggression (p. 87). Skiba et al. conclude that multiple factors contribute to disproportionate referral rates of blacks and the more frequent use of exclusionary sanctions

with students of color. They analyzed data from 364 elementary and middle schools in urban, suburban and rural settings, but “were not able to analyze the data by geographic location or school locale” (p. 103). Skiba and colleagues write that “it must be concluded that the ubiquitous differential removal from the opportunity to learn for African American and Latino students represents a violation of the civil rights protections that have developed in this country since *Brown v. Board of Education*” (p. 104). But they also argue in favor of “a *graduated discipline* model whereby the severity of consequences are scaled in proportion to the seriousness of the infraction” (p. 101), and many school leaders would say that such a model must include exile. Skiba et al. conclude, “All children deserve access to effective educational settings that are predictable, positive, consistent, safe, and equitable” (p. 104), and many school leaders would say that such settings are created in part by disciplinary consequences like suspension.

Cornell and Mayer (2010) distill many of the important arguments for discipline and order. They point out that teacher burnout resulting from misbehavior can lead to negative attitudes that affect students; “students, too, are distracted from instruction by student misconduct” (p. 8). Worse still, “anxieties over bullying and fears for personal safety” have been shown to keep students away from schools and school activities, and misbehavior directed at students can “lead to school avoidance and reduced motivation to engage in learning activities” (p. 8). In their synthesis of previous research, Cornell and Mayer point to “evidence that classroom aggression by a few children can foster increased aggression by others” and “evidence that day-to-day, low-level incivility in schools is a key factor in student adjustment and psychological well-being” (p. 8). Disruptive behavior, then, should not be tolerated; rather, students must sometimes be removed from class.

2.8 SUSPENSION CASE STUDIES

The rhetoric behind ISS is discussed in a qualitative study by Noblit and Short (1985). These researchers conducted case studies of ten ISS programs in secondary schools across North Carolina. Noblit and Short studied ten ISS programs nominated by North Carolina state officials, programs that had been identified as “good” (p. 59). Their methodology differed from the quantitative research described above: “Each of these reputedly good programs was visited for one day by at least one researcher who was trained and experienced in case study techniques and interviewing, observation, and document review” (p. 60). These researchers interviewed students, teachers and administrators and conducted “semistructured” observations of ISS rooms and their schools (p. 60). The authors found that all ten programs were intended to exclude students from the regular classroom while still providing some type of educational experience, but programs exist on a spectrum from punitive to academic to therapeutic (p. 60). All of the programs had academic components, but ISS teachers experienced challenges related to getting seatwork from content teachers. Beyond that, content teachers who did send seatwork did not always send enough work to occupy students through the day (p. 62). These observations mirror my own experience as a teacher in ISS and as an administrator assigning students to ISS. But Noblit and Short note another antithetical concern, mainly that academic work will be associated with punishment in the minds of students in ISS. Furthermore, in another article reflecting on the same case studies, Short and Noblit (1985) note that ISS does not require students to change their

behavior in order to leave ISS. Students may take more responsibility for their actions if a written agreement requiring a behavior change were necessary to leave ISS (p. 115).

In the case study described by Hawkes (2011) – research that might best be described as practitioner inquiry, conducted in the urban high school where Hawkes was principal – students were compelled to do something constructive about their behavior. In the instances described, this took the form of reflection, restitution, conversation, and circles that allowed for public apologies. Hawkes writes, “Suspending students from class can be an effective strategy, just like suspensions from school, to force certain conversations and reflection, to develop behavior contracts, and to broaden the child’s ‘circle of accountability’” (p. 137). Hawkes sees suspension as part of a graduated model that includes ostracism in the corner of the classroom or out in the hall, but he stresses the need for school connection before students are suspended. Exile from the classroom only works as punishment “if some sense of *home* has been established first” (p. 137). Hawkes concludes that suspension – though a last resort – is sometimes necessary, and he focuses his article on the work of transitioning students back to school from suspension. He writes, “School leaders should levy this punishment with discretion and clarity, as wise elders have through the ages – for if our schools feel like communities, then exile can have its place, provided time and love are invested in the return” (p. 142).

Haley and Watson (2000) also write about suspension from the perspective of practitioners working with suspended students. Their “action research” (p. 654) works from the premise that students will be given ISS and that ISS provides unique opportunities to teach students in both the academic and affective domains. In particular, because Haley had been an English teacher, she sought to develop students writing skills in her “in-school literacy extension” in an urban middle school (p. 654). As for her sample, “All kinds of students were

involved,” but the majority (59%) of the 222 students she worked with were African American (p. 655). Haley and Watson describe students “with social concerns such as teen pregnancies, divided families, divorce, and child and spousal abuse” and “experiences that involved unemployed parents, court officers, homeless shelters, and limited parental control” (p. 655). In working with these students in ISS, Haley decided to focus on prewriting strategies and also student reflections on their own behavior (p. 656). To document the effects of her intervention, Haley maintained portfolios of student work, surveyed teachers in the general classroom after the students’ return to class, and even observed students in the regular education classroom after their return. She also surveyed suspended students after working with them, and a couple student responses are quoted as proof that this model of ISS can be effective, that “these practices can help increase the degree of academic and behavioral success attained by teachers and students” (p. 659). But Haley and Watson provide no hard data related to recidivism, for instance, or academic achievement or school dropout.

Articles by Sheets (1996) and Morris and Howard (2003) both address designing effective ISS programs. Sheets describes four models of ISS: punitive, discussion, academic and individual (1996, p. 87). Morris and Howard describe three models: punitive, academic and therapeutic (2003, p. 157). Sheets points out that ISS isolates disruptive students, thus protecting both the learning environment and the community at large (1996, p. 87). Morris and Howard relate that ISS can “provide the teachers with relief from unruly students while providing students access to educational opportunities” (2003, p. 156). Also, ISS is preferable to after-school detention for some parents who would have trouble collecting students from school after they were prevented from riding the bus; they add that ISS has taken the place of corporal punishment in many states and districts. Morris and Howard describe traits of effective ISS

programs, including mentoring components, background music, social skills lessons, and character education lessons (2003, p. 158). Sheets focuses on the need for dedicated staff in ISS: “The key operational component is the person assigned to monitor the program,” he writes, arguing that the monitor should be a trained instructor with a background in social work or special education (1996, p. 89). Certainly, these qualitative and anecdotal articles do not presume that suspension should be eradicated; rather, they offer prescriptions for success.

2.9 SUSPENSION AND THE LAW

Another group of articles are legal in nature. Dickinson and Miller (2006) cite the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, Supreme Court precedents, and the Federal Register – to explain student rights and district responsibilities related to ISS and OSS. Dickinson and Miller cite 64 Fed. Reg. 12619, for instance, when they conclude that “ISS is not counted as a day of suspension so long as the student continues to receive ISS services” (p. 78). Robinett (2012) has written a succinct article on “Alternatives to student suspension.” Since it describes tactics in California and places them in a legal context, his article relies extensively on the California Education Code and references specific sections of that code, e.g. the section devoted to community service, Section 48900.6 (p. 34). Thernstrom et al. (1999) provide a legal analysis that promotes ISS.

And then there are the laws of the land. West Virginia Code provides for “suspension or expulsion of disorderly students.” Title § 18A-5-1 (c) reads, “The teacher may exclude from his

or her classroom or school bus any student who is guilty of disorderly conduct; who in any manner interferes with an orderly educational process; who threatens, abuses or otherwise intimidates or attempts to intimidate a school employee or a student; who willfully disobeys a school employee; or who uses abusive or profane language directed at a school employee. Any student excluded shall be placed under the control of the principal of the school or a designee.” The state’s school code encourages the use of suspension by prohibiting other punishments, specifically corporal punishment [§ 18A-5-1 (e)]. The code stipulates that parent conferences should be held in every case of suspension and must be held when a student is suspended for a second time in a single semester. If a student has earned a third suspension, he or she may be given an alternative placement: “The Legislature finds that isolating students or placing them in alternative learning centers may be the best setting for chronically disruptive students. The county board shall create more alternative learning centers or expand its capacity for alternative placements, subject to funding, to correct these students’ behaviors so they can return to a regular classroom without engaging in further disruptive behavior.” The code is written with an emphasis on correcting behavior and deterring disruption.

While a teacher “*may* exclude” a “student who is guilty of disorderly conduct,” the code indicates that principals “*shall* suspend” students who bring narcotics and other controlled substances into school [§ 18A-5-1a (a)]. Students who deal narcotics on campus *shall* be expelled; students who possess narcotics on campus *may* be expelled. The code gives principals considerable latitude in suspending students: “A principal may suspend a student from school, or transportation to or from the school on any school bus, if the student, in the determination of the principal after an informal hearing pursuant to subsection (d) of this section: (i) Threatened to injure, or in any manner injured, a student, teacher, administrator or other school personnel; (ii)

willfully disobeyed a teacher; (iii) possessed alcohol in an educational facility, on school grounds, a school bus or at any school-sponsored function; (iv) used profane language directed at a school employee or student; (v) intentionally defaced any school property; (vi) participated in any physical altercation with another person while under the authority of school personnel; or (vii) habitually violated school rules or policies. If a student has been suspended pursuant to this subsection, the principal may request that the superintendent recommend to the county board that the student be expelled” [§ 18A-5-1a (c)]. While principals may suspend students for a wide range of offenses, they are given less discretion when it comes to duration, since the state sets a maximum of ten school days [§ 18A-5-1a (d)]. In a state where students cannot be paddled but can be suspended for willful or habitual disobedience, suspension is one of the most important tools available to principals. But in a state where personnel costs average 80 percent of a school district’s budget, it is worth looking at how schools across the state are staffing ISS and keeping students productive in ISS.

3.0 RESEARCH METHODS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

My study shares the spirit of action research. Anderson and Herr (1999) describe me and my brand of pragmatism when they write that “practitioners often begin their research with quite practical concerns involving issues of discipline and specific instructional strategies, seeking answers to ‘what works best’ in fairly instrumental terms” (p. 17). Anderson and Herr also contribute a set of criteria for practitioner research, including outcome validity and local validity, which is to say that conclusions drawn from the research should be appropriate and suited to their context (p. 16). From McNiff and Whitehead (2006), I take the notion of a “disciplined, systematic process” (p. 8), and a “morally committed practice” (p. 24). But since I have moved from the principal’s office to a superintendent position – since I am no longer assigned to a single school and dealing with discipline on a daily basis – my approach to the research has shifted from observation of my own ISS to the collection of information about others’ ISS.

My mixed methods approach is modelled on a study by Mick Luehrman – “Art Experiences and Attitude toward Art Education: A Descriptive Study of Missouri Public School Principals” (2002). In it, 297 principals “were randomly selected from among a list of 2084 possible subjects provided by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education” (p. 200). Luehrman’s survey included 25 multiple choice questions, several demographic

questions, and a single open-ended question, asking subjects to provide contact information for voluntary interviews if they would be willing to participate (p. 200). After conducting the survey, he interviewed six principals from among those who had agreed to be interviewed. These six principals constituted a sample with maximum variation (p. 201). Hence, for the analysis and interpretation of results, Luehrman was able to triangulate the data from three distinct data sources (p. 201). Similarly, this inquiry is designed to have three data sources: statistical analysis from multiple-choice questions in the survey; descriptive responses to the open-ended question in the survey; and qualitative interview data.

The Luehrman article references the Patton book, *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods* (1990). On triangulation, Patton argues that research design is strengthened by applying several methodologies within the study. This is accomplished by incorporating both quantitative and qualitative methods in a research project (p. 187). Especially relevant to this study of ISS is Patton's description of implementation evaluation: "One important way of studying program implementation is to gather detailed, descriptive information about what the program is doing. Implementation evaluations answer the following kinds of questions: What do clients in the program experience? What services are provided to clients? What do staff do?" Those are exactly the kinds of questions asked by this study of ISS.

3.2 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

As a school administrator, I have experienced several factors that influence principals and the programming they can provide regarding in-school suspension (ISS). Additionally, the literature suggests that five factors, in particular, are at work when principals assign consequences as a means of disciplining students for misbehavior:

- A) a principal's theory of punishment,
- B) school district leadership,
- C) policy and interpretations of policy,
- D) the inertia of prior practice, and
- E) the resources available to principals.

This study was designed to explore what secondary schools in West Virginia are doing and which of these five factors or pressures exert the greatest influence on principals' efforts related to punishment. Survey questions related to all five factors; follow-up interviews also included questions about each factor. The inquiry, then, addresses not only what principals are doing but why. Inquiry questions include:

- A) What form does in-school suspension take in schools across West Virginia?
- B) What are principals' beliefs related to the purpose, effectiveness and design of in-school suspension?
- C) What other factors – including district leadership, prior practice, district policy and district finances – exert the greatest influence on ISS?
- D) How would principals describe the ideal in-school suspension?

My theory was that all five factors are at play but that resources – financial constraints in particular – would play the biggest role. This conceptual framework is illustrated in Figure 1.

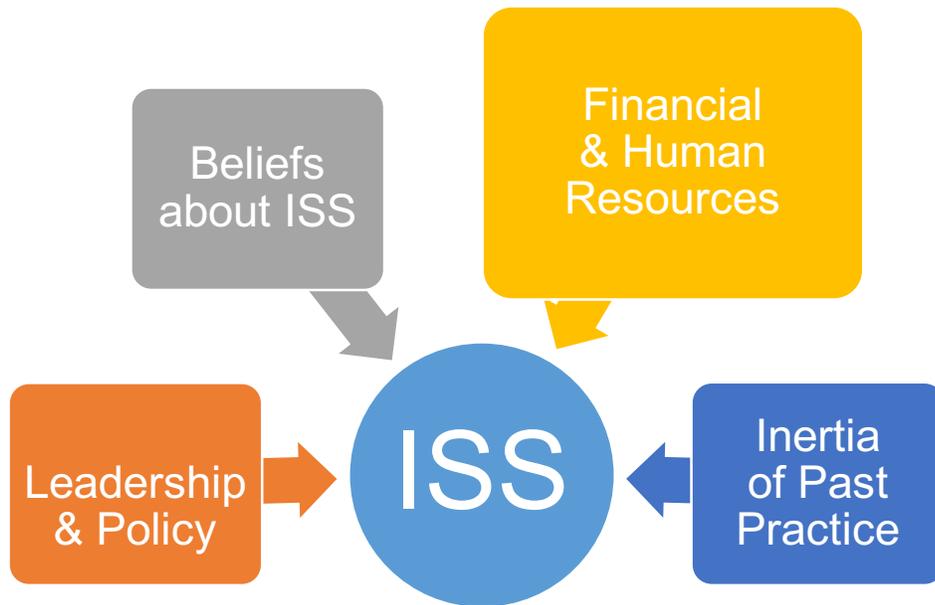


Figure 1. This graphic represents a unified theory related to in-school suspension – the notion that several factors influence principals’ decisions and the greatest of these is financial.

To explore the proposed heuristic, a statewide survey and selected interviews were conducted.

3.3 SURVEY

Following a literature review and consultation with colleagues, a 30-question survey was designed around the five factors described above. The survey was built in Qualtrics, a web-based data collection tool that is mandatory for graduate students at the University of Pittsburgh. The

Likert-type items in the survey asked questions about why and how principals deploy ISS. Questions 5 through 13 asked about principals' perceptions of ISS, while questions 14 through 20 asked about activities offered to students in ISS. Questions 21 and 22 addressed location and supervision of ISS. The last several questions asked about respondents' gender and years of experience as well as the size of their schools and the socioeconomics of their student bodies. Finally, survey respondents were invited to provide contact information for follow-up interviews.

In January of 2018, a list of middle and high school principals was provided by the executive director of the West Virginia Association of Secondary School Principals. The 291 names on the list were checked on the internet, a process that led to the elimination of 53 names of assistant principals and private school principals. A spot check of ten counties revealed the names of 4 recently hired principals, principals who were not yet on the WVASSP email list, and those 4 were added to the survey distribution list. The survey was emailed to 242 principals on Wednesday, January 24, 2018. The email read:

Dear secondary principals,

Please take this brief survey about in-school suspension. This anonymous survey is intended strictly for research purposes and is central to my dissertation. The survey can be taken on a computer or a mobile device and shouldn't take more than ten minutes to complete. Here's the link:

[web link provided here]

Thanks so much for your help. I couldn't do it without you!

Erich

As a reminder, the same anonymous link was sent out to the same 242 principals one week later, on Wednesday, January 31. This second request read:

Dear middle and high school principals,

Because this survey is anonymous, there's no way for me to know which of you have participated. If you've already taken the survey, I really appreciate it!

If you're a principal who hasn't taken this survey, please lend me ten minutes of your time. The link is here:

[web link provided here]

Under ESSA, it may be increasingly important for us to have ISS. My dissertation asks how we can do that at minimal expense.

Thanks again for your help. I couldn't do this research without you!

Erich

Erich May

Superintendent

Morgan County Schools

247 Harrison Avenue

Berkeley Springs, WV 25411

(304) 258-2430

Two weeks later, on Wednesday, February 14, the survey was closed in Qualtrics. At that time, no one had participated in the survey for ten days, and there were 52 survey respondents.

Of those 52 respondents, 49 completed 100 percent of the survey, one completed 97 percent of the survey, and two completed just 13 percent of the survey, according to the initial report generated by Qualtrics. The responses of the two principals who completed just 13 percent of the survey were eliminated; the responses of the participant who completed 97 percent of the survey were retained. That left exactly 50 respondents. Of those respondents, 30 were male, and

20 were female. They reported experience as a principal ranging from 1 to 30 years. Average experience in the position of principal was 9.66 years.

Of the 50 respondents, 60 percent (n=30) reported working in a small school with 100 to 499 students, 32 percent (n=16) reported working in a medium-sized school with 500 to 999 students, and 8 percent (n=4) reported working in a large school of 1000 to 1999 students. When asked what percentage of their students are eligible for free or reduced meals, 24 percent (n=12) reported that 100 percent of their students are eligible for free or reduced meals, 60 percent (n=30) reported that 50 to 80 percent of their students are eligible for free or reduced meals, 14 percent (n=7) reported that 30 to 45 percent of their students are eligible for free or reduced meals, and 2 percent (one respondent) failed to answer that question. In other words, 84 percent of those surveyed (n=42) reported that the majority of their students are eligible for free or reduced meals.

Table 1. Size of Schools Represented in Survey.

	1-99	100-499	500-999	1000-1999	2000 or more
Percentage of Respondents with these Student Body Sizes	0%	60%	32%	8%	0%

By sending the survey to the whole experimentally accessible population, this research attempted to generate a representative sample. The fifty survey respondents were representative of the whole group of secondary principals at least in terms of the size of their schools, which is arguably the most important metric for the purposes of this research. Of the schools represented by survey respondents, 60 percent were smaller schools of fewer than 500 students, 32 percent

were medium-sized schools of 500 to 999 students, and 8 percent were larger schools of 1,000 or more students. Across the state, meanwhile, 49 percent of schools (n=121) have fewer than 500 students, 40 percent of schools (n=100) are in that medium size range, and 11 percent of schools (n=28) have 1,000 or more students.

3.4 INTERVIEWS

To better illuminate patterns or profiles of practice, ten of the fifty principals who completed the survey were reached for phone interviews over the month following closure of the survey.

Interviewees were assured that their identities would be kept confidential; in reporting data, both the survey results and the interview would be anonymized. Like the survey, follow-up interviews included questions about potential influences on principals and their use of ISS. Unlike the survey, these semi-structured interviews allowed me to diverge from the formal plan and plumb surprising or impassioned answers. As Hatch (2002) explains, “although researchers come to the interview with guiding questions, they are open to following the leads of informants and probing into areas that arise during interview interactions” (p. 94). Interviews covered belief systems in greater detail but also policies, prior practice, and fiscal constraints.

The questions listed in the appendix are guiding questions, as defined by Hatch (2002): “They are questions I have prepared in anticipation of the interview and are designed to guide the conversation that I anticipate will take place” (p. 101). Like Hatch, I allowed that additional, follow-up questions would also be asked, questions such as “Do you worry about students not

learning anything while in ISS?” or “How much money could your school spend on curriculum or software for ISS?” But those probing questions emerged based on responses to the guiding questions. As Hatch writes, “Probes are not prepared ahead of time but are created as follow-up questions during the give and take of the interview” (p. 109). By asking essential questions and probing questions, I hoped to explore patterns in the principals’ approaches and to ascertain the motivations and conditions that underlie those approaches.

Sixty percent of those *surveyed* were men, but seventy percent of those *interviewed* were men. While survey respondents had an average of 9.66 years of experience as a principal, interview participants had an average of 9.75. Four of the principals interviewed were leading medium schools of 500 to 999 students; six of them were leading smaller schools with student populations between 100 and 499.

Table 2. Characteristics of Principals Interviewed.

	Gender of Principal	Years as Principal	Size of School They Lead	Average Number of Students in ISS
Subject 1	Male	10	100-499	2
Subject 2	Female	3	100-499	3
Subject 3	Female	5	100-499	1
Subject 4	Male	7	500-999	0-1
Subject 5	Male	15	500-999	3
Subject 6	Male	12	100-499	0-1
Subject 7	Male	20	500-999	5
Subject 8	Male	10	100-499	1
Subject 9	Male	5.5	100-499	1.5
Subject 10	Female	10	500-999	3

Interviews began with questions about why principals assign ISS and moved on to questions about how schools deliver ISS, what students do in ISS, and what principals would like students to do in ISS. Interviews were recorded in word processing documents, and those transcripts were coded in two cycles.

As in the analysis of survey data, the analysis of interview data was designed to explore patterns in the principals' views and practices. As Saldaña points out, patterns can involve similarity, difference, frequency, sequence, correspondence and causation (p. 6). In the first coding cycle, comments were grouped topically in a manner consistent with Saldaña's "Structural Coding" (p. 66). According to Saldaña, structural coding is particularly appropriate to interviews and foundation work (p. 66). Content phrases were applied to segments of interview

transcripts, grouping content around the following structural codes: principal beliefs, influencing factors, limiting factors, prior practice, current practice, technology use, and best-case scenarios.

The second cycle of coding applied Saldaña's "Hypothesis Coding" (p. 123). As Saldaña writes, hypothesis coding can be used "to confirm or disconfirm any assertions or theories developed thus far" (p. 124). In this round of analysis, codes were applied to the transcripts in line with my theory involving four influences on ISS: A) a principal's theory of punishment, B) policy and interpretations of policy, C) the inertia of prior practice, and D) the resources available to principals. Specifically, this second cycle explored whether financial limitations are, in fact, the strongest influence on in-school suspension and what principals felt students should be doing while in ISS.

4.0 CURRENT PRACTICE

4.1 SURVEY RESULTS

My own experiences as a teacher and school leader have exposed me to various disciplinary practices, including various forms of in-school suspension. In fact, my career has involved disciplinary practices in small, medium and large schools; in elementary, middle and high schools; in urban, suburban and rural settings; in public schools and also a charter school. Still, some of these experiences are dated, and all of them transpired in Pennsylvania. One of the main aims of this inquiry was to describe current practices in West Virginia. Several survey and interview questions addressed the first inquiry question – *What form does in-school suspension take in schools across West Virginia?*

Survey questions 14 to 20 related to “activities that are available to students in ISS.” Q14 asked, “While students are assigned to ISS, they are put to work in maintenance or custodial services.” Of the 44 respondents for this question, 2 responded “Sometimes,” 5 responded “Seldom,” and 37 responded “Never.” In total, then, 95 percent of respondents indicated that physical labor was not usually part of ISS.

Q15 asked, “While students are in ISS, they have an opportunity to catch up on coursework.” Of the 44 respondents for this question, 32 responded “Always,” 11 responded

“Sometimes,” and 1 responded “Seldom.” In total, then, 98 percent of respondents indicated that students can usually catch up on coursework while in ISS.

Q16 asked, “While students are in ISS, they have an opportunity to reflect on their behavior.” Of the 44 respondents for this question, 31 responded “Always,” 11 responded “Sometimes,” and 2 were “Unsure.” In total, 95 percent of the principals who answered this question indicated that students in ISS have the opportunity to reflect on their actions.

Q17 asked, “While students are in ISS, they have access to a social and emotional learning curriculum.” Of the 44 respondents for this question, 13 responded “Always,” 11 responded “Sometimes,” 3 were unsure, 8 responded with “Seldom,” and 9 with “Never.” Respondents were divided on this question: 55 percent indicated that students get SEL in ISS, but 38 percent said they do not.

Q18 asked, “While students are in ISS, they have access to a character education piece.” Of the 44 respondents for this question, 15 responded “Always,” 12 responded “Sometimes,” 9 responded “Seldom,” and 8 responded “Never.” Here again, respondents were divided: 61 percent of respondents indicated that students get character education in ISS while 38 percent said they do not.

The next two questions focused on computing, and one respondent failed to answer both of these questions, leaving 43 respondents. Q19 asked, “While students are in ISS, they have access to a computer.” Of the 43 respondents for this question, 28 responded “Always,” 12 responded “Sometimes,” and 3 went with “Seldom.” In total, 91 percent of respondents indicated that students have access to a computer in ISS.

Q20 asked, “While students are in ISS, they are given work to do on a computer.” Of the 43 respondents for this question, 6 responded “Always,” 30 responded “Sometimes,” 6

responded “Seldom,” and 1 responded “Never.” In total, 82 percent of respondents indicated that students are given work to do on the computer.

Table 3. Principals’ Descriptions of Students’ Activities while in ISS.

Students in ISS	Always	Sometimes	Unsure	Seldom	Never
do maintenance or custodial work (Q14)	0%	5%	0%	11%	84%
have opportunity to catch up on coursework (Q15)	73%	25%	0%	2%	0%
have opportunity to reflect on their behavior (Q16)	70%	25%	5%	0%	0%
have access to social and emotional learning (Q17)	30%	25%	7%	18%	20%
have access to character education (Q18)	34%	27%	0%	20%	18%
have access to a computer (Q19)	64%	27%	0%	7%	0%
are given work to do on a computer (Q20)	14%	68%	0%	14%	2%

Q21 asked where ISS is held. Of the 44 respondents for this question, 30 indicated that ISS is held in “its own, devoted classroom,” 9 indicated that ISS is held in the “main office

suite,” 4 indicated that ISS is held in a classroom other than the student’s normal assignment, and 1 said it takes place in the library.

Q22 asked how ISS is supervised. Of the 44 respondents for this question, 13 reported a full-time teacher, 5 reported a full-time paraprofessional, 8 reported a different teacher or para each period, 7 reported that office staff supervise ISS, 4 reported that substitute teachers do it, and 7 provided other answers. These other answers included administrators, alternative education teachers, other teachers, and a librarian.

4.2 INTERVIEW FINDINGS

In interviews, principals who have dedicated staff for ISS described an ISS held in a dedicated classroom. Subject 8 said, “I have a separate dedicated classroom. Nothing happens in the classroom except for ISS.” Subject 8 added, “You have to dedicate an ISS teacher; you have to have that as a position. If you’ve got different people in there running the boat, you have different rules and expectations, and they can’t learn behaviors there.” Subject 5 said ISS is “in a room fairly close to the ISS that is limited as far as access. It has no windows. It’s not an exciting room to be in. Close to the office is kind of crucial. Teachers need to feel like if I have an issue an administrator can come quickly and help.” Subject 6 said ISS is held “off of my cafeteria. I have a small computer lab, about seven or eight computers. It’s very frequently not used. It’s an excellent place for us to do it.” Subject 7 said, “We actually have it in our media center. We have

a room that we actually do that. There's not any windows in it. We don't want it to be a horrible experience, but we don't want it to be comfortable, you could say."

Other principals reported that students assigned to ISS are sent to a different classroom than their normal assignment or are supervised in the office suite. Subject 2 said, "Students are placed across different grade levels, so, for instance, if I have a sixth grader, I may place him in an eighth-grade classroom." The principal of a school serving grades K to 8, Subject 9 said, "We do it in the office in elementary; me or the assistant principal will take them. In the middle school, there's a teacher who has room for two. He's a science teacher. He's probably the strongest with discipline in the classroom; he also has the largest classroom. He has two cubbies where he can see the kids, but they're not able to see the class. He was doing it even before I started here, and he does a good job with it. He also does our lunch detention, in a stage area off the cafeteria." Subject 4 said, "We have two rooms. We have one down by the cafeteria if we have staff available. But most blocks, I don't have available staff, so they're in a little room in our main office suite." Subject 3 said, "We have a small records room in our office where we keep the door open and kids can work and we can keep a visual check on them." Subject 3 added, "We gather up all their work in the morning; we go around to their teachers and get all their work. We give them a task, and then we check in." Subject 10 said, "My assistant principal, myself and the counselor supervise it, and then my clerk and secretary operate in that clerical role, making sure everyone gets their meals and serves their time."

Several principals highlighted the involvement of a school counselor or social worker. Subject 3 said, "They follow the regular classroom curriculum. If students get through their work very quickly, the school counselor or social worker will take them." Subject 4 said, "This semester we have a teacher available just one block; the other three they're with us. And the

guidance counselor takes them almost one block a day.” Subject 4 added, “They have to maintain their coursework, so we have to have that. And then the counseling piece; they have to have that. And they have to meet with me or the assistant principal. And they have to do some writing. The first thing they do when they come in is get a piece of paper and a pen and tell me what happened and what went wrong. And then we’ll talk about that.” Subject 8 said, “Other than that [physical education] period, they work on assignments that are given to them by their classroom teachers. Usually in the afternoon, there will be one group counseling session, not official counseling per se, but it’s a session where they talk about behaviors, and what got you hear and what you could do differently.” Subject 9 said counseling depends on the infraction: “If they’re in here because they lost their temper, we’ll do a counselor referral. If it’s something that’s aimed at a teacher, I’ll have them write an apology, which gets them writing. One thing I don’t allow is writing as punishment.”

None of the ten principals interviewed for this study reported that a discipline curriculum, a character education curriculum, or a social and emotional learning curriculum was in place for ISS. In every case, principals said students in ISS do academic work. Subject 1 said students in ISS “follow their regular schedule. We make our teachers send their work.” Subject 3 said, “We gather up all their work in the morning; we go around to their teachers and get all their work. We give them a task, and then we check in.” Subject 6 said, “They do their daily work. We send out emails to all the staff members the evening before; they provide the work the next morning. A lot of times, they send more than what’s necessary. Sometimes it’s busy work, but busy work is good in ISS.” Subject 7 said students do “All their core class work, or credit recovery on the computer.” Subject 10 said, “When teachers have students in ISS, part of their planning is to visit students here in ISS.” When asked what students do in ISS, Subject 5 said, “That’s been an area

of weakness. I told teachers I would fund whatever they needed to buy, but no one really has stepped up to take responsibility because no one really wants that responsibility. I just did a chart of what teachers need to do, what students need to do, and what I need to do to make ISS successful.”

All principals reported that computers or iPads are available to students in ISS. Subject 2 said, “We ask teachers to send work, and sometimes they do and sometimes they don’t. And if they don’t, then we have an iReady program. We have math and language arts for iReady. That’s because we’re a Title I school.” Subject 8 said, “We’re on a one to one iPad initiative, and they have their iPads with them.” Similarly, Subject 10 said, “We are one to one with iPads, so our students use Schoology – a lot of their work through the day is on Schoology.” Subject 3 said, “We have a laptop if they have a need.” Subject 4 said, “Yes, we have laptops. Most of them have some sort of work now that’s online. That’s always very controlled.” When asked if students in ISS have use of a computer, Subject 6 said, “Yes, they can. As long as that’s not the reason they’re in there, for misuse of a computer.” Subject 2 said, “Probably safe to say that they always have access to a computer – unless they’ve had their privileges revoked.” Subject 5 said, “That’s been a sore point. All our eighth graders have Chromebooks. The concept is great – that they would work on Khan Academy, for instance – but kids are very crafty about opening up another tab. It sounds perfect, but it’s very hard to monitor. And the ability to get around filters is staggering.”

4.3 CONCLUSIONS

These survey and interview questions address the first inquiry question: *What form does in-school suspension take in schools across West Virginia?* For the most part, ISS involves a small group of students working on coursework in a dedicated classroom supervised by a single teacher or aide.

In those schools whose principals answered the survey, 68 percent have an ISS that takes place in a classroom dedicated to ISS. While 30 percent of survey respondents reported that ISS is supervised by a full-time teacher devoted to ISS, half of the respondents reported that ISS is supervised by the same person all day – a dedicated teacher, aide or substitute. This was an important point for Subject 8, who said, “You have to dedicate an ISS teacher; you have to have that as a position. If you’ve got different people in there running the boat, you have different rules and expectations, and they can’t learn behaviors there.” Still, many schools do not devote staff to the supervision of ISS: 16 percent of responding principals indicated that students serve ISS at a desk in the office suite or right in the principal’s office. The principal of a small school, Subject 3 was exemplary of this group, saying, “We have a small records room in our office where we keep the door open and kids can work and we can keep a visual check on them.” In survey data, no clear difference existed between the small and medium size schools, but the four large schools all reported having a devoted classroom for ISS, and none of them had office staff supervising ISS. Two reported using a full-time paraprofessional, one a full time teacher, and one a different teacher or para each period.

In 84 percent of the buildings represented, students in ISS never do custodial or physical labor. Rather, most ISS programs focus on academic work. While 55 percent stated that students have access to social and emotional learning in ISS, all but one respondent indicated that students can usually catch up on coursework while in ISS. Not one of the ten principals interviewed could name a social and emotional learning curriculum or product in use in ISS. But computers are ubiquitous: 91 percent of respondents reported that students have access to a computer in ISS. In interviews, several principals also made the point that school counselors stop in ISS or that small group counseling sessions are held in ISS. So, while nothing has been purchased in the ten schools interviewed, most principals recognize the need for social and emotional learning or a character education intervention in ISS.

5.0 PRINCIPAL BELIEFS

5.1 SURVEY RESULTS

My own beliefs about student behavior and discipline are informed by experiences as a teacher and school leader, my years as a student and parent, as well as my formal education and reading. In some ways, however, my own beliefs are out of step with conventional wisdom and my practitioner colleagues. Another aim of this inquiry was to describe the beliefs of school leaders across West Virginia. To that end, several survey and interview questions addressed the second inquiry question – *What are principals’ beliefs related to the purpose, effectiveness and design of in-school suspension?*

Of the 50 principals who answered the survey, 6 respondents reported that they did not have in-school suspension in their buildings. All 44 of the remaining respondents answered YES to the question (Q5) “Do you approve of the use of ISS in your school?”

Table 4. Principals Unanimous in their Approval of ISS.

	YES	NO
Percentage of principals who approve of the use of ISS (Question 5)	100%	0%

Questions 6 to 13 asked about principals' perceptions of ISS. Q6 asked, "When students are assigned to ISS, the punishment is appropriate to their offense." Of the 44 respondents for this question, 22 chose "Strongly Agree," 20 chose "Agree," none were neutral, 1 chose "Disagree," and 1 chose "Strongly Disagree." Between "Strongly Agree" and "Agree," 95 percent of respondents took the position that ISS was an "appropriate" response to disciplinary infractions.

Q7 asked, "When students are assigned to ISS, their punishment functions as a deterrent to others." Of the 44 respondents for this question, 10 chose "Strongly Agree," 24 chose "Agree," 6 chose "Neutral," 2 chose "Disagree," and 2 chose "Strongly Disagree." Between "Strongly Agree" and "Agree," 78 percent of respondents indicated that ISS functions as a deterrent in their schools. Those 34 respondents who saw deterrent value in ISS were more experienced principals, with an average years of experience of 10.79. Those respondents who answered neutral or in disagreement had an average of 7 years of experience.

Q8 asked, "When students are assigned to ISS, the school expresses its disapproval of their behavior." Of the 44 respondents for this question, 27 strongly agreed, 13 agreed, 3 were neutral, and 1 strongly disagreed. Between "Strongly Agree" and "Agree," 91 percent of the principals who answered this question were in agreement that in-school suspension expresses disapproval for misconduct.

Q9 asked, "When students are assigned to ISS, they themselves are less apt to misbehave in the future." Of the 44 respondents for this question, 5 strongly agreed, 23 agreed, 9 were neutral, 6 disagreed, and 1 strongly disagreed. In sum, 63 percent of respondents took the position that serving time makes students "less apt to misbehave in the future."

Q10 asked, “When students are assigned to ISS, they are reformed or corrected.” Of the 44 respondents for this question, 3 strongly agreed, 16 agreed, 14 were neutral, 10 disagreed, and 1 strongly disagreed. Respondents were more divided on this question: only 43 percent agreed that ISS succeeds at correcting or reforming students. Interestingly, respondents who agreed that ISS has reformative or corrective value were more experienced principals. Respondents who saw reformative or corrective value in ISS had an average of 13.1 years of experience; those who were neutral or in disagreement with the notion that ISS reforms or corrects had an average of 7.5 years of experience.

Q11 asked, “When students are assigned to ISS, other students are protected from the offender.” Of the 44 respondents for this question, 18 strongly agreed, 21 agreed, and 5 remained neutral. In contrast to the previous question, this represents a high level of agreement: 89 percent of respondents agree that ISS protects students who are not assigned to ISS.

Q12 asked, “When students are assigned to ISS, their punishment is proportionate to their offense.” Of the 44 respondents for this question, 13 strongly agreed, 27 agreed, 2 were neutral, and 2 disagreed. In total, 91 percent of respondents indicated that ISS is a “proportionate” response to disciplinary infractions. This data aligns with the 95 percent who indicated that ISS was an “appropriate” response to disciplinary infractions (Q5).

Q13 asked, “In my school, ISS is consistently applied for certain offenses.” Of the 44 respondents for this question, 18 strongly agreed, 22 agreed, 3 were neutral, and 1 disagreed. In total, 91 percent of respondents indicated that ISS is “consistently applied,” just as 91 percent indicated that it is “proportionate” (Q12).

Table 5. Principals' Perceptions Related to the Value of ISS.

ISS	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
is appropriate to offense (Q6)	50%	45%	0%	2%	2%
functions as a deterrent to others (Q7)	23%	55%	17%	5%	5%
expresses disapproval (Q8)	61%	30%	7%	0%	2%
makes offenders less apt to misbehave (Q9)	11%	52%	20%	17%	2%
reforms or corrects offenders (Q10)	7%	36%	32%	23%	2%
protects other students (Q11)	41%	48%	11%	0%	0%
is proportionate to the offense (Q12)	30%	61%	5%	5%	0%
is consistently applied (Q13)	41%	50%	7%	2%	0%

5.2 INTERVIEW FINDINGS

In interviews, principals were asked about their motivations, about why they assign students to ISS. Without being asked about OSS, several principals compared ISS to OSS. When asked why she puts students in ISS, Subject 10 said, “To keep them in the school system as opposed to an OSS. I feel like they are benefitting from being in our building and getting follow-up from teachers, as opposed to being at home where it becomes a play day or a TV day.” Similarly, Subject 6 said, “For the most part, these are the kids who aren’t going to benefit from being out. That’s going to be a day playing Xbox.” Subject 3 said, “We look at it case by case. We try to determine if the student is benefited more from being here with us than being in the home environment. We want them to still get food for the day. It kind of depends on parental support. If we have a parent that supports us, we’re more likely to put them out.” Similarly, Subject 7 said, “For us, they still need to be in school. For a lot of our students in rural West Virginia, they still need to come and eat. If you suspend kids at home, sometimes we know what they’re going home to, and we’d rather have them here with us.” Subject 9 compared ISS to OSS and detention, saying, “I look at it as an alternative to out-of-school suspension. This is a high poverty area. They go home and there’s no punishment. Sometimes there’s no one home to watch them. I feel safer with them in the building. That’s why I use ISS. It has more weight than lunch detention, and it’s easier to use than after-school detention. A lot of our parents can’t provide that transportation after school.”

Two principals perceived ISS as an opportunity to correct or reform offenders. When asked why he puts students in ISS, Subject 8 said, “We assign students to ISS because usually

what happens – OSS is not necessarily a punishment for a child. In ISS, they’re still getting the minutes and education they need, but they’re removed from the environment where the incidents are occurring, and we try to retrain them so they will use the right behaviors when they return.” Subject 4 said ISS gives him an opportunity to connect with offenders: “Because I don’t want them to get away from me. I want to have the opportunity to talk to them. My big fear is that they walk away and don’t learn from the experience. My little mantra is: accept the challenge, be accountable, live with the consequences, and do the next right thing. If I send them home, I don’t have the opportunity to address any of those things.”

Two principals focused on the capacity of ISS to protect students who are not assigned to ISS. Subject 1 said, “We are of the opinion, and it seems to have worked pretty well so far, that those who want to learn are going to pay attention in class; we don’t want the ones who don’t want to learn getting in the way of that.” Later in the interview, Subject 1 said, “Quit focusing so much attention on the ones you’re putting in there, and think about the ones that aren’t the problem. That’s the driving force behind our program.” Subject 5 said, “Partly it is to protect classrooms so you get some instruction if a student continues to disrupt.” While focusing on the students who are not in ISS, Subject 5 seemed to doubt the effectiveness for students who are placed in ISS: “Do I think they learn a lot in ISS? Of course not.” Only subjects 5 and 2 shared a dim view of ISS. When asked why she assigns students to ISS, Subject 2 said, “Because there’s really not anything else to do.”

5.3 CONCLUSIONS

These survey and interview questions address the second inquiry question: *What are principals' beliefs related to the purpose, effectiveness and design of in-school suspension?* For starters, the evidence suggests that principals value ISS: 100 percent of those who answered the question said they approve of ISS, 95 percent said ISS is appropriate, and 91 percent said ISS is proportionate and consistent.

Survey respondents seemed less confident about the effectiveness of ISS: 78 percent said it functions as a deterrent, 63 percent said it makes offenders less apt to misbehave in the future, and just 42 percent said ISS reforms or corrects the students who serve time. Also represented in this data is the perception that ISS protects the students who remain in the regular education classroom free of the distractions caused by repeat offenders. Subject 5, for instance said, "Partly it is to protect classrooms so you get some instruction if a student continues to disrupt." That same principal questioned the effectiveness of ISS for students in ISS: "Do I think they learn a lot in ISS? Of course not." In interviews, principals made clear that they believe ISS is better than OSS, but they also maintained that ISS is best accomplished with dedicated staff and space.

6.0 OTHER INFLUENCES

6.1 SURVEY RESULTS

In conversations with colleagues, classmates and committee members, and through my readings on the subject of suspension, it became clear that principals' beliefs are just one of many factors that influence their decisions related to discipline and punishment. For this reason, survey and interview questions were also intended to address the third inquiry question: *What other factors – including district leadership, prior practice, district policy and district finances – exert the greatest influence on ISS?*

Of the 50 survey respondents, 12 percent (6 respondents) reported that they did not have in-school suspension in their buildings. Of those 6 respondents without ISS, 5 indicated that the reason for that was “We have no staff to monitor ISS.” The other principal without ISS indicated that the reason was “District policy prevents the use of ISS.” No other principal indicated that ISS was prohibited by policy.

6.2 INTERVIEW FINDINGS

6.2.1 District leadership

Within the series of questions about why principals use ISS were a set of questions about factors that might encourage or discourage principals from using ISS. Principals were asked, “Is the superintendent involved in ISS?” and “Is the school board involved in ISS?” Most said that neither the superintendent nor the board were involved in ISS. Subjects 1, 5 and 10 indicated that the board is given ISS data during the annual meeting of the Local School Improvement Council, but their boards were otherwise not involved in ISS. Subjects 2 and 9 maintained that neither the superintendent nor the board were involved in any way. Similarly, Subject 3 said, “We’ve always been given the discretion at the school level to determine in school and out of school.”

Two principals indicated that the superintendent had provided funding for staff to supervise ISS, full time or otherwise, but that was the full extent of the superintendent’s involvement. Subject 7 said, “He’s helped to secure a teacher for that position, but that’s all.” Subject 8 said the board was involved “Just in the fact that they pay for the teachers.” Subject 6 said, “Here in our county, we’re provided monies from our board, four days a month where we can hire a teacher, which is normally a substitute teacher to do an ISS or a Saturday. Generally, I use mine for ISS.” Subject 8 was alone in crediting the superintendent for the use of ISS: “Our superintendent was instrumental in ISS approximately two and half years ago now when he went to the board and got an ISS position for each feeder area. Those are middle school/high school combinations. Each high school shares an ISS position with a middle school.” Subject 4 said the superintendent was involved “As far as supporting it, but other than that no. But he’s going to be

a little more involved now since out-of-school suspensions are going to count. The number of out-of-school suspensions are being counted, and they will weigh negatively in our school report. Just from a numerical standpoint, I think most superintendents will take a greater interest. And most superintendents want to see students learn.”

6.2.2 Prior practice

Principals were split on the question “Did the principal before you use ISS in the same way?” Subject 1 said, “It was in place, but it wasn’t used very effectively. It was just a parking place for kids; there was no pedagogy involved.” Subject 3 said, “She did not. She was more of an OSS person. When I was the assistant and I was managing discipline, I was processing more referrals than we have now.” Subject 8 said, “No, ISS was not here with the principal before me.” But Subject 4 said the previous principal had staffed ISS differently: “He tried to do the rotation piece, but when I came on board, a lot of teachers disliked that.” On the other hand, Subjects 2 and 5 said the previous principals had done ISS the same way that they do. One principal indicated that ISS had evolved under his watch. Subject 7 said, “When we first opened the building in 2006, we had different regular teachers, so it was really inconsistent as far as expectations.” Subject 7 added, “At one time, we had a lunch detention that was not effective at all, so we convinced the board to hire a person. That was last year. She was only here three days a week, but next year we’re hoping to have her five days a week.”

6.2.3 District policy

Most of the principals interviewed for this study could not say whether district policy was an influence on ISS. When asked, “How do the district’s policies impact ISS,” Subject 1 said, “I’m not sure, to be honest with you. I don’t know that they do. I don’t know that there’s an ISS policy other than to say that all the high schools have one, although I’m not sure the smallest high school has one.” When asked if district policies impact ISS, Subject 2 said, “To be honest, I don’t think they do at all. And I will say I don’t think we get a lot of vision or direction. This is my third year as a principal, and it’s kind of the most – well, when I came into my school, I had to make a clear vision and the steps I had to get there.” When asked about the impact of district policies, Subject 6 said, “If I would have a [special education] student in there, I would still need to meet the needs of their IEP, make sure their minutes are met.” Only Subject 8 credited district policy for encouraging ISS: “The district discipline policy impacts it in that it puts an ISS layer into play prior to an OSS layer for almost all offenses.”

6.2.4 District finances

When asked how the district budget impacts ISS, Subject 7 said, “It did not, because it’s Title 4 money. It’s grant money.” While one school was using federal funds to staff ISS, other principals saw finances as a limiting factor. For instance, Subject 2 said, “The ISS we have is not very effective. Because of budgeting, we don’t have an ISS room or an ISS monitor.” Subject 9 said, “There’s no budget for ISS.” For the same reason, Subject 3 is forced to cover ISS with office staff. Subject 10 said, “Right now we do no more than one to three days, but I would like

to potentially do a three to five day ISS, but without having a budget there for a teacher, we can't do that. We're also limited in how many students we can have every day based on the limited supervision we have. I know some of our other schools in this county that are funding it through some Title I funds, but I can't do that." When asked how the budget impacts ISS, Subject 4 said, "Well, to give you a good example, right now during personnel season – right now we're going to lose probably one or two staff who are critical for supervising ISS. That's going to probably bring us right back to where they're sitting outside my office." Subject 4 added that school code related to teacher planning periods also affects ISS: "Some schools will staff it by rotating through faculty, just like on a planning period. But I've never seen that work successfully because you can't get standardization in a program. Some people will take it more seriously than others. If our goal is to improve our students' behavior, we need to create a standard learning environment where students can expect the same things. But this thing where WVDE came out and said you can't ask teachers to use their planning for anything but planning, then that affects ISS." Where budgets are tight, principals did not identify wasteful spending or alternatives; they were resigned to not being able to provide a teacher for ISS.

6.2.5 Available personnel

Principals who were most pleased with the shape and feel of ISS gave credit to an individual who supervises ISS. Subject 1 said, "We're very fortunate in that we have a retired forty-year educator as our ISS head. She has an English degree, she's very versatile, and we're very fortunate that she can intervene on just about any level. Our county has structured it so it's a paraprofessional position, a full-time paraprofessional. Which I'm certain has helped our test

scores – both those that are put in there and those that are not interrupted.” Subject 1 said ISS looks “like a regular classroom. You wouldn’t be able to tell it from any of our other classrooms.” Similarly, Subject 7 described a retired teacher who is contracted on a daily basis: “Our goal is to put her five days a week next year. She’s phenomenal. The majority of those kids are struggling anyway. She’s tough, but kids open up to her. She’s persistent and consistent, everything she does. She spends the first period of the day going to all the teachers and getting all the assignments. First period, those kids aren’t in ISS yet. They know she’s coming to get that work one way or another. That first period is like a planning period.” Subject 6 also uses a retired teacher to supervise ISS: “I am pretty consistent with the teacher I bring. She is a retired English Language Arts person. She has her routine of what she expects and how it works, and that’s pretty nice. She already gave me dates for March and April of when she’s available, and I usually stick with the dates she’s given me.”

6.3 CONCLUSIONS

These survey and interview questions address the third inquiry question: *What other factors – including district leadership, prior practice, district policy and district finances – exert the greatest influence on ISS?* While district leadership and district policy exert less influence on punishment, district finances were perceived to be the deciding factor. Prior practice, meanwhile, seemed to be inconsequential, and an unexpected influence emerged in the data – individuals who are available to work in ISS.

In interviews, superintendents and school boards were described as funding sources at most. Subject 8, for instance, said the board was involved “Just in the fact that they pay for the teachers.” One interviewee indicated that his superintendent had been an advocate for that funding, and one anticipated that superintendents would soon care more about ISS, given the requirements of ESSA. As for prior practice, principals described previous administrations that used ISS the same way and other administrations who had not used ISS. District policy was an area of less certainty. Some principals who were interviewed were not sure what district policy said about ISS. The effect of district finances was evident. Where principals were dissatisfied with the way they do ISS, they blamed it on a lack of funding. Where principals were pleased with ISS, they understood that the district budget, ultimately, allowed for the staffing of ISS. A couple of principals emphasized that they had found particularly suitable teachers, and three of them said they were glad to put a retired teacher in ISS.

7.0 BEST-CASE SCENARIOS

7.1 SURVEY RESULTS

Given various beliefs and practices, one would expect that principals would have various notions of how to improve in-school suspension. To illuminate potential improvements or approaches, an open-ended survey question was intended to address this fourth inquiry question – *How would principals describe the ideal in-school suspension?* To move beyond limiting factors but to keep the suggestions concrete, the question was posed in terms of what students should be doing while assigned to in-school suspension. It was expected that this question could be probed in greater detail during semi-structured interviews.

The six respondents who indicated that their buildings do not have ISS were asked, “In a perfect world what would students do in ISS?” (Q4). One answered, “Work from the classes they are being removed from.” Another answered, “Class work being missed and basic skill review.” Another answered, “Same work that all other students in their grade [are] doing.” Another answered, “Students would work on assignments created by their classroom teachers for that day.” Four of these six respondents imagined only academic needs in ISS, but two described another dimension. One answered, “Make up their missed classroom work and any other work they may have missing and also work on strategies to remediate their behavior.” The other wrote, “Complete all academic requirements that were missed in the classroom. In a perfect situation,

students in ISS could Skype or Adobe Connect into each classroom so they did not miss instruction for the day, most important area for this would be math. In addition to academics, a social aspect to reteach and replace behaviors would be required. Individually process the incident that resulted in the placement, accept responsibility for their actions, and provide an appropriate means of handling similar situations in the future.”

The 44 respondents who do have ISS in their schools were also asked, “In a perfect world what would students do in ISS?” (25). Among those respondents who do have ISS, the percentage who favor a strictly academic approach is much smaller.

Table 6. In a perfect world, what would students do in ISS?

Academic Approach	
1	Catch up on assignments
2	Our students follow their schedule without leaving the classroom. Teachers are required to send work to the ISS room and students complete the assignments under the supervision of the ISS teacher. We believe this is the most expeditious process for the student.
3	Work on class assignments.
4	Ours do their classwork that teachers assign that they would be doing if they were in class. They are also given any make-up work that they may have. We also have computer programs that are to be completed and reading or Accelerated Reader assignments for them to complete.
5	Continue with the daily assignment
6	Classwork and assignments
7	Continue their education
8	Work on Homework or Credit Recovery
Therapeutic Approach	
1	Reflect and character build
2	Have the opportunity to reflect on their behavior, how it affects them and those around them and realize the loss of instructional time.
3	restorative justice
4	Reflect on their wrongdoings and have grand epiphanies about the positive changes they will make after that day.
5	Focused PBIS curriculum
6	Be reformed

7	Reflect on their actions and formulate a plan to correct the behavior.
8	Complete a behavioral chain analysis, receive support for developing replacement behaviors, and develop a plan for correction of their offense and reparations to the individual(s) or property affected.
Blended Approach	
1	Course work and apology letters
2	complete coursework and reflect on behaviors and appropriate actions
3	All assignments due that day, a paragraph to reflect on their behavior, and character education.
4	normal classwork, make-up work, counseling from a counselor, social worker support for any underlying issues
5	Discuss how to correct their behavior, do their assigned school work and stay away from other students at school
6	There assigned work for the day and character ed
7	That day's classwork, character education exercises, behavioral support exercises, participation in individual and/or group counseling.
8	Write a reflective essay, complete assigned work from teachers, complete make up work
9	Reflect on behavior, complete daily assignments and return to class.
10	Classwork and character ed/counseling
11	Do all that day's classwork and catch-up on any make-up work. They would also write a reflection piece on what they did that got them in ISS and write a clear solution to fix that behavior and stick to the plan once they were out.
12	social emotional support, character ed piece, academic work
13	Their work and an assignment related to their behavior.
14	develop emotionally so they make better choices, catch up on school work, not make similar choices in the future

15	Stay current with class work, and have time to reflect on decisions that brought on this consequence.
16	Reflect on behavior, Counseling session daily, complete current assignments and/or make-up. Having a dedicated teacher to supervise would allow for more consistency.
17	Reflect on their behavior with character curriculum relevant to their discipline and coursework.
18	Intervention on behavior, course work
19	Complete the work necessary to stay current in classrooms as well as work on online curriculum that focuses on behavior.
20	Class work and character ed.
21	The work they are missing in class along with a group counseling session followed up with a lesson designed to remediate their behavior.
22	Character education, reflect on behavior, and classroom assignments
23	Understand that ISS is to deter the behavior they were sent to ISS for and maintain their classwork.
24	Student are removed from the social aspects of the school environment to reflect on the behavior while working on regular school work under supervision of the office admin and staff. During the day, the counselor check in with each student and has a one on one discussion about the behavior, the reason why it was inappropriate, and can help the student make better choices the next time. During the day students are pretty lonely by losing social interaction with peers and have plenty of time to complete work sent for them either through the Schoology Learning Management System, or on paper. In a perfect world the student would reflect on their behavior and choose not to reoffend.
25	The work the entire time they are in ISS. They write a letter of apology and have to write an essay to reflect what lesson they have learned from their misbehavior. When done with work they read a book. We would rather have ISS because if we do out of school suspension then those kids get to sleep in and play video games all day.

Service Approach	
1	They would have to work with the custodians or be assigned cleaning projects that the school needs.
2	Catch up on work and reflect on their behaviors, possibly even perform community service around the school

7.2 INTERVIEW FINDINGS

Interviews provided the opportunity to probe this question in greater detail. Subject 1 said he wished he had more technology in ISS. When asked what he would do if money were no object, Subject 1 said, “I would get her the latest in technology in there. There are three or four computers in there, but I’d get her more technology. I’d get her an aide, so she could go about teaching instead of doing discipline. Other than that, I’m not sure I’d change anything.” Most principals, however, maintained that additional funding should be allocated to staff ISS. Subject 9 said, “I worked in another county, and I would model the ISS on theirs: have a teacher assigned to ISS. The ISS teacher would be responsible for collecting all the work, and as a teacher, they would be able to instruct them to. We’ve talked about that. They’re able to do that at the high school here. They do it on a rotational basis: people give up their planning periods to do it. Here, our school was a priority school – it was the second lowest in the state elementary wise. We got a big priority money grant, and we hired a tutor. That’s only two days a week, but that’s nice. That would be my dream: morning do class work and afternoon be taught.”

When asked what she would do if money were no object, Subject 2 said, “It would look like having a scheduled monitor for in there. That would be their only job, and they would be

working on academics in there.” Subject 2 added, “I feel like if a school can show with their data that it’s pretty widely used, they could at least offer up a monitor. Like if I could have a dedicated teacher or an aide. An aide would probably be ideal because in my building I also have a stand-alone intensive behavior disorder classroom for kids who have IEPs for behavior issues.” If money were no object, Subject 3 said, “I would never ever put a student on out-of-school environment. They’re much better with us. I would have someone monitor continually. I would have a counselor in there every day. And there would be some type of mediation if they had conflict with another student.” Subject 3 added, “I know that’s easy for me to say when we have only 200 kids. But I really think only the worst infractions should kids be out-of-school for.” Subject 6 said his best-case scenario “would look like my alternative school. Kids getting their individualized instruction in ISS. There’s always one or two students having a bad day; it would be great for them to be able to cool off. Some kids perform very well in ISS; they just can’t handle the general population.”

When asked to describe the ideal ISS, Subject 5 said, “We ought to have an academic curriculum and almost a moral lesson.” Subject 8 said, “About the only thing that I would do differently at all would be if I had access to some outside counseling sessions, like if I had someone from one of the outside agencies who could come in a couple times a week.” Subject 4 said, “I would convert our library into a student support service center. ISS would be one component of that. It would be staffed by a counselor or a graduation coach. And I would love to have a social worker. They would have an individual learning plan. Like, for example, a lot of our boys have a lot of different issues. We have a lot of young men with no men in their lives. That creates issues. We have a lot of girls with only their moms or grandparents in their lives. We have cases where kids are raising themselves; we have other cases where they’re over-raising

their kids. They want to bring lunches in for their kids. That's a big thing for me this year. But it's an attitude that we get in there and we show them we care and back to that mantra where kindness is not weakness. There are just so many needs. We started a clothing closet; we have a food pantry. We're doing a lot of things that just need to be done."

Subject 10 stated, "If money was not an object, we would have a classroom set up for ISS with a teacher, and the teacher would be there to facilitate instruction through the LMS or whatever is sent down by teachers. What we find often is that students who are assigned to ISS are often behind in their classes. Oftentimes, that's why they're acting out. If money were no object, we may look at having the counselor have a program that we could purchase for students that they could do that would deal with social and emotional learning issues. Self-responsibility is a big piece with middle schoolers. A lot of time they end up in there because they don't take responsibility for their own behavior." Subject 10 added, "My staff right now, we function on the bare minimum. We have our core teachers, our related arts teachers and our special education teachers and that is all. An ALC teacher, an alternative learning center, is something that we used to use in parts of the county, is a certified teacher but not certified in any one particular area. I myself would look for something like a sixth-grade teacher with some comfort in all content areas. Or a special education teacher would possibility be another one."

7.3 CONCLUSIONS

These survey and interview questions address the fourth inquiry question: *How would principals describe the ideal in-school suspension?* The majority of survey respondents wrote that students

should be doing a mix of academic work and reflection or counseling related to their behaviors. Eight respondents envisioned a purely academic ISS, eight envisioned a purely therapeutic approach, but 25 respondents answered the open-ended question by describing a blended approach to ISS. Survey respondents wrote that students in ISS should do “Class work and character ed.” Another exemplary response was “Stay current with class work, and have time to reflect on decisions that brought on this consequence.”

Interviews provided the opportunity to further probe this question, and most principals said they would like to provide additional or continuous staffing for ISS. Principals who have only an occasional ISS wish they could have it constantly; principals who staff it with substitutes wish they could staff ISS with a full-time teacher or aide. Subject 9, for instance, would “have a teacher assigned to ISS.” Principals who already have staff dedicated to ISS wish they could provide more counseling in ISS. They maintained that that could be done by a district employee or a counselor from an outside agency. Subject 10 said, “If money were no object, we may look at having the counselor have a program that we could purchase for students that they could do that would deal with social and emotional learning issues.”

8.0 IMPLICATIONS

8.1 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

8.1.1 Current practice

In most schools described by this research, in-school suspension has been designed to meet the academic needs of students in ISS. To that end, ISS usually involves a small group of students working on coursework in a dedicated classroom supervised by a single teacher or aide. Half of survey respondents reported that ISS is supervised by the same person all day – a dedicated teacher, aide or substitute. Staffing was an important issue for several interviewees, especially Subject 8, who said, “You have to dedicate an ISS teacher; you have to have that as a position. If you’ve got different people in there running the boat, you have different rules and expectations, and they can’t learn behaviors there.” That perspective aligns with Sheets (1996), who argues that an effective ISS is led by a single teacher (p. 89). In every school described by this research, students in ISS had access to computers, which were being used for academic purposes only. Some students also had access to counseling.

8.1.2 Principals' beliefs

While none of the principals used the word “theory” or offered a specific theory of punishment, it does seem that their beliefs impact their decisions to apply ISS. For the most part, those beliefs centered on correcting offenders and protecting other students. As Subject 8 said, “In ISS, they’re still getting the minutes and education they need, but they’re removed from the environment where the incidents are occurring, and we try to retrain them so they will use the right behaviors when they return.” Brooks (2012) argues for a unified theory of punishment that brings together retribution, deterrence, rehabilitation, restoration, and expression (p. 148), and the principals interviewed for this study described multiple motivations for using ISS. Sheets (1996) points out that ISS isolates disruptive students, thus protecting both the learning environment and the community at large (p. 87), and several principals interviewed for this study made similar points related to protection. While principals had doubts about the deterrent power of ISS, and no principals referenced the need for retribution or justice, they did hope for protection, deterrence and rehabilitation. In this way, principals’ perspectives also mirrored those of Noblit and Short (1985) and Cornell and Mayer (2010). Brooks (2012) also writes about the importance of proportionality (p. 70) and consistency (p. 72), and principals gave in-school suspension high marks in both of those criteria.

8.1.3 Other influences

The second cycle of coding revealed that all four influences listed in my hypothesis are at work in principals’ decisions related to ISS. Most of the principals interviewed saw district policy as

having minimal impact on ISS. A couple principals cited state code 4373, but only Subject 8 credited district policy for encouraging ISS. The work of previous principals or the impacts of prior practice seemed to be greater in some schools than in others. Some principals said their predecessors had no ISS, some said ISS had been the same, and one said it has become more academic over time. The principals interviewed for this study made clear that district budgets have a greater impact than prior practice and district policy. Subject 2 said, “The ISS we have is not very effective. Because of budgeting, we don’t have an ISS room or an ISS monitor.” Missing from my hypothesis is another influence – particular people who work in ISS. Subjects 1, 6 and 7 all described a highly competent retiree who runs ISS. As Subject 6 said of his ISS monitor, “She already gave me dates for March and April of when she’s available, and I usually stick with the dates she’s given me.” His scheduling ISS around her schedule makes clear that she has a significant influence on ISS. One is reminded of Sheets’ (1996) insistence that “The key operational component is the person assigned to monitor the program” (p. 89).

8.1.4 Ideal scenarios

In most schools described by this research, in-school suspension is academic. Some principals who were surveyed or interviewed were satisfied with a wholly academic approach. Others, like Morris and Howard (2003), seemed intent on providing a more therapeutic model of ISS. The effective ISS programs described by Morris and Howard (2003) include mentoring components, background music, social skills lessons, and character education lessons (p. 158). No principals reached in this study referenced the need for music, but several envisioned a therapeutic model where students “Reflect on their actions and formulate a plan to correct the behavior” (response

to survey item 25). More than half of survey respondents described a blended approach, as in “Character education, reflect on behavior, and classroom assignments” (response to survey item 25). In follow-up interviews, principals made clear that additional staffing would be needed to provide a therapeutic approach, but none referenced the need for curricular materials, either in print or online.

8.2 IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Over the next several years, we are likely to see a decrease in OSS and an increase in ISS. Out-of-school suspension has been criticized as an exclusionary practice disproportionately applied to students in already underserved populations. But regardless of the race or economics of their student bodies, many middle and high school principals – and even many elementary principals – have begun to see ISS as a more effective punishment than OSS. For too many students, OSS means a day off, something that might actually incentivize bad behavior. For too many administrators, OSS represents a kind of hypocrisy, something meant to highlight the importance of school by preventing students from attending school. OSS may be the cheaper of the two suspensions, but under ESSA, school districts will have another reason to invest in ISS. Financial investments – to hire full-time teachers to supervise ISS and to purchase character education curriculum to use in ISS – will be needed if schools are going to make the leap from OSS to ISS. And just as schools are increasingly turning to online vendors to diversify their course catalogs, schools might also look to online options for curriculum or programming within ISS.

8.3 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

It is worth noting that the survey and interviews were directed at principals but conducted by a superintendent. That difference in position might have affected the answers provided by survey respondents and, even more so, by interviewees. For instance, principals might be less apt to criticize their school or district when speaking to someone who might one day speak with their bosses. More generally, principals might be less apt to critique their own schools than they would to critique others' schools or schools in general. In fact, they might be more apt to defend or even exaggerate the quality of their programs and efforts. The positionality of the researcher, the survey respondents, and the interviewees, is a factor that potentially impacts the validity of survey results and interview findings. Future studies, conducted by principals or professors, might garner different or additional responses from the same population.

On the financial front, future studies might compare the effectiveness of certified faculty with service personnel. Can aides provide the same level of supervision and ensure the same level of productivity as teachers? Can substitute teachers working only one or two days a week ensure the same level of productivity as full-time teachers or aides? Productivity itself merits increased attention. Future studies could use researcher observations and document analysis to compare the relative productivity of students in different kinds of ISS. The same research methods might be used to compare the relative productivity of older and younger students in ISS. In addition to academic coursework, apology letters offer a product that could be compared across schools. Are students who write apologies while in ISS less apt to repeat the offenses for which they were assigned to ISS?

This study has identified several factors that influence a principal's use of in-school suspension, including the principal's own beliefs related to punishment and suspension. Future studies might explore the perspectives of superintendents and board members. Do they prefer ISS to OSS? Do they value ISS over Saturday school? Do they prefer a therapeutic approach to a punitive or academic approach? Just as it would be illuminating to compare their perspectives on various punishments, it would also be interesting to ask them about the relative value of various teaching positions. Would they consider replacing a school counselor position or a specials teaching position – music or art, for instance – with a teacher devoted to ISS? Would they consider replacing a classroom aide with an aide devoted to ISS?

APPENDIX A

Principals Survey

Survey Flow

Standard: Block 1 (1 Question)
Branch: New Branch If If Is in-school suspension (ISS) a consequence that is available in your school? No Is Selected
Block: Block 2 (2 Questions)
Branch: New Branch If If If ISS is not available in your building, do you wish that it were available? No Is Not Selected
Block: Block 3 (1 Question)
Branch: New Branch If If Is in-school suspension (ISS) a consequence that is available in your school? Yes Is Selected
Block: Block 4 (21 Questions)
Standard: Block 5 (4 Questions) Standard: Block 6 (1 Question)

Page Break

Start of Block: Block 1

Q1 Is in-school suspension (ISS) a consequence that is available in your school?

Yes (1)

No (2)

End of Block: Block 1

Start of Block: Block 2

Q2 If ISS is not available, why is it not available in your school? (Select all that apply.)

We have no staff to monitor ISS. (1)

We have no room for ISS. (2)

We cannot afford ISS. (3)

I do not believe in ISS. (4)

Central office does not believe in ISS. (5)

The school board does not believe in ISS. (6)

District policy prevents the use of ISS. (7)

I don't know why we don't have ISS. (8)

Other. Please explain. (9) _____

Q3 If ISS is not available in your building, do you wish that it were available?

- Yes (1)
- Maybe (2)
- No (3)

End of Block: Block 2

Start of Block: Block 3

Q4 In a perfect world, what would students do while in ISS?

End of Block: Block 3

Start of Block: Block 4

Q5 The following questions relate to your perceptions of in-school suspension. Do you approve of the use of ISS in your school?

- Yes (1)
 - Maybe (2)
 - No (3)
-

Q6 When students are assigned to ISS, the punishment is appropriate to their offense.

- Strongly disagree (1)
 - Disagree (2)
 - Neutral (3)
 - Agree (4)
 - Strongly agree (5)
-

Q7 When students are assigned to ISS, their punishment functions as a deterrent to others.

- Strongly disagree (1)
 - Disagree (2)
 - Neutral (3)
 - Agree (4)
 - Strongly agree (5)
-

Q8 When students are assigned to ISS, the school expresses its disapproval of their behavior.

- Strongly disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neutral (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly agree (5)

Q9 When students are assigned to ISS, they themselves are less apt to misbehave in the future.

- Strongly disagree (1)
 - Disagree (2)
 - Neutral (3)
 - Agree (4)
 - Strongly agree (5)
-

Q10 When students are assigned to ISS, they are reformed or corrected.

- Strongly disagree (1)
 - Disagree (2)
 - Neutral (3)
 - Agree (4)
 - Strongly agree (5)
-

Q11 When students are assigned to ISS, other students are protected from the offender.

- Strongly disagree (1)
 - Disagree (2)
 - Neutral (3)
 - Agree (4)
 - Strongly agree (5)
-

Q12 When students are assigned to ISS, their punishment is proportionate to their offense.

- Strongly disagree (1)
 - Disagree (2)
 - Neutral (3)
 - Agree (4)
 - Strongly agree (5)
-

Q13 In my school, ISS is consistently applied for certain offenses.

- Strongly disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neutral (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly agree (5)

Q14 The next several questions relate to activities that are available to students in ISS. While students are assigned to ISS, they are put to work in maintenance or custodial services.

- Never (1)
 - Seldom (2)
 - Unsure (3)
 - Sometimes (4)
 - Always (5)
-

Q15 While students are in ISS, they have an opportunity to catch up on coursework.

- Never (1)
 - Seldom (2)
 - Unsure (3)
 - Sometimes (4)
 - Always (5)
-

Q16 While students are in ISS, they have an opportunity to reflect on their behavior.

- Never (1)
 - Seldom (2)
 - Unsure (3)
 - Sometimes (4)
 - Always (5)
-

Q17 While students are in ISS, they have access to a social and emotional learning curriculum.

- Never (1)
 - Seldom (2)
 - Unsure (3)
 - Sometimes (4)
 - Always (5)
-

Q18 While students are in ISS, they have access to a character education piece.

- Never (1)
- Seldom (2)
- Unsure (3)
- Sometimes (4)
- Always (5)

Q19 While students are in ISS, they have access to a computer.

- Never (1)
 - Seldom (2)
 - Unsure (3)
 - Sometimes (4)
 - Always (5)
-

Q20 While students are in ISS, they are given work to do on a computer.

- Never (1)
 - Seldom (2)
 - Unsure (3)
 - Sometimes (4)
 - Always (5)
-

Q21 ISS is held in

- its own, devoted classroom. (1)
- the main office suite. (2)
- a hallway. (3)
- other. Please specify: (4) _____

Q22 ISS is supervised by

- a full-time teacher. (1)
- a full-time paraprofessional. (2)
- a different teacher or paraprofessional every period. (3)
- office staff. (4)
- other. Please specify: (5) _____

Q23 On average, how many students in your school are in ISS each day?

Q24 What percentage of the student body does that represent?

Q25 In a perfect world, what would students do while in ISS?

End of Block: Block 4

Start of Block: Block 5

Q26 What is the size of the student population in your school?

- under 100 (1)
 - 100 to 499 (2)
 - 500 to 999 (3)
 - 1000 to 1999 (4)
 - 2000 or more (5)
-

Q27 Approximately what percentage of your current students are eligible for free or reduced meals?

Q28 How many years of experience do you have as a principal?

Q29 What is your gender?

- Female (1)
- Male (2)
- Other (3)

End of Block: Block 5

Start of Block: Block 6

Q30 In the next phase of my inquiry, I plan to conduct interviews to dig deeper into why principals make the decisions they make and to describe in greater detail the options that exist or might yet exist for ISS. Would you be willing to participate in a follow-up interview that would take place on the phone and last 15 to 30 minutes?

Yes. My contact info is (1) _____

No (2)

End of Block: Block 6

APPENDIX B

Thank you for your willingness to be interviewed as part of this research project. Your answers will help inform the qualitative analysis of profiles of practice relative to in-school suspension for my dissertation. Your identity will be kept confidential: your name and school will never appear in any part of this research. The first set of questions involves WHY you do ISS.

- 1) For which infractions do you assign students to ISS?*
- 2) What other punishments are available to you?*
- 3) Why do you assign students to ISS?*
- 4) Why not rely exclusively on detention?*
- 5) What do you hope to achieve with ISS?*
- 6) Is the superintendent involved in ISS? How?*
- 7) Is the school board involved in ISS? How?*
- 8) How do the district's policies impact ISS?*
- 9) How does the district's budget impact ISS?*
- 10) Did the principal before you use ISS in the same way?*
- 11) Do neighboring principals use ISS in the same way?*
- 12) Why do you do ISS the way you do?*

The next set of questions involves HOW you do ISS.

- 13) Where in your building do you house ISS?*

14) What does ISS look like in your building?

15) How is ISS staffed in your school?

16) How many students are in ISS on a typical day?

17) What do students do while in ISS?

18) Do they use computers while in ISS?

19) Do you have a curriculum for students in ISS?

20) If money were no object, what would your ISS look like and what would students do there?

21) Is there anything else you could share with me in terms of how public schools in West Virginia could do a better job with ISS?

Thanks so much for spending this time with me!

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