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# Key stakeholder perceptions of the expulsion process for high school students identified as emotionally disturbed

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Key Stakeholder Perceptions of the Expulsion Process for High School Students

Identified as Emotionally Disturbed


by


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ABSTRACT

This study examined how the expulsion process works for seven male ninth grade students identified as emotionally disturbed and in particular, the perceptions students, their parents, five district representatives, and five high school administrators involved in an expulsion have of the process. Furthermore, the study investigated through in-depth interviews possible differences in perceptions between those students who are expelled, parents, and key education personnel involved in expulsion decisions.

Computer-based qualitative data analysis software was used to organize and analyze the collected data. Results of the study indicate that the two primary key stakeholder participants; students and their parents, shared predominately similar perceptions of the expulsion process. These perceptions differed from the secondary key stakeholders, high school administrators and district representatives, whose perceptions were also predominately similar to each other. The students and parents' responses indicate that they did not understand the expulsion procedures and did not feel as though the expulsion decision was unanimous. District representatives and high school administrators' responses indicated that they felt trained and familiar with expulsion procedures; they understood the expulsion procedures and perceived that the placement options and decisions were made by a unanimous group decision.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Expulsion has become a present day discipline alternative within the public high

school system (Moses, 2001). Those who develop and implement policies supporting

expulsion need to better understand the nature and consequences of this discipline

approach and to consider how expulsion often denies opportunities for precisely those

students who need them the most (Doyle, 1986; Piechura, 1993; Skiba & Noam, 2002).

Despite its increasing use there are a host of problems are associated with expulsions. For

example, current literature provides ample evidence that expulsions decrease academic

opportunities and accelerate the dropout process (Gonzalez, 2002; Moses, 2001; Skiba,

2000; Studley, 2002). Other examples of problems associated with expulsions noted in

the literature are increased numbers of students entering the juvenile justice system

(Advancement Project, 2005), and a disproportionate number of students with disabilities

being expelled (American Psychological Association, 2006). This study examined how

the expulsion process works for students with disabilities and in particular, the

perceptions students, parents, district representatives, and high school administrators

involved in an expulsion had of the process.

Students whose primary disability is Emotionally Disturbed (ED) were the focus of

this study. Some school districts use the term Emotionally Handicapped (EH) for this

same group of students and therefore both ED and EH appear throughout the literature.

For the purposes of this study the federal designation of ED was used. See Definition of Terms at the end of Chapter 1 for the federal definition of ED.

National Data Regarding Expulsion

Discipline is of utmost concern to educators and is viewed by the American public as a major problem in education (Windom, 2002). According to a survey completed by the National Center for Education Statistics (2005), the disruption caused by violence in our nation's public schools is a national concern. The survey states that 78% of schools reported having some type of formal violence prevention or violence reduction program or effort (National Center for Education Statistics, 2005). Many school districts have implemented some form of violence awareness or prevention program in an effort to address school safety issues to reduce and prevent violence on campus (Brugman, 2004). As student discipline continues to be a major problem, there is a need for consistent direction to balance school safety with protection of students' rights (Hartwig & Ruesch, 2000; Lyons, 2003). Federal courts have sought to balance students' constitutional rights with the need for safety and freedom from violence in their schools (Windom, 2002).

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2003), nationally 97,177 students were expelled during the 2002-2003 school year. Of those expelled during the 2002-2003 school year, 5,724 students were expelled under the federal "Gun Free Schools Act" (GFSA) that requires states to have legislation to mandate the expulsion of youths who bring guns to school (Macallair, 2002).

Students with disabilities are over-represented among students who are expelled from school (U.S. Departments of Education and Juvenile Justice, 1999). A study in a California school district looking at expulsion (Studley, 2002), found that special

education students comprised 22% of the study sample, approximately twice their school enrollment. As a result of this over-representation and in an effort to better serve the needs of students with disabilities (House Report No. 105-95, 105th Cong., 1st Session, 1997), the IDEA was amended in 1997 to include specific disciplinary provisions to deal with children who misbehave in school (Palley, 2002).

A national study completed by the Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice (Macallair, 2002) found that students with disabilities are disproportionately expelled. For example, one quarter of the children expelled in Massachusetts and Maryland were in special education programs, even though they represent 15% of the state's school enrollment. The study further points out that when students with disabilities are expelled, their education becomes disrupted: they are more likely to fall further behind, to become more frustrated, and too frequently, to drop out of school (Macallair, 2002).

Among students in special education, students who suffer from an emotional handicap are particularly at-risk for committing discipline violations and being expelled (Kaplan, 2005). McFadden et al. (1992) discovered that in a sample of 4, 392 high school discipline infractions over a 17-month period, students classified with an Emotional Handicap (EH) comprised 43.1% of all students in special education (N= 649) who committed a discipline violation. Skiba et al. (1997) also found in a sample of 11, 001 regular and special education students that those classified as EH (1.8% of the sample) were more likely to be considered for expulsion than any other group of students.

State Data

The method Florida uses to track student expulsion is described at the Florida Department of Education website (http://www.firn.edu/doe/besss/discipline2.htm).

Expulsion data are reported by school districts through Florida's automated student database. Expulsion rates are calculated by dividing the number of students who were expelled at any time during the school year by the total year enrollment. Alternative placement rates are calculated by dividing the number of students who were moved to an alternative placement at any time during the school year by the total year enrollment. All calculations are completed for students with disabilities and for students without disabilities separately (Florida Department of Education, 2005).

During the 2004-2005 school year, 752 students were expelled in the state of Florida (Florida Department of Education, 2006). When focusing on children of low socio-economic status (SES) or children of color, excluding Asians, the rate of expulsion climbs even higher (Price, 2002). For example, the Florida's School Indicators Report showed that approximately 19% of African American, 10% of Hispanic, 9% of White, and 4% of Asian students committed infractions that led to the consideration of expulsion (Florida Department of Education, 2006). The deduction is that expulsions appear to be linked to racial and social status. Many expelled students have similar characteristics, such as low reading and math achievement in the early grades, early academic retention, single parent, undereducated parents, and race and/or ethnicity (Moses, 2001). Many of these characteristics have been associated with teacher bias when disciplining students (Walker-Dalhouse, 2005). Besides being linked to racial and gender status, expulsion is also linked to students with disabilities who appear to be expelled disproportionately (Lyons, 2003). Morrison and D'Incau (1997) described the characteristics of 158 students recommended for expulsion over a two-year period in a medium-sized suburban school

district. Overall, 22% of the 158 students received special education services, primarily for emotionally handicapped conditions (Morrison & D'Incau, 1997).

Across the 67 school districts in Florida, data reported are grouped into five school district groups based on the size of student membership as very large, large, medium, medium small, and small size. Data reported show overall higher rates of expulsion for all students in small and medium small districts. According to the Florida Department of Education (2005) it is hypothesized that these medium small and small districts may have fewer discipline alternatives available to them. However, rates for students with disabilities are higher than their non-disabled peers across all districts (Florida Department of Education, 2005).

District Data

Across all 67 of Florida's school districts, rates for students with disabilities being considered for expulsion averaged between 13%-14% throughout the 2000-2004 school years (Florida Department of Education website, 2005). Similar expulsion rates across each of Florida's school districts for non-disabled students averaged between 6%-7% during those same years. The data above show that expulsion rates are almost twice as high for students with disabilities. The school districts throughout Florida that exceeded state expulsion rate averages the most, fell into the small or rural school district category (Florida Department of Education website, 2005).

Zero Tolerance

Most schools follow zero tolerance discipline policies that shape a school's culture and discipline procedures. For the purposes of this study, a zero tolerance policy was defined as a school district policy that mandates predetermined consequence/s or

punishment for specific offenses (Christensen, 2003). The public's perceptions that school campuses were inherently unsafe led to the Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994. This Act, although originally a gun-related bill, is often believed to be the genesis of zero-tolerance policies (Christensen, 2003). The act required schools to expel automatically for 1-year students who bring a gun to school. Any school that failed to implement this law risked losing federal education funds. Shortly after national adoption of weapons-related zero tolerance, school districts began extending the policy's purview to other undesirable behavior such as drugs, violence, threats, classroom disruptions, hate speech, and fighting (Advancement Project & Civil Rights Project, 2000).

By the mid-to-late-1990's incidents began to surface about over-zealous applications of zero tolerance, such as a Colorado fifth-grade honor roll student's expulsion for accidentally bringing a paring knife to school (Christensen, 2003). There also was the highly published case of Shanon Coslet, a 10-year old at Twin Peaks Academy in Longmont, Colorado, who was expelled because her mother put a small knife in her lunch box to cut an apple (Christensen, 2003). The parents were amazed that Shannon was subject to mandatory expulsion under the school district's zero-tolerance policy.

Much of the momentum to target drug-, violence-, and gun-free campuses came from Goals 2000, the policy supported by the Clinton Administration to improve the nation's school systems (Christensen, 2003). Unfortunately, some school districts took the conceptual framework of zero tolerance beyond the reasonable, developing policies that could not discern between innocent behavior and illegal activity. A flurry of expulsions for such varied behavior as giving a classmate an antacid or bringing a butter knife to school created broad-based confusion as to the intent of the policy. In areas where state

statutes did not establish strict boundaries, school districts were cautioned to consider

each expulsion case individually, rather than making broad sweeping reactions that belied

common sense (National Association of Secondary School Principals, 1999).

Skiba and Noam (2002) conclude that misconduct and violence in schools appear

largely unaffected, and, in fact, some state and local data suggest zero tolerance has

caused a dramatic increase in the use of expulsions in some school districts. Additionally,

Skiba and Noam (2002) assert policies that rely solely on expelling students do not

remedy student misbehavior. Instead, research indicates that such policies exacerbate

student misconduct, contribute to academic failure and higher drop-out rates, and leave

students vulnerable to anti-social, high risk, and delinquent situations (Skiba & Noam,

2002).

IDEA Disciplinary Procedures

Three major studies have been conducted to assess the implementation of IDEA

1997's disciplinary amendments. One is from the Government Accounting Office (GAO,

2001) study that addresses the impact of the discipline policies in the 1997 amendments

of the IDEA. The second is a study by Smith (2002), which evaluated judicial decisions

regarding the IDEA's disciplinary amendments. The third study is by the National

Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) that evaluated IDEA's implementation of

discipline for students.

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) (1999) conducted a 5-year

evaluation of the implementation of the IDEA. As a part of this process, evaluators

examined nine target issues that were defined in the IDEA, one of which addresses

behavioral problems of students with disabilities as compared to non-disabled students

(NAEP, 1999, IV-1). This evaluation included a sample survey from all states consisting of 800 local education agencies and about 3,200 schools. It also included in-depth qualitative evaluation of IDEA policies and procedures related to discipline, dispute resolution and parental involvement (NAEP, 1999, IV-4).

In a preliminary report to Congress (NAEP, 1999), the NAEP noted that public concern about school safety had led to an increase in the development and enforcement of tougher discipline codes and the 1997 disciplinary amendments to the IDEA. The NAEP Interim Report further stated that application of these provisions is complicated by lack of data on the prevalence of certain disciplinary events among students with disabilities (NAEP, 1999, IV-15). In the findings regarding the implementation of disciplinary policies in the IDEA, it noted that poor students, minority students and disabled students tended to receive harsher punishment than other students (NAEP, 2002).

Smith (2002) completed a study on the implementation of the IDEA's 1997 discipline amendments by reviewing Office of Civil Rights (OCR) opinions, hearing decisions, and court decisions from 1997-98. He searched databases for terms related to manifestation meetings, behavioral assessments and alternative educational settings. His study includes a review of 89 decisions regarding the assessment competency of teachers and other school professionals, behavioral planning skills and the placement of students in alternative educational settings. In his review of decisions regarding manifestation determination meetings, which included 16 state level decisions and 5 OCR opinions, he found that in 9 of 13 cases, the parent requests were upheld for manifestation determination meetings that were not completed by schools. In 59 cases regarding behavioral planning, judicial or semi-judicial bodies found that only 27% of the IEP

teams appropriately addressed student behavior. In 9 of 10 situations where there was a behavioral intervention plan, the plan was not appropriately followed. Lastly, only 4 of 12 proposed interim alternative placements were appropriate to address student behavioral problems (Smith, 2002). These cases are representative of cases in which there is conflict and parents pursue legal action. As a result, they are not likely to represent typical disciplinary decisions in schools because typical school disciplinary decisions do not end up in court. In addition, this study looked at the implementation of the law prior to the issuance of the final regulations in 1999. The criterion for holding a manifestation determination meeting was specified in the 1999 regulations. However, this study does demonstrate some of the initial problems with the implementation of the law. Based on his review of court hearings and OCR decisions, Smith (2002) suggested that the implementation of the law is hindered because of lack of staff skill in developing and implementing behavior plans. He notes that schools may have ambivalence over whether to address behavioral problems as characteristics that can be corrected or to punish students who exhibit them (Smith, 2002).

A study that addresses the impact of the discipline policies in the 1997 amendments of the IDEA (P.L. 101-476) and its accompanying federal regulations that went into effect in 1999 is *Student Discipline: Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (GAO, 2001). In this study, the Government Accounting Office (GAO) attempted to assess three key issues: 1) whether "the incidence and impact of serious student misconduct (drugs, weapons, assault, rape, sexual assault and robbery) on schools were primarily attributable to the serious misconduct of students with disabilities or of regular education students," 2) whether, "students with disabilities who engage in serious misconduct were being

disciplined differently from those without disabilities and if so how," and 3) "the role of the IDEA in schools' ability to properly discipline students with disabilities who engage in serious misconduct" (GAO, 2001). In addition, they conducted site visits and interviewed principals in three states, Louisiana, New York and Wisconsin, to help develop their survey instrument and to get a broader perspective on the implementation of the IDEA (GAO, 2001).

The GAO study found that 81% of the schools that responded reported at least one incidence of serious misconduct. Seventy percent of these acts involved violent behavior, which they reported were generally student fist fights. On average, principals reported 10 incidents with general education students and 4 with special education students. They found that special education students who are involved in serious misconduct were being disciplined in a similar manner to general education students, based on information reported by principals (GAO, 2001). They also found that 60-65% of students in both regular and special education who engaged in serious misconduct were given out of school suspensions that were approximately equal in time (GAO, 2001). Approximately, one in six students was either expelled or placed in an alternative educational placement as a result of the misconduct. Almost all of the students with disabilities received educational services after expulsion whereas only half of the regular education students did (GAO, 2001).

This study found that the "IDEA plays a limited role in affecting schools' ability to properly discipline students" (GAO, 2001). However, they also found that 26% of responding principals felt that special education discipline policies are unfair to the regular student population, teachers and parents (GAO, 2001). The GAO report noted

that 86% of local special education discipline policies provided additional protections to students with disabilities that are not required by the IDEA. The GAO report stated that, "10 school day suspension limit may reflect school districts' continuation of policies developed from the proposed IDEA regulations that were out for public comment through May 1999 but were replaced by the final regulations" (GAO, 2001).

As discussed previously, Smith's study (2002) did not consider the implementation of the IDEA's disciplinary policies in cases where there was no court or hearing involvement. The GAO report did not evaluate how schools were implementing the IDEA's discipline policies or what actually happens in schools as a result of the IDEA's policies. A goal in the present study was addressed by bridging these gaps in current understanding of the implementation of the IDEA's disciplinary policies and zero tolerance policies based on the perceptions of key stakeholders.

Manifestation Determination

In the 1997 Amendments to the IDEA, Congress specifically noted that if a student with a disability is suspended in total for 10 or more days during a school year, the student's Individual Education Plan (IEP) team must conduct a manifestation determination meeting to determine if the student's misconduct was a manifestation of his/her disability. In addition, there is a provision in the IDEA called the "stay put" provision which essentially requires that in all but a few exceptional cases, a school cannot remove a student with disabilities from their educational setting without parental permission (IDEA, 1999). If a parent requests a due process hearing, the student must remain in his or her current setting through the outcome of the hearing. However, if a student brings a weapon or drugs to school, the student may be removed from the setting

and placed in an interim alternative setting for 45 days. The school staff must request a hearing if they do not wish to return the student to the previous setting at the end of 45 days unless they have parental permission for a change of placement. The school can also request a hearing to determine whether a student is a danger to himself or another, and if the student is found to be a danger, the school can request that a hearing officer order the child to be placed in an interim alternative setting for up to 45 days (IDEA, 1999).

In 1999, the final regulations accompanying the IDEA were completed. It is clear from the regulations that a student with a disability may be suspended or expelled for 10 days. They further clarified the student may be suspended or expelled for more than 10 days as long as during the manifestation determination meeting the IEP team does not find that the student's misbehavior was a manifestation of the student's disability. During the interim of the suspension, the student must be provided with educational services that enable the student to make appropriate progress toward his or her IEP goals (IDEA, 1999). A manifestation determination is a meeting at which the IEP team meets to determine whether the student's behavior was a manifestation of his/her disability. Since this study looked at students with Emotional Disturbance (ED), it is not surprising that the behavior reported by the key stakeholders throughout the interviews was a manifestation of their disability. This supports Kaplan's (2005) assertion that often the inappropriate behavior exhibited by students with ED is determined to be a manifestation of the student's disability.

In order to determine if a behavior is a manifestation of the disability, the school committee must review the student's functional behavioral assessment plan. A functional behavioral assessment is an assessment that schools are required to perform to help

relevant personnel at the manifestation determination meeting decide the extent to which

the student's misconduct was a manifestation of his/her disability (IDEA, 1999). If the

student has not had a functional behavioral assessment plan completed prior to the

manifestation determination meeting, then the school must develop an assessment plan

either before or no later than 10 business days after either removing the student for more

than 10 school days in a school year or commencing a removal that constitutes a change

in placement (IDEA, 1999). The federal regulations require that the IEP team:

> (1) First consider, in terms of the behavior subject to disciplinary action, all relevant information, including - -
>> (i)     Evaluation and diagnostic results, including the results or other relevant information supplied by the parents of the child;
>> (ii)    Observations of the child; and
>> (iii)   The child's IEP and placement; and
> (2) Then determine that - -
>> (i)     In relationship to the behavior subject to disciplinary action, the child's IEP and placement were appropriate and the special education services, supplementary aids and services, and behavior intervention strategies were provided consistent with the child's IEP and placement;
>> (ii)    The child's disability did not impair the ability of the child to understand the impact and consequences of the behavior subject to disciplinary action; and
>> (iii)   The child's disability did not impair the ability of the child to control the behavior subject to disciplinary action.
> (3) Decision - -
>> (i)     If the IEP team and other qualified personnel determine that any of the standards were not met, the behavior must be considered a manifestation of the child's disability (IDEA, 1999).

These decisions are to be made on a case-by-case basis. The federal regulations

(IDEA, 1999) do not provide any further guidance for the actual decision making

processes. States and local school districts may choose to adopt similar policies for all

students (both students with disabilities and those without) but federal law does not require them to do so.

At the same time that the IDEA made special provisions for students with disabilities who are involved in delinquent activities at schools, they also specifically permitted schools to report crimes to law enforcement agencies that are committed by students with disabilities. The public law 105-17 states:

> (a) Nothing in this part shall be construed to prohibit any agency from reporting a crime committed by a child with a disability to appropriate authorities or to prevent State law enforcement and judicial authorities from exercising their responsibilities with regard to the application of Federal and State law to crimes committed by a child with a disability (IDEA, 1997).

Depending upon related state regulations and the implementation of this policy, this provision may limit the ability of students with disabilities to receive the procedural protections that are specified within the IDEA (P.L. 105-17). For example, if a state prohibits certain behaviors or defines certain in school behaviors as criminal, then students who exhibit those behaviors will have them addressed outside of the context of the IDEA and its protections.

Students, Parents, District Representatives, and High School Administrators

Students who are identified as having an emotional disturbance are more frequently expelled than their general education counterparts (National Center for Education Statistics, 2005). Piechura (1993) used a naturalistic research design to analyze case studies and gain insight into the student's view of their expulsion experience. She interviewed and observed four students ranging from 14 to 17 years of age with Emotional Handicaps. Based on student responses, the students' perceptions include not

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feeling confident academically, being targeted by the school administrator, and having a negative reputation (Piechura, 1993). The current study continued along the same lines but also included the perspectives of multiple key stakeholders.

Moses (2001) interviewed students who had been expelled. The students in his study primarily felt that their experience of being expelled was unjust and commonly stated they felt wronged, a sense of injustice, angry, frustrated, and silenced (Moses, 2001). Being expelled according to the students in his study carried a stigma of being a bad person and made them further targets for administrators (Moses, 2001). All the students interviewed by Moses (2001) stated that upon returning to their regular campus they received no counseling or assistance in reintegrating into the general population of public school life. Again the present study included various key stakeholders as well as students who had been expelled to gain their perspective on the expulsion process.

In addition to interviewing students whose primary disability was ED, parents were also interviewed as part of the present study to determine how they are affected by an expulsion. Research shows that schools that effectively engage all stakeholders, particularly, parents, are most successful in handling discipline (Ndaayezwi, 2003). Because multiple stakeholders (parents, administrators, students, social services, law enforcement and judicial agencies) are involved, various perspectives were needed to develop an understanding of the challenges and perceptions held by each key stakeholder (Mellard & Seybert, 1996).

Parents and/or guardians must be informed immediately when their child is being considered for expulsion and have the opportunity to attend a manifestation determination meeting and hearing (U.S. Department of Education, 2000). According to

Mellard and Seybert (1996), a building administrator chairs the meeting and all views of the incident must be expressed in order to determine an appropriate outcome. In a study conducted by Mellard and Seybert (1996) the parents felt, however, that the hearing was too often a sentencing meeting rather than a fact-finding effort to understand what happened. Rather than view the hearing as an opportunity for all parties to be heard and work together to describe events and identify and resolve problems, parents perceived it as something that had been done to them (Mellard & Seybert, 1996).

In a study conducted by Christensen (2003) parents were asked if they understood the expulsion process. In his study, all parents interviewed said the process was too complex or too legal to be understood, and therefore they did not feel as though they were fully able to participate. Additionally, Christensen's study revealed that most parents were unclear regarding timelines (number of days of suspension prior to a child being expelled or being returned to the regular school site). Several wanted to know how to get schoolwork while their child was waiting for the expulsion hearing. Most were angry about the expulsion process and several felt that they had no one with whom to discuss their issues (Christensen, 2003). Overall, many felt that the process was intimidating and had not been explained to them in an acceptable way (Christensen, 2003).

District representatives frequently attend expulsion meetings for students with disabilities. A district representative at an expulsion meeting is often the Special Education Director, Program Specialist, or Exceptional Student Education (ESE) Staffing Specialist. Chapter1006.07 of the 2006 Florida Statutes states that school districts are responsible for following appropriate expulsion procedures (Florida Statues, 2006).

Along with the school-based administrator, the district representative is often a member of the expulsion hearing.

Upon review of Florida school district website discipline policies throughout Florida the following are examples of how various school districts involve a district representative at expulsion meetings. Madison County school district website states that the ESE staffing specialist must be involved when the IEP team is convened for an expellable offense (Madison County Schools, 2006). Monroe County school district website illustrates that the staffing specialist is a district professional that coordinates the IEP team and makes sure the procedures are followed (Monroe County Schools, 2006). The district ESE administrator or designee will attend IEP expulsion meetings (Brevard County Schools, 2006). Since school districts frequently have a district representative who assists the school administrator in adhering to appropriate ESE expulsion procedures and procedural safeguards, it was reasonable to include this individual as a key stakeholder in the present study.

In addition to students, parents, and district representatives, high school administrators were interviewed to gain insight into their perception of the expulsion process and knowledge of IDEA's disciplinary provisions. A study conducted by Wiemer (2002) indicated that based on IDEA requirements the most frequently mentioned changes occurring for special education students facing expulsion were the implementation of interim alternative educational settings, functional behavioral assessments and behavior intervention plans, heightened attention to detail, revisions to district forms and documents, and increased involvement in the individualized education plan process by regular education teachers. Through in-depth interviews with administrators, the majority

perceived the disciplinary mandates as beneficial to students with special needs (Wiemer, 2002). The most frequently expressed benefit was the mandatory continuation of educational services for special education students who engage in expellable offenses (Wiemer, 2002). Several disadvantages to the IDEA requirements mentioned by the administrators in her study included over-protections for students who knowingly and willingly disrupt the learning process, and burdensome paperwork requirements (Wiemer, 2002). The study's findings conclude that expulsion percentages have increased slightly and suspension percentages have decreased slightly since the passage of IDEA in 1997.

Public Law 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, leading to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was originally passed in 1975. There have been several amendments since the passage of the law in 1975 (National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities, 2003). IDEA is not a static law. Every several years, parts of IDEA are reauthorized (National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities, 2003). IDEA was reauthorized in 2004 and in that discussion about reauthorization; the 1997 amendments of IDEA were the subject of much controversy (Rothstein, 2001; O'Neil 2002). Reauthorized issues relating to discipline that were discussed include whether the behavior was a manifestation of the student's disability and the process used to determine if the behavior is a manifestation of the disability (Federation for Children with Special Needs, 2004). The 2004 reauthorization also considered how to provide for the continued provision of services for students with disabilities that are expelled (Federation for Children with Special Needs,

2004). The present study focused on the existing law and current procedures for expulsions.

It is expected that special education laws will continue to evolve. Current practice, court cases, and research are expected to contribute to future discipline procedures. Educators are actively engaged in the next legislative update that will affect discipline procedures which is called the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (Federation for Children with Special Needs, 2004). This Act became effective on July 1, 2005.

Statement of the Problem

The raw data totals from the School Environmental Safety Incident Reporting (SESIR) compiled by the Florida Department of Education 2003-2004 show high school students with disabilities being over-represented in expulsions. Students with disabilities are suspended at a higher rate according to research. Leone, Mayer, Malmgren, and Meisel (2000) found that students with disabilities represent 11% of the population nationally but account for approximately 20% of suspensions. Many students who are expelled from school have faced repeated suspension days (Lyons, 2003). Researchers in Kansas and Minnesota (Lyons, 2003) found that students with disabilities were more than two times more likely to be expelled than students without disabilities. Furthermore, students with an emotional handicap were expelled at twice the rate as other students with disabilities (Kaplan, 2005). In the Skiba et al. (1997) study, students identified as ED were more likely to be considered for an expulsion than all other students. McFadden et al. (1992) found that ED students represented 43.6% of 649 students with disabilities with a

discipline referral. Rose (1988) revealed that students classified with an emotional

disturbance were most likely to be expelled from school.

Most students with an emotional disturbance who find themselves subject to

disciplinary action under the provisions of the Florida Education Code, (Florida

Department of Education, 2006), which may involve expulsion are unprepared for the

steps that follow the action taken by the governing board of their school district. Students

and parents, who are placed under oath, are asked to provide a statement and, in many

cases, feel intimidated by the process (Van Acker, Boreson, & Gable, 2005). For most,

this is their first exposure to the legal process that determines the educational options for

the child when the child is separated from the school district for the term of the

expulsion. This process can be extremely unsettling for the parent and child, since there is

very little way of knowing where the child will end up, what the time requirements will

be, and the conditions that the school district may impose in order to have the child return

at the end of the expulsion (Christensen, 2003).

The disproportionate representation of students with disabilities is well documented

among expelled students (Morrison & D'Incau, 1997; Skiba, et al., 1997). Students with

disabilities are over-represented in the juvenile justice system as well as among students

who are expelled from schools (U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of

Juvenile Justice, 1999). As a result of this over-representation and, in an effort to better

serve the needs of children with disabilities (House Report No. 105-95, 105th Cong., 1st

Session, 1997), the IDEA was amended in 1997 to include specific disciplinary

provisions to deal with children with disabilities who misbehave in school. One of the

specific provisions was the mandating of manifestation determination meetings: meetings

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that schools must hold when students with disabilities have been suspended or expelled for over 10 days. Two of the main purposes of these meetings are to require schools to identify and address the needs of students who misbehave in school and to balance the interests of students with disabilities with the rest of the school population so that other students are not endangered (House Report No. 105-95, 1997). We see all the problems expulsions create, as well as some positive aspects of expulsions, but we do not know what the perceptions of expulsions are from those involved in the process. This study has contributed to the aforementioned gap by allowing perceptions of key stakeholders to emerge.

Purpose of the Study

Given the history of disproportionate exclusion of particular groups, and the severe negative consequences of repeated exclusion, it was sensible to investigate how key stakeholders viewed the expulsion process. A goal of interviewing multiple key stakeholders was to gain a systems perspective rather than the perspective of a single stakeholder. Through in-depth interviews the study investigated the expulsion process and its outcomes as seen by students whose primary disability is ED and by their parents. Additionally, high school administrators and district representatives who are responsible for conducting expulsion and manifestation determination meetings for students with disabilities were interviewed.

The purpose of this study was to determine the perceptions of the expulsion process held by students with an emotional disturbance, parents, district representatives, and high school administrators. Furthermore, the study investigated through in-depth interviews possible differences in perceptions between those students who were expelled, parents,

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and key education personnel involved in expulsion decisions including manifestation determination procedures.

Identifying the gaps in information between these four groups of key stakeholders who were interviewed may help school districts meet the needs of some of their most at-risk students. At this time, determining the proper balance between competing rights and responsibilities of multiple stakeholders continues to be somewhat unclear; it is this researcher's belief that the results of this study has unveiled key stakeholder perceptions of themes that future individuals may use to improve the balance between key stakeholders. Gaining an understanding of the types of programs that parents feel are necessary for their children to continue their education while under expulsion will allow educators and legislators to consider new programs and to eliminate existing programs. The data collected helped to identify what district officials should provide to students and parents to allow them to make informed choices and to improve the primary key stakeholder understanding of the expulsion process. Finally, the data identified areas where high school administrators may need training and improved communication at expulsion meetings in order to comply with IDEA's disciplinary provisions while balancing these legal requirements with individual student rights.

Method

A text analysis approach was followed in the present study. Text analysis is one form of qualitative data analysis. The collected data were entered as text in a software program. According to Corbin and Strauss (1990), the five analytic phases used in qualitative research are: research design, data collection, data ordering, data analysis and literature comparison. This study used a text analysis approach and followed the phases

associated with the five analytic phases mentioned by Corbin and Strauss (1990). Computer-based qualitative data analysis software was used to organize and analyze the collected data. Data analysis software can assist in tracing events over time, capturing interviews with key stakeholders, and bringing together the emerging themes derived from the collected data (Pandit, 1996). In text analysis one does not begin with a theme, but rather, one begins with an area of study and what is relevant to that area is allowed to emerge (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

This study was developed in an effort to better understand how the following four groups of key stakeholders (1) student, (2) parent, (3) district representative and (4) high school administrator perceived IDEA's disciplinary provisions and to help inform policy makers. The study assessed student, parent, district representative, and high school administrator perceptions of their experience with expulsion.

The study examined expulsion as a consequence used to control student misconduct. Students identified with an emotional disturbance, as their primary area of disability were selected for this study. The perceptions students, parents, district representatives, and high school administrators had of the expulsion process were analyzed for themes. A qualitative design consisting of in-depth interviews with students, parents, district representatives, and high school administrators was used to analyze this phenomenon of expulsions. This qualitative study examined student, parent, district representative, and high school administrator responses to a set of interview questions pertaining to student expulsion. Parents of expelled students were purposefully selected as participants for the study. The district representative and high school administrator involved in the same expulsion hearing as the student and parent were also purposefully selected. Purposefully

selecting participants involved in the same expulsion hearing further demonstrated if communication gaps existed when all key stakeholders attended the same meeting.

After a thorough review of the literature on expulsions and student discipline, interview questions were developed with the assistance of school officials from a selected Florida School District's Office of District and School Security. In-depth interviews were conducted with students and parents involved in the expulsion process or who had been expelled, as well as with district representatives and high school administrators involved in the expulsion process. The interviewer asked questions related to the actual expulsion process, its outcome, alternative program options and what, if any, parts of the expulsion process the students and parents did or did not understand. Likewise, the district representatives and high school administrators were asked about the actual expulsion process, its outcome, alternative program options and what, if any, parts of the expulsion process did or did not make sense to them.

A pilot study was conducted and is described in Chapter 3. The pilot study helped to refine the interview questions, time allotted for each interview, field notes and tape recording procedures. Additionally, the pilot study helped the researcher begin thinking about how to enter and analyze the interview responses. Results of the pilot study are included in Chapter 3.

Research Questions and Limitations

The research questions include:

1. How do the primary key stakeholders involved in expulsion experience the process?

> 1a. What are the perceptions of students with an Emotional Disturbance?
> 1b. What are the perceptions of parents?

2. How do the secondary key stakeholders involved in expulsion experience the process?

2a. What are the perceptions of district representatives?
2b. What are the perceptions of administrators?

3. Do the perceptions of the different key stakeholders differ and if so, how?

For the purpose of the study the following limitations are noted:

1. Using a purposeful sample of key stakeholders from one school and one school district in Florida may only produce findings and issues relevant to the individual participants in this study.

2. The interview findings from the study may be limited to the school used in the study and, to a degree, to other high schools or school districts with similar pupil demographic characteristics.

Role of the Researcher

I was the primary instrument for the data collection and analysis. Consequently, some biases were inherent and it is important to discuss and clarify my role in the development of the study so that the reader knows to what extent my past experiences might have shaped the data collection as well as the interpretation of the findings.

A large public school district on the eastern coast of central Florida was the site of the study. In the 2005-2006 school year, the district had a population of 75,160 students. Of the total 75,160 students, 54,570 were White, 10,420 were African American, 5,302 were Hispanic and 4,868 were identified as Other membership. There were 64 elementary schools, 14 middle/junior high schools, 22 senior high schools, 11 alternative/combination schools, and 13 adult schools for a total of 124 schools district wide. The graduation rate was 91.5% and the dropout rate was 1.2%.During this 2005-2006 school year, 8,746 students received in-school or out-of-school suspensions. There were 22,584 students receiving free or reduced lunch and 1, 387 receiving "English as a

Second Language" services. Special education serviced 18,061 students and 1,047 of these students were identified as Emotionally Disturbed. Whites represented 592 of the students with ED, African Americans represented 359 of the students with ED, Hispanics represented 51students with ED, and 45 of the students identified as ED were identified as Other.

This site was chosen because I worked as a teacher and ESE staffing specialist within this system for 10 years and in doing so had established relationships with a number of the district staff and school based administrative and instructional personnel. I had attended many child study team meetings and expulsion meetings throughout my decade of employment within the district.

As a full time employee of the district I had become acquainted with many administrators, educators, students and families. My role as an ESE staffing specialist kept me involved in the expulsion process and meetings for students with disabilities at my assigned schools. I purposely selected for this study a high school where I had never worked as a teacher or been assigned as a district representative for expulsion meetings. By selecting a high school where I was not acquainted with the administrators, teachers, students or families, I was able to approach the interviews without a prior history close involvement.

While my history within the district unquestionably made access to the research site easier it also presented certain problems. The school district is divided into four areas and I purposely selected a high school where the district representatives who attended the expulsion meetings for that high school would be assigned to schools in a different area and not be well acquainted with me. I am close friends with several of the district

representatives in the area of the district where I have been employed for many years and I felt these individuals needed to be ruled out of the study because I did not feel that I would be able to fairly observe them. Had I observed the work of a friend or close colleague ethical issues involving privacy might have arisen.

A second area of concern was in the presentation of the findings. I was concerned that there could be a possibility that some of my finding might be negative. This potentially could have reflected poorly on the district. Since the district was my employer I did have some reservations about the ramifications of negative findings. The district representatives and school administrators assured me of their support. They were very interested in the findings regardless of the outcome. They confirmed that their priority in supporting research was the improvement of expulsion procedures and ultimately improved quality education for students with an emotional disturbance.

The key stakeholders involved in the study were asked to review transcriptions. They were encouraged to edit and provide feedback. Pseudonyms were used for purposes of confidentiality. This ongoing series of checks contributed to the study's validity. Despite these measures there might be those participants who, upon reading the final dissertation, might not be in agreement with some findings in the study. Consequently, I informed all participants that I would be willing to discuss the results at any time in the future.

*Definition of Terms*

- *Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP):* A plan of strategies and supports to prevent a student from displaying inappropriate classroom behaviors and teach ones that are socially acceptable.  The IEP team develops the plan, which becomes part of the

student's IEP, based on information collected from a functional behavior assessment (Gartin & Murdick, 2001).

- *Eighth Amendment to the US Constitution*: States that excessive bail shall not be required, nor excessive fines imposed nor cruel and unusual punishment inflicted.

- *Emotionally Disturbed (ED)*: The federal definition of an emotional disturbance recognized by IDEA involves a condition that is present over a long period of time, which adversely affects academic performance, and involves one of the following:

  o An inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors.

  o An inability to build or maintain satisfactory relationships with peers and teachers.

  o Inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances.

  o A general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression.

  o A tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears with personal or school problems. (Kaplan, 2005, p. 12).

- *Exclusion*: Suspension or expulsion from school, for a period lasting one day or more.

- *Expulsion*: Exclusion from regular student activities for more than 10 school days.

- *Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE):* Special education and related services that (a) have been provided at public expense, under public supervision and direction, and without charge; (b) meet the standards of the state education

agency; (c) include an appropriate preschool, elementary, or secondary school education in the state involved; and (d) are provided in conformity with the IEP of a student with a disability. FAPE is available to all children ages 3 through 21 with disabilities, including those who have been expelled (Wright & Wright, 2000).

- *Fourteenth Amendment to the US Constitution*: States that no state shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.

- *Fourth Amendment to the US Constitution*: The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated, and no warrants shall issue, but upon probable cause, supported by oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched, the persons or things to be seized.

- *Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA)*: "A systematic process for describing problem behavior, and identifying the environmental factors and surrounding events associated with the problem behavior" (Office of Special Education Programs Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, 1999, p. 13).

- *Incident*: A specific criminal act or offense involving one or more victims and one or more offenders.

- *Individual Education Plan (IEP)*: "The IEP constitutes a written statement of each special education student's present level of educational performance, including

how the disability affects the student's involvement and progress in the general

curriculum, a statement of annual goals including benchmarks or short-term

objectives, and a statement of the special education and related services that will

be provided to the student" (Grzywacz et al., 2000, pp. 6-7).

- *Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA):* A federal law mandating

  that students with disabilities receive a free appropriate public education in the

  least restrictive environment with related and supplementary aids and services.

  The IDEA was amended resulting in several changes to the law, including the

  addition of a discipline provision for eligible students (Wright & Wright, 2000).

- *Manifestation Determination (MD):* "An analysis of the causal relationship

  between a student's disability and the misconduct for which he/she is being

  disciplined (Hartwig & Ruesch, 2000, p. 242). Such reviews must be conducted

  when a student served in special education is being removed from school for over

  10 days or due to a drug or weapon charge; or if appeal is made to a hearing

  officer to remove a child who is a danger or threat to himself or others (Hartwig &

  Ruesch, 2000).

- *Weapon*: Any instrument or object used with the intent to threaten, injure, or kill.

- *Zero tolerance policy*: A school or district policy that mandates predetermined

  consequences or punishment for specific offenses.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Introduction

As a result of the history of maltreatment and exclusion of students with disabilities

from public education, federal policies were developed to ensure the inclusion of all

students with disabilities in state public education systems. However, federal law does

not require the inclusion of students who are delinquent in public schools and many

children with mental health disabilities, some of whom may not be defined as disabled

for educational purposes, manifest their disabilities by exhibiting delinquent behaviors in

schools. Other federal policies which intend to protect the safety of school staff and

students, such as the Gun Free School Act (1994), are based on zero tolerance beliefs and

do not allow for special considerations based on student individuality or disabilities.

Throughout the U.S. history, there are two different policy streams that have been

used to address juvenile delinquency and violence in schools. Some policies, such as zero

tolerance policies, are based on the premise that children need firm rules and should be

punished for wrongdoings. Other policies and programs, such as those associated with

family and juvenile courts are based on the idea that children are not fully formed adults

and that they are creatures of the environment in which they live (Skiba & Peterson,

2000). The second perspective has led to IDEA's disciplinary procedures and to the

IDEA's basic presumption that students with disabilities should not be excluded from

receiving educational services as a result of manifesting behaviors that are associated

with their disabilities. Rather, they should be provided with related services that help them to be educated in the least restrictive environment (IDEA, 1999).

There have been increasing attempts by school districts and administrators to provide protection against school crime by installing metal detectors, arming hallway security guards, requiring uniforms, and conducting random searches of students and their lockers. Administrators and teachers face the challenge of implementing discipline procedures that are effective and fair. This literature review chapter on the treatment of youth who are disabled and delinquent provides a basis for understanding why special procedural rights for students with disabilities were enacted and why these protections may vary from those that are available for students without disabilities. Several court cases are reviewed to further explain the basis for current expulsion procedures.

Expulsions are a necessary disciplinary tool. While schools need to develop better strategies for responding to the underlying causes for behavior problems, educators must be able to remove chronically disruptive or violent children from the current school setting in order to assure safety and meet the needs of the other students. If, however, expulsions are to be effective disciplinary devices, they must be imposed fairly, consistently and, as a consequence for clearly defined misconduct (Gallegos, 1998).

Several studies have also investigated the role of gender as a significant variable in expulsions. Palley (2002) reported findings from a national dataset from the Safe School Study reporting an increase in expulsion for male students. A study of secondary school students in a school in Georgia found that male students were more likely to be expelled than female students (Morgan, 1991). In a study of one school in Kentucky, Fasko (1995) found that male students were disproportionately expelled. The National Center for

Educational Statistics (2003) shows 74,852 males were expelled from school throughout the United States while only 22,325 female students were expelled. The study further illustrates these findings by stating that roughly 9% of all males commit expellable infractions compared to 3% of all females (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2003). Consistently, males appear to be expelled more often than females. Many studies that report males as being disproportionately expelled also report an increase in expulsions for male students with disabilities. The aforementioned studies use quantitative methods to describe the type of students who have been expelled but fail to address the perceptions held by those who have been expelled. The studies do not ask the key stakeholders to describe their experience with expulsion, they simply state who has been expelled. The current study consisted of all male student participants and supports the findings cited above pointing to the disproportionate expulsion of males.

For some students, their poor academic performance begins a process of rejection, withdrawal from school, and delinquent acts in society. This chain of events is also seen in students with undiagnosed learning problems. Frustrated and embarrassed by their low grades, those students become disruptive in the classroom and, subsequently, are treated as behavior problems by teachers. Eventually, the student is suspended and expelled or drops out of school, and the movement toward delinquency proceeds (Bernstein & Rulo, 1976). There are a few qualitative studies that interview students and parents of students who have been expelled but these studies do not include interviews of district administrators and school administrators involved in these expulsions. When looking at students in the 9th and 10th grade who were identified as ED there appeared to be a gap in the literature. Those students who are being expelled more frequently than any other

group needed to be heard so we can gain an understanding of the problem through their eyes.

Students with Emotional Disturbance

Students with emotional disturbances are significantly more likely to have been expelled in one school year or over their school careers than youth in all other disability categories (Wagner & Davis, 2006). In fact, Wagner and Davis (2006) report that students with ED are 27% more likely to have received disciplinary actions in one school year and 32% more likely to have been expelled than those in the next more frequently occurring category—youth with other health impairments.

It is alarming that students with ED are being expelled at such a high rate compared to other students considering the current climate of inclusive practices and the history of excluding students with disabilities from the public schools. Historically, many students with disabilities have been segregated from students without disabilities. When Public Law 94-142 (the Education for All Handicapped Children Act) was passed in 1975, the state of special education was vastly different from what it is today. Previously, many students with emotional difficulties were hospitalized or institutionalized and those who were served in the public schools were often excluded from the mainstream (Wagner & Davis, 2006). Prior to the passage of Public Law 94-142, Congress found that up to 1 million of the estimated 8 million children with disabilities in the United States were excluded from public school services, and another 3 million were being served inappropriately (Smith, 2005). There were fewer than 3.5 million children with disabilities served in public schools, mostly in isolated, self-contained classrooms (Smith, 2005).

Since Public Law 94-142 was passed, there have been several reauthorizations that have made changes in the law. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was recently reauthorized as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004. Several significant changes were made in the most recent reauthorization. These include requirements for "highly qualified" special education teachers; changes in the participants of Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) and committee involvement in the IEP process; transition from school to post school; identification procedures for student with learning disabilities (LD); due process hearings; expulsion and suspension of students with disabilities; and a host of other changes (Smith, 2005).

Despite the legal requirement to educate students in the least restrictive environment (LRE) and the widespread emergence of inclusive programs for students with disabilities, students with ED continue to be removed from the pubic school setting for disciplinary reasons at a rate higher than any other group of students with disabilities. Disciplinary procedures for students with emotional problems have been a hotly debated topic for many years (Council for Exceptional Children, 2005). In fact, disagreements on disciplining students with ED have been a major stumbling block in successfully reauthorizing IDEA (Smith, 2005). Although, the literature acknowledges there is a problem, the literature does not demonstrate a decrease in expulsions for students in ED programs. Students with ED are often educated at an alternative school away from their neighborhood public school after being considered for an expulsion. Once again we are witnessing the disproportionate removal of students with emotional problems, from their public school, as we did when they were hospitalized or institutionalized prior to Public

Law 94-142. This presents a dilemma for students identified as ED as well as for those students who are at-risk for school failure due to emotional problems.

Approximately 1% of our nation's school-age children and youth receive special education services under the label of emotionally disturbed (ED), with prevalence estimates ranging from 0.17% to 2.56% across the 50 states (National Center for Special Education Research, 2006). Although the number of students served appears rather low, researchers estimate that between 2% and 4% of all students could qualify for services under the ED label (Lane, Whey, & Barton-Arwood, 2005). Eddy, Reid, and Curry (2002) suggest that a far greater percentage of students--between 2% and 16% of the school-age population--have either oppositional defiant disorders or conduct disorders (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). Even greater numbers of students demonstrate antisocial behavior patterns that serve as the foundation for conduct problems (Lane, Wehby, & Barton-Arwood, 2005). Consequently, educating and managing students with emotional disturbance (ED) is not just the responsibility of special education teachers. Administrators and parents are also faced with the formidable task of meeting the needs of students with an emotional disturbance. Again the literature is abundant with quantitative information regarding the ED population but supplies limited information pertaining to the perceptions held by the key stakeholders responsible for meeting the needs of students with ED.

Students with ED are well known for their behavioral characteristics, which may include externalizing behaviors such as noncompliance, defiance, and aggression, as well as internalizing behaviors such as anxiety, withdrawal, and depression (McConaughy & Skiba, 1993). These behaviors often disrupt the school environment and make it difficult

for teachers to instruct other students (Lane, Gresham, & O'Shaughnessy, 2002). These students also have limited social skills, such as a tendency to misinterpret neutral cues as hostile and poor problem solving skills that make it difficult for them to develop adaptive relationships with peers and teachers (Lane, Gresham, & O'Shaughnessy, 2002).

In addition to these behavioral and social concerns, students with ED also exhibit academic deficits, including low levels of task engagement, low rates of task completion, limited academic skills--particularly in the area of reading--and limited content knowledge (Gunter & Denny, 1998; Nelson, Benner, Lane, & Smith, 2004). In fact, students receiving special education services under the ED label not only perform below their general education peers, but also earn lower grades, make less academic progress, and experience more disciplinary actions than students in other disability categories (Anderson, Kutash, & Duchnowski, 2001; Bradley, Henderson, & Monfore, 2004; Wagner et al., 2003).

Without intervention, students with and at risk for ED are likely to experience a host of negative outcomes within and beyond the school setting. In addition to impaired social relationships, academic underachievement, and high rates of disciplinary consequences, these students also are more likely than their typical and special education peers to experience unemployment, be involved in motor vehicle accidents, and require mental health services (Wagner et al., 2003; Walker, Ramsey, & Gresham, 2004).

School districts throughout Florida have received special funding and other resources to provide intensive intervention to students who are having behavioral difficulty (Florida Department of Education, 2005). The funding and resources included training in special

education services, Functional Behavioral Assessments, mental health services and psychological counseling.

The 1997 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments require the use of functional behavioral assessment (FBA) and positive behavioral interventions and supports for students with disabilities who are the subject of formal disciplinary actions (Reid & Nelson, 2002). When a student with a disability has committed an expellable offense, the Individualized Education Program (IEP) team must meet within 10 days to collect information to develop a functional behavioral assessment plan (Van Acker, Boreson, & Gable, 2005). This information should be used for developing or reviewing and revising an existing behavior intervention plan (BIP) to address the individual problem behavior the high school student confronts.

Given the host of negative outcomes, it is imperative that students with ED receive an appropriate education. The present study allowed the perspectives the four groups of key stakeholders have of the expulsion process for high school students with ED to emerge. A goal of the study was to gain an understanding of the perceptions held by stakeholders. By documenting each key stakeholder's perception of an expulsion and how their perceptions overlap, the study demonstrates where gaps in communication exists and where improvements are needed for supporting high school students with ED.

Expulsion

A group of students who have received attention from researchers who study expulsion are students with disabilities and these are the students who were interviewed in this study. Students with disabilities are over-represented among students who are expelled from schools (U.S. Departments of Education and Juvenile Justice, 1999). A

study in a California school district looking at expulsion (Studley, 2002), found that special education students comprised 22% of the study sample, approximately twice their school enrollment. As a result of this over-representation and, in an effort to better serve the needs of students with disabilities (House Report No. 105-95, 105th Cong., 1st Session, 1997), the IDEA was amended in 1997 to include specific disciplinary provisions to deal with children who misbehave in school (Palley, 2002). The present study focused on the existing law and current procedures for expulsions.

A component of the study included an effort to better understand what is actually happening in schools as a result of the IDEA's disciplinary provisions and to help inform policy makers. The study assessed key stakeholder perceptions of the implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act's disciplinary provisions, particularly those that require schools to hold manifestation determination meetings after a student has been suspended or expelled for 10 or more days.

Zero Tolerance

The public's perceptions that school campuses were inherently unsafe led to the Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994. This Act, although originally a gun-related bill, is often believed to be the genesis of zero-tolerance policies (Christensen, 2003). The act required schools to expel automatically for 1-year students who bring a gun to school. Any school that failed to implement this law risked losing federal education funds. Shortly after national adoption of weapons-related zero tolerance, school districts began extending the policy's purview to other undesirable behavior such as drugs, violence, threats, classroom disruptions, hate speech, and fighting (Advancement Project & Civil Rights Project, 2000).

The Gun-Free Schools Act (GFSA) requires each state to submit an annual report that provides the following information: the number of students expelled (by firearm type and the school level), the number of expulsions shortened, and the number of expelled students sent to alternative school (U.S. Department of Education, 2000). The Florida Department of Education, Division of Public Schools and Community Education, Bureau of Equity, Safety and School Support, keeps statewide data for expelled students (1998-1999 and 1999-2000 Statewide Report on School Safety and Discipline Data, 2001). These data include violent acts, alcohol and drugs, property crimes, weapons possession, and fighting.

School boards have the legal right to separate a student from the district if the offense/s fall within the guidelines of the Education Code for expulsion (Florida Department of Education, 2006). Governing boards, in many cases, are not well versed in the best educational options that will help to rehabilitate a child and return the child to mainstream educational programs as quickly as possible (Skiba & Noam, 2002). The critical issues arise when a child is expelled from school for a zero tolerance offense, and the parents are given options that are not consistent with what they believe is in the best interest of their child (Carpenter, 2004). For the purposes of the study, a zero tolerance policy was defined as a school district policy that mandates predetermined consequence/s or punishment for specific offenses (Christensen, 2003).

Although expulsion is widely used, empirical studies of expulsion are relatively rare (Costenbader & Markson, 1997). Skiba (2000) also notes that very few empirical studies exist on the effectiveness of expulsion.  In light of heightened public concern over school violence, school district administrators have increased their reliance on exclusionary

measures as a means of deterring and punishing students who are violent on campus (Price, 2002). The removal of students from the school setting for disciplinary purposes has been one of the most commonly used practices for dealing with students who exhibit problem behaviors (Lyons, 2003). Sautner (2001) reported that although expulsions were used, "no school district was able to demonstrate its effectiveness in improving student conduct" (p. 210). In short, if the threat of expulsion does not work to prevent students from behaving violently, then such students will be expelled so their behavior cannot further endanger their peers on the mainstream campuses and zero tolerance policies are followed.

High School Data

The study looked at the perceptions students have of expulsion, which is not well documented, in the existing research. Selected students for the study were identified as emotionally disturbed and in the 9th or 10th grade but only 9th grade students participated in the study. Several of the 9th grade students were repeating the 9th grade due to lack of academic progress. Most of the existing research used quantitative methodology while fewer studies have examined expulsions from a qualitative perspective. A keyword search on multiple key stakeholders that included expelled students in the 9th and 10th grades that were identified as ED, yielded no studies employing qualitative methodology. Therefore the current study is viewed as especially valuable, offering a unique contribution to the literature. This section includes some of the existing research pertaining to high school safety and discipline.

Research shows that high school students face many challenges. High schools have always had groups - jocks, fraternities, cheerleaders, sororities, nerds, brains, losers,

earth-dogs, Goths, rockers, and gangs (Willert & Willert, 2000). According to Willert and Willert (2000) within a high school these groups fall into a kind of hierarchy - some are widely admired by fellow students, teachers, parents, and administrators and some are labeled as offenders with varying degrees of estrangement from the mainstream. For example, James Harris, prosecuting attorney in the Paducah, Kentucky killings of members of a prayer group, believes that school cliques had a strong influence on Michael Carneal, who killed three of his classmates. Michael was a member of the "Zoo Crew," a self-named group of kids who were labeled by others as nerds and misfits (Willert & Willert, 2000).

During the spate of secondary school shootings that have occurred in the last few years, the shooters have spoken about their resentment toward being teased, bullied, and belittled by some of their classmates, particularly by popular cliques such as "the jocks" (Kleck, 1999). Eric Harris and Derek Klebold had been active in athletics before high school; however, by the time they took up arms against their school and classmates, they viewed athletes as their enemies (Kleck, 1999). The literature repeatedly describes the difficulties experienced by high school students and offers various scenarios of high school students who commit offenses.

The U.S. Departments of Education and Justice conducted a review of school safety research using a survey. The survey summaries relate primarily to aspects of school safety and school climate from studies across the country. The study statistics were compiled in June of 2000. The majority of U.S. teens stated they committed a violent act in the past year, and one in five high school age boys took a weapon to school, according to a recent survey administered nationally by randomly selected schools throughout the

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nation in 2000. The survey included responses from 15,877 middle and high school students (U.S. Departments of Education and Justice, 2000). Results from the 8-year old biennial survey did not change significantly from one taken in 1998. More than one in three students (39% of middle school students and 36% of high school students) said they do not feel safe at school. Forty-three percent of high school and 37% of middle school boys believed it is acceptable to hit or threaten a person who makes them angry. Nearly one in five (19%) of the girls agreed (U.S. Departments of Education and Justice, 2000).

An even higher percentage actually resorted to violence. Seventy-five percent of all boys and over 60% of girls surveyed said they hit someone in the past 12 months because they were angry. More than one in five (21% of high school boys and 15% of middle school boys) took a weapon to school at least once in the past year. Sixty percent of high school males and 31% of middle school boys said they could get a gun. Sixty-nine percent of high school males and 27% of middle school boys said they could get drugs. Finally, 19% of high school males and 9% of middle school boys admit they were drunk at school at least once in the past year (U.S. Departments of Education and Justice, 2000).

In California, researchers studied enrollment patterns of 10th-grade students in 2000 and found that approximately 50% of African-American and Hispanic students dropped out of school, compared to the dropout rate of 19% for Asians and 29% for White students (Wehlage, Rutter, & Turnbaugh, 1997). Similarly, in Chicago, a study was conducted that found Hispanics were the largest ethnic group that dropped out: "A breakdown by race and ethnicity finds that 47% of Hispanics, 45% of African Americans, 35% of Whites and 19% of Asians dropped out" (Wehlage, Rutter, & Turnbaugh, 1997). The United States General Accounting Office (Wehlage et al., 1997) cited the following:

13% of the White youth, 17% of the African-American youth, and 19% of the Hispanics dropped out. Among Hispanics, the dropout rate for Puerto Ricans in the United States was somewhat higher than for youth of Mexican descent. The dropout rate for each of the above race/ethnic groups was higher in the cities than in suburbs or rural areas. The dropout rate was also higher among students who have been suspended or expelled from school across each race/ethnic group.

The National Longitudinal Transition Study 2 (NLTS2) states that 46% of 9th and 10th graders compared to 40% of 11th and 12th graders are referred for discipline problems (National Center for Special Education Research, 2006). The NLTS2 also states that these younger students are more likely to fight with other students in class than those in the 11th and 12th grade. The NLTS2 data were obtained through mailed surveys of teachers so although it is an example of yet another study that is different from the present study it demonstrated a need to further examine 9th and 10th graders in this study.

Litigation

During the last 25 years, there have been significant court cases related to school discipline. The courts have argued between the need for school safety and the rights of all citizens, including students, to enjoy constitutional protections. This is significant because the courts draw a line between the competing demands of school safety and student rights. School searches of students and seizure of their property poses many challenges for school administrators while they struggle to honor the Fourth Amendment and maintain safety at their schools. The fourth amendment provides for the right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures. Other legal developments have set some limits on the array of

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actions permitted by school officials relative to the Fourteenth Amendment and due process as they apply to disciplining students.

Courts have generally given schools considerable latitude over school discipline practices as long as their behavior and school rules are reasonable and not excessive or unfair. In addition, school officials are given considerable latitude in the determination of what is reasonable school practice (Yudof, Kirp, & Levin, 2001). However, there have been several Supreme Court cases that have addressed children's rights and, as a result have influenced school procedures.

The first major case regarding procedural safeguards for children was *In re Gault*, (1967). In *In re Gault*, (1967), the Supreme Court found that children must receive notice of their charges in writing and that they have a right to legal counsel. Parents must also be notified as soon as a child is taken into custody. Further, children also have a right to protect themselves against self-incrimination. Though *In re Gault* (1967) did not address whether juveniles could knowingly waive their Miranda rights, this issue was later addressed in *Fare v. Michael C*. (1979). The Supreme Court held that when investigating a juvenile, if the juvenile appears to waive his/her rights to an attorney, the totality of the circumstances must be considered to determine if the confession is admissible in court. This case limited the procedural due process protections of youth (*Fare v. Michael C*., 1979). Both *In re Gault* (1967) and *Fare v. Michael C*. (1979) are important cases to consider when dealing with in-school delinquency.

The courts have held that there are some behaviors that plainly disrupt school life and that those engaging in that behavior knew, or should have known, that they would be subjected to consequences. Prevailing law indicates that school officials generally may

discipline students for conduct that is disruptive of the educational process or conduct that endangers the health and safety of the students and school staff. One of the earlier cases related to students' discipline, Gross v. Lopez, was heard before the United States Supreme Court in 1975 (Yudof, Kirp, & Levin, 2001). This case involved the legal requirement of due process, still in effect, when disciplining students. Dwight Lopez was suspended along with many others in connection with a disturbance in the school cafeteria. Lopez said he was not one of those in the cafeteria who was involved in the incident. He was never told why the principal believed he was involved, nor was he given the opportunity to explain why he was in the cafeteria. Lopez was given a 10-day suspension. The case was referred to the Supreme Court along with another case involving the state of Ohio and a student who had been suspended for 10 days. Lopez was referred on the basis that he was denied due process of law as required by the Fourteenth Amendment because he was suspended from school without a hearing before or shortly after the suspension.

The other student (Betty Crome) was suspended for an incident that did not occur on school grounds. Mass arrests had been made but Betty maintained her innocence. She was suspended without ever being told what she was accused of doing or allowed to explain her presence among those who had been arrested. The Fourteenth Amendment forbids the state to deprive any person of life, liberty, or property without due process of law (Yudof, Kirp, & Levin, 2001). Even though the right to an education is not a constitutional one, compulsory attendance law in Ohio required attendance for students of not less than 32 weeks (Ohio Rev. Code Ann. Section 3321.04, 1972).

Additionally, in *Goss v. Lopez* (1975), the Supreme Court overturned an Ohio Statue (Ohio law, Rev. Code Ann. Section 3313.66, 1972) that had given principals the right to suspend students without a notice of the violation or a hearing. The court held that because Ohio law provided all children, age six to twenty-one with the right to a free, public education, children must receive some due process before this right could be taken away. According to *Goss v. Lopez* (1975) students cannot be suspended for less than 10 days without notice and an informal hearing or chance to explain the situation. The court also suggested that a more formal hearing might be required for a suspension of 10 days or more.

Also in 1975, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (the predecessor to the IDEA) was passed. This law did not specifically address the issue of disciplining students. In 1988, the US Supreme Court held that suspending or expelling students with disabilities for 10 days or more was a change in the student placement (Honig v. Doe, 1988). As a result, parents of students with disabilities were and still are entitled to notice and an opportunity to contest the school's intended placement change (including suspension and expulsion for more than 10 days) at a hearing.

A major concern in the use of expulsion is the issue of due process, the constitutional assurance of the rights of the individual to timely notification, and the ability to confront those who have authority. These were the issue addressed in one of the earliest of such cases, Baldwin v. Hale/Wall, in which the courts sided with the plaintiff, ruling that parties whose rights are affected are entitled to be heard; and, in order that they may enjoy that right they must first be notified.

Education is considered one of the most important functions of state and local governments (Brown v. Board of Education, 347 U.S. 483, 493, 1954). The Supreme Court concluded that a student must first be told what they are being accused of doing and upon what the accusation is based. The court did agree with the district court in allowing the immediate removal from school of those students who pose a continuing danger to persons or property before such notification. The necessary notice is still required as soon as practical following the removal. The court was careful to restrict its opinion to suspensions of 10 days or less. Longer suspension or expulsions require procedures that are more formal. A suspension of 10 days or less would not deprive the person of their property or liberty interests.

As mentioned earlier, another significant Supreme Court case is Honig v. Doe (484 U.S. 305, 108 S. Ct. 592, 98 L.Ed.2d 686, 1988). The ruling in this case requires school officials to obtain a court ordered injunction to remove dangerous and disruptive students longer than 10 days. This case involves officials of the San Francisco Unified School District who attempted to indefinitely expel two students identified as emotionally disturbed. One of the students (John Doe) assaulted another student. Doe's individual education plan indicated that he had considerable difficulty controlling his impulses and anger. After being provoked, John Doe choked a student leaving abrasions on her neck, and kicked out a window. Doe was suspended for 5 days. On the last day of the suspension, school officials informed the mother that John Doe would be expelled from the district permanently.

Doe sued several school officials including the State Superintendent of Public Instruction (Honig). A district judge granted injunctive relief and ordered the defendants

to provide home instruction in the interim. Shortly after that time, the judge ordered Doe returned to the developmental center from which he had been suspended until the individual education plan process could be completed. The district appealed and the case was on its way to the Supreme Court. Justice Brennan delivered the opinion of the court. He stated that as a condition of receiving federal funds, states must ensure that students with disabilities are entitled to a "free appropriate public education" (Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, 20 USC 1401). The act also contains an elaborate system of procedural safeguards designed to maximize parental participation in the decision-making process. One of these safeguards is the "stay put" provision, which states that a disabled child shall remain in his or her then-current educational placement pending the completion of any review proceedings. The exception is agreement between parents and state or local educational agencies (20 U.S.C. Section 1415 (e) (3). The court was to decide if state or local school authorities might unilaterally remove disabled students from the classroom if they are disruptive or dangerous. The position of the district was that the due process procedures take too long to complete. The court interpreted the intent of Congress was not to tie the hands of school officials by allowing for an interim placement during the proceedings where parents and school officials agree. Justice Brennan indicated that Congress intentionally did not address the emergency removal of disruptive students (Yudof, Kirp, & Levin, 2001). This decision has left schools with the burden of seeking legal action to remove dangerous and disruptive students longer than 10 days.

Key Stakeholders in the Expulsion Process

Four groups of key stakeholders consisting of students with ED, parents, school district representatives, and high school administrators were interviewed in the study. The present study adds to the limited existing research on the collaborative efforts between these four groups of key stakeholders involved in the expulsion process. The impact that multiple key stakeholders have produced varied results throughout the literature.

Burbank et al. (2005) noted the ability of multiple stakeholders to provide different forms of support and insights into the program. Their study claims the key to the success of the current program was the willingness of the different stakeholders working within a Professional Development School (PDS) collaborative to provide support and insights into the success of the Teaching Professions Academy (TPA). Although lasting change is possible when stakeholders collaborate, we cannot assume that change takes place simply because of shared interests (Burbank, Bertagnole, Carl, Longhurst, Powell, & Dynak, 2005). A commitment to quality education, coupled with systematic movements toward improvement, characterizes what Fullan (2000) described as reculturing--a process in which community members routinely examine procedures within schools that change practices as well as the culture.

The current study was inspired by this researchers hope to contribute to the improvement of education for all students, particularly those students with disabilities. The perceptions of multiple key stakeholders that emerged during this study contribute to an awareness of current expulsion practice and ultimately the findings are an available means to improve communication among all key stakeholders.

Literature Review Summary

   This chapter reviewed the literature related to students with Emotional Disturbance who are involved in an expulsion. Based on the literature review, students identified as ED are expelled more frequently than any other group of students in special education programs (Smith, 2005; Wagner & Davis, 2006). Few qualitative studies have interviewed students who have been expelled while even fewer have interviewed students in ED programs (Piechura, 1993). The existing literature does not describe the perceptions or experiences of the four groups of key stakeholders selected for this study who are involved in the expulsion process for students who are identified as ED. Several studies do report findings of perceptions and experiences of ED students or of students and parents but not for all of the four groups of key stakeholders selected for this study (Costenbader & Markson, 1997; Skiba, 2000). The study provided a view of the expulsion process and outcome from several perspectives as a way of bridging the communication gap and improving the understanding of expulsions between multiple key stakeholders.

   The literature review included a section on litigation and how IDEA disciplinary procedures continue to be refined (Yudof, Kirp, & Levin, 2001). Since the laws continue to evolve it is imperative that individuals who are impacted by these laws are heard. The study allowed their voices to be heard. Therefore it was critical to include how school administrators and school district representatives perceive and experience expulsions. The study contributed to the literature the perceptions held by administrators and district representatives, as well as by, students with ED and parents of students with ED. Since these four groups of key stakeholders attend expulsion hearings it made sense to

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interview each of the groups of key stakeholders in order to gain a better understanding

of the expulsion process and how different individuals experienced the process. This

study brings us closer to bridging a gap in the literature that has not been well addressed

through the inclusion of each of the four groups of key stakeholders identified in the

study.

Chapter 3

Methods

The purpose of the study was to investigate the perceptions that students with emotional disturbance, their parents, district representatives, and high school administrators had of the expulsion process. This chapter describes the research design, participants, and method of data collection, followed by a description of the data analysis process.

This was a qualitative study that used in-depth interviewing as the method of data collection. A text analysis approach was used to analyze the collected data. The following research questions were addressed:

1. How do the primary key stakeholders involved in expulsion experience the process?
> 1a. What are the perceptions of students with an Emotional Disturbance?
> 1b. What are the perceptions of parents?

2. How do the secondary key stakeholders involved in expulsion experience the process?
> 2a. What are the perceptions of district representatives?
> 2b. What are the perceptions of administrators?

3. Do the perceptions of the different key stakeholders differ and if so, how?

The first research question explored how students with ED and their parents experienced the expulsion process based on their perceptions. For the purpose of the study the perceptions of students and parents were the primary objective. The second research question explored how district representatives and high school administrators experienced the expulsion process based on their perceptions. For the purpose of the

study the perceptions of district representatives and administrators were considered a secondary objective. The third research question investigated if the perceptions of the different key stakeholders differed and if so, how they differed.

Text analysis, according to Glaser and Strauss (1967), provides a method to address each research question by making sense or understanding the abstract phenomena. The researcher is able to generate themes surrounding the actions, interactions, and perceptions of people (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The data from the field emerges as a "set of well-developed concepts related through statements of relationship, which together constitute an integrated framework that can be used to explain or predict phenomena" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 15).

The method of the study was conceptualized from a belief system that lived experience can be understood from the viewpoints of those who live it--that people's realities are not physical objects that lend themselves to objective observations, but constructions of the mind based on lived experiences that can be understood within the contexts of people's lives (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Seidman, 1998). Also, this view values and upholds the importance of interactions between participants and researchers in reconstructing lived experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

Context analysis also advocates and supports a naturalistic approach to understanding complex human experiences (Creswell, 2002).The naturalistic approach in qualitative research focuses on finding meaning in the environment where the phenomenon of interest occurs. It also requires the use of analysis methodology and study instruments that are sensitive to the underlying phenomenon of interest (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Merriam, 1998).

Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted to see if procedures were appropriate and if modifications were needed. The high school selected for the pilot study is located on the eastern coast of central Florida. This high school was selected because of its close proximity to the researcher making it possible for the researcher to collect interview data throughout the week at times that were convenient for the participants. The high school in the pilot study has approximately 1,700 students in grades ninth through twelfth and roughly 11% of its population is identified as students with disabilities (Brevard Public Schools Indicator Report, 2006).

Staff at an alternative school where students who have been expelled and may be sent to continue their education were selected to assist in the identification of students with ED who were in the ninth or tenth grades, as well as to identify their parents. The Brevard County Public Schools District's Director of Administrative Support Services who is responsible for the special education programs was contacted to identify district representatives who attend expulsion meetings for students identified as ED. The principal at the selected high school for the pilot study was contacted to recruit participation of administrators of the selected school.

Once participants were identified and contacted, consent forms were reviewed with each participant to make sure they understood the form and that participation was voluntary. The pilot study consisted of four participants, specifically there was one participant selected from each key stakeholder group. Each of the four key stakeholders in the pilot study was a member of the same expulsion meeting. Each participant was interviewed twice with approximately 2 weeks between the first and second interview.

Each participant, in the pilot study, provided his or her consent to be audio taped. Interviews were audio taped to ensure accuracy of responses (Seidman, 1998).

The researcher prepared for the data analysis prior to conducting the interviews by creating a start list (Evans, 2005). Items on the start list were developed from the literature review. The start list helped to identify categories and codes used for this pilot study. The codes were used during the analysis of the interview transcripts. Field notes and key artifacts were collected during the interviews. Immediately after each interview session, personal notes were added to the field notes written during the interview about impressions, insights, and possible emerging themes (Creswell, 2002).

The researcher began the analysis process by placing the interview transcripts into Atlas Ti. 5.0. ATLAS.Ti. 5.0 is a software program for the qualitative analysis of large bodies of textual, graphical, audio, and video data (ATLAS.ti Scientific Software Development GmbH, 2004). First the student interview was coded, second the interview with their parent was coded, third the interview with the district representative was coded and then the fourth interview with the school administrator was coded. The interviews were coded in the order that they occurred. After each interview was coded the researcher reviewed and revised the codes as new data emerged. The researcher involved a second coder to verify the coding and to code the transcripts. The second coder was provided a list of codes and definitions for each code. After the researcher and second coder completed the review process, we compared coding similarities and differences. Initially, the inter-rater agreement between the researcher and second coder was 70%, which led to a review of the coding. The researcher and second coder discussed the definitions of the codes where disagreement existed. It was determined that a variation in the interpretation

of the definitions caused some coding differences. Upon reaching consensus on how to define the disputed codes the inter-rater agreement improved to 95% agreement. The use of a second coder or peer examination clarifies the researcher's assumptions and theoretical orientations at the outset of the study and ensures the trustworthiness of the research report results (Evans, 2005; Merriam, 1998).

Field notes were written for each interview session. The field notes were able to capture the researcher's observation of facial expressions, gestures and moods that were not conveyed in the audiotapes. The field notes enhanced the data analysis by enriching the responses with thick descriptions of the interview sessions (Warren & Karner, 2005). Additionally, key artifacts were collected during the interviews which further supplemented the data. For example the parent who was interviewed provided a copy of the invitation to the expulsion hearing and the school administrator shared a copy of the manifestation determination form used during the expulsion meeting. The proceeding examples of key artifacts collected during the interviews captured a more vivid recapitulate of the items discussed at the expulsion meeting.

The pilot outcome demonstrated that the two primary key stakeholders participants, one student and one parent, shared similar perceptions of the expulsion process. While the secondary key stakeholders, high school administrators and district representatives, shared similar perceptions of the expulsion process. There were some differences in perception between the primary and secondary key stakeholders. The primary key stakeholders' responses indicate that they did not understand the expulsion procedures; they did not believe options were presented and did not feel as though the expulsion decision was unanimous. While the two secondary key stakeholder participants, one

district representative and one high school administrator, revealed they felt trained and familiar with expulsion procedures; they understood the expulsion procedures and perceived the placement options and decision were made by a unanimous group decision.

The pilot study prompted the researcher to include an Interview Checklist (See Appendix E). The Interview Checklist was drafted during the first interview session and was used for the remaining interviews. The checklist ensured consistency from one interview to the next. An introductory period allowed the researcher to introduce the purpose of the study, review the letter of informed consent, and build rapport with the interviewee. Background information questions that emerged during the pilot study were included during the introductory period in the proposed study (Appendix C). The intention of the background questions was to gather demographic information and to help the participant relax before beginning the interview questions.

Upon completion of the pilot study, the interview questions were refined to allow for more open-ended responses (See Appendix D). The topics explored during the interviews include perceptions of the expulsion process for students with emotional disturbances and perceptions of the communication between those involved in the expulsion process. The pilot study was used as a flexible tool as a means for taking and organizing notes and interview questions (Dick, 1999).

Main Study

The study consisted of multiple participants and provided additional data that were added to the data from the pilot study. According to Corbin and Strauss (1990), a single incident is not a sufficient basis to discard or verify a hypothesis. To be verified or

regarded as increasingly plausible, a hypothesis must be indicated by the data over and over again (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

The researcher followed and completed the required university procedures for conducting this study. The university Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviews all studies before permission is granted to initiate the study. Since the study involved human subjects the appropriate IRB and informed consent procedures were followed for ethical and legal reasons. The IRB granted approval to conduct the study. Upon completion of the data collection and data analysis the IRB conducted and approved a final review of the study.

The research method that best met the goals of the study, and was appropriate to investigate the perceptions of key stakeholders involved in the expulsion process was in-depth interviews. Marshall and Rossman (1995) clarified this method and its scope of uses as a data collection method relied on quite extensively by qualitative researchers. Marshall and Rossman (1995) further clarified by describing it as a conversation with a purpose and state that in-depth interviewing may be the overall strategy or one of several methods employed in a study. This method required the researcher to use open-ended questions to explore a phenomenon of interest, and build on participants' responses to explore the phenomenon.

The ultimate goal of in-depth interviewing was to have participants reconstruct their experiences within the topic under investigation (Seidman, 1998).The appropriateness of in-depth phenomenological interviewing for investigating the research questions that guided the study prompted its use as a methodology.

Researchers using text analysis approach may rely heavily on interviews as a method of data collection (Charmaz, 2000). Interviews are used as a way to capture the experiences and perceptions of participants in their own words (Charmaz, 2000). Interviewing was the method of collecting data for this study. Semi-structured one-on-one interviews with open-ended questions were used to give the key participants options for responding without constraint. To promote a safe atmosphere interviews were conducted at a place determined by the interviewee, which included different locations at a school that contained a private conference room. Kvale (1996) described a research interview as an experience between two people about a topic of shared interest. It is an explicit form of personal interaction in which knowledge evolves through dialogue.

The high school for the study has approximately 1,300 students in grades ninth through twelfth and roughly 12% of its population is identified as students with disabilities (Brevard Public Schools Indicator Report, 2006). This high school also serves students who are identified as ED in the ninth and tenth grade. Given that the high schools in the pilot and actual study are located in the same school district, district representatives who attend expulsion meetings sometimes work at both schools.

Participants

The first key stakeholders were students whose primary disability was identified as emotional disturbed. Some of these students had been identified with other areas of disabilities beside ED. There were a total of seven students who participated in this study. For the purposes of this study these students were given pseudonyms. The student's pseudonyms were listed alphabetically to provide the reader with a way to follow each student's experience. These students were Adam who is White, David who is Hispanic,

Kevin who is African American, Nick who is White and Tony who is African American.

Students were only selected from the ninth and tenth grades since most high school

expulsions tend to occur during the first few years of high school (Mendez & Knoff,

2003). Coincidentally, all of the students who participated in the study were ninth graders

and all of them were male. The second key stakeholders were the parents of students who

were identified as emotionally disturbed and had been expelled. The parents selected for

the study were the parent of the student who was selected. All of the parents were

unmarried females at the time of the study. Several of the parents said they had never

been married and others said they were divorced. The parent's racial background

matched their child's race listed above. The third key stakeholders were district

representatives who participated in expulsion meetings for students with disabilities. The

district representatives were selected from a list of ESE program specialists, ESE staffing

specialists, ESE director, or other appropriate person who represented the district. The

district representative participants were racially diverse. For example, the district

representative who attended Adam's expulsion meeting was Hispanic, David's district

representative was White, Kevin's district representative was African American, Nick's

district representative was White, and Tony's district representative was Hispanic. All of

the district representatives were females except for Nick's district representative who was

male. The fourth key stakeholders were the high school administrators at the selected

high school. All of the high school administrators were White except for the school

administrator that attended David's meeting who was Hispanic. The school

administrators included three males and two females and therefore were considered a

mixed gender group. Later in this chapter, the high school demographics and key

stakeholder characteristics are shown. Table 1 summarizes the expulsion meeting participants by race, gender, and expellable offense.

Table 1: Participants by Race, Gender, and Expellable Offense

| Student Name And Race | Parent Race | District Representative | School Administrator | Offense |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Adam White | White | Hispanic Female | White Male | Drugs |
| David Hispanic | Hispanic | White Female | Hispanic Female | Bomb |
| Kevin African American | African American | African American Female | White Male | Drugs |
| Nick White | White | White Male | White Female | Alcohol |
| Tony African American | African American | Hispanic Female | White Male | Weapon |

Table Note 1: All students were males.
Table Note 2: All parents were females.

Warren and Karner (2005) recommend when embarking on a larger project like a book or a dissertation, researchers should think in terms of coverage and saturation. The study followed this recommendation by continuing to interview participants identified as key stakeholders meeting the primary objective of the study until saturation was achieved. The participants meeting the primary objective are the student and their parent. Researchers can tell when they have reached this point (saturation) when the interviews are no longer providing any new information (Warren & Karner, 2005). Data saturation occurred when the researcher was no longer hearing or seeing new information. Therefore, unlike quantitative researchers who wait until the end of the study to analyze

their data, as a qualitative researcher data were analyzed throughout the study (Dick, 1999).

Participants identified as key stakeholders meeting the secondary objective of the study were the district representatives and school administrators. Unlike the students and their parents who were personally affected by an expulsion, district representatives and school administrators are professionally involved and therefore viewed differently for the purpose of this study. Also, district representatives and high school administrators attend many expulsion meetings for different students. Due to the differences in their role at expulsion meetings and a predetermined number of existing individuals meeting the criteria of the secondary objective, interviews could not be conducted until data saturation was met. There are five administrators at the high school selected for the study and each administrator was asked to participate and did participate in the study. The participation of five district representatives was also requested and provided.

As mentioned during the pilot study, before asking the interview questions attempts were made to reduce any apprehension by reminding the key stakeholders that their answers are neither right nor wrong. Their answers are perceptions of their understanding and experience of the expulsion process. A few background information questions were asked to build rapport with the interviewee. During the interview session, each key stakeholder was asked a set of interview questions. Questions were related to their personal perceptions of the expulsion process. Questions were open-ended allowing the individual to elaborate on their experience. Open-ended questions also provided valuable insight for follow-up dialogues during the second interview session with each key stakeholder.

The development of the interview questions was based on a review of the literature. The interview questions (See Appendix D) were developed for the key stakeholders affiliated with the study's primary objective, as well as, for those accepted as members meeting the secondary objective of the study. The first few questions pertained to the key stakeholders experience before the expulsion. The next few questions pertained to the key stakeholders' perceptions of the expellable event and expulsion process and the final questions were geared toward the outcome of the expulsion or what has happened since the expulsion. A sample interview question associated with the study's primary objective included: Were there any specific events that led up to the expellable incident? A sample interview question associated with the study's secondary objective included: Are you familiar with your school district procedures for conducting expulsion meetings for students who are emotionally disturbed (ED)? For each key stakeholder the interview questions sometimes overlapped which determined if each key stakeholder perception differed and if so how their perception differed. The questions developed for the primary purpose and the questions developed for the secondary purpose varied because students and parents were not expected to be necessarily familiar with school board policies or the terminology used.

Twenty-four participants began the study; however, five key stakeholders withdrew from the study prior to completing the two-phase interview process. All twenty-four participants completed the first phase of the interview process. Results were transcribed and analyzed via the data derived from the 24 participants who completed the first phase of the interviews. The interview transcripts yielded 87 typed pages of text.

The 19 participants who completed the second phase provided follow up responses

that evolved into richer and more meaningful results than those participants who only

completed the first phase of the interviews. The first two of the five participants who

dropped out of the study a student and his parent, both African American, moved out of

the school district, and therefore were unavailable for the second interview. The third and

fourth participants who dropped out of the study, district representative and one high

school administrator, reported via follow-up phone contact they were each unavailable

due to other commitments for a second interview. The third and fourth participants were

white females. And the fifth key stakeholder, an African American parent who did not

complete the study, never returned any follow up communication so her reason for

dropping out is unknown to the researcher. The fifth key stakeholder to drop out of the

study was the most puzzling to the researcher since this parent's child did complete both

interview phases. Table 2 below illustrates the demographics of the selected high school

and characteristics of the key stakeholders.

Table 2: High School Demographics and Key Stakeholder Characteristics

| School Demographics 9th-12th grade | Primary Stakeholders (Identified through staff at alternative school) | Secondary Stakeholders (Identified through Director of Special Ed.) |
|---|---|---|
| FL Eastern Coast 1,300 total students 12% Special Education | Students Total =7 African American =4, White = 2, Hispanic =1 | District Representatives Total =5 White =2, Hispanic =2, African American= 1 |

| 85% White, 5%African American, 5% Hispanic, 5% Other | Parents Total =7 African American =4, White = 2, Hispanic =1 | School Administrators Total =5 White =4 & Hispanic =1 |
|---|---|---|
| Approximate gender population of high school: ~620 females ~680 males | Students: males = 7 9th grade 14-17 yrs old Parents: female = 7 All parents were single | District Representative : Female = 4, Male =1 School Administrators: Male =3, Female =2 |

Data Analysis

   The procedures for text analysis involve three types of coding procedures: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Creswell, 2002). Open coding consists of taking the data and segmenting them into categories of information (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The next step in the process is to reassemble the data in new ways using the axial coding process. Creswell (2002) describes axial coding as an arrangement using a coding paradigm or logic diagram in which the researcher identifies a central phenomenon, explores causal conditions, specifies strategies, identifies the context and intervening conditions and delineates the consequences. The third set of coding procedures in the process is called selective coding. During the selective coding process, the researcher composes themes from the interrelationship of the categories in the axial coding model. At a fundamental level, these themes offer an abstract explanation for the process being studied in the research (Creswell, 2002).

After entering the data from the interviews into Atlas Ti 5.0, related coded concepts were grouped into categorical themes. Categorical themes are more abstract than the coded concepts they represent (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). The codes and themes provide an analytic process where similarities and differences were able to emerge from the interview responses. Once the initial coding was developed, axial coding was developed, which created a visual coding and thematic paradigm. Axial coding provided a way to relate categories and subcategories together. Field notes were taken during the interview and key artifacts were obtained. The field notes and key artifacts provided additional validation to various themes. Finally, selective coding allowed a central phenomenon to emerge. Each theme surrounds a core or central category that fuses or grounds the data together. These themes are the groundwork toward developing a theory by providing a means by which a theory can be integrated (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). The findings from this study are viewed as groundwork for further studies.

Finally, as experienced in the pilot study, to strengthen the reliability of the study, an independent rater reviewed the codes. The independent rater was viewed as a second coder and the researcher was viewed as the primary coder. The independent rater was an individual with an earned doctorate degree who has previously used Atlas Ti software. The independent rater was previously employed as a school psychologist in the school district where the study took place. As a school psychologist the independent rater attended expulsion meetings at her assigned schools for approximately seven years. Therefore the independent rater was not only familiar with coding procedures but she was also familiar with expulsion procedures. We repeated the process used in the pilot study to compare our coding similarities and differences. The researcher and second coder

discussed the definitions of the codes where disagreement existed and any variations in the interpretation of the definitions. Having an independent rater code the transcript data and resolving any discrepancies through dialogue with me supports the trustworthiness of the coding. Once the transcribed interviews were coded by the independent rater and compared to the primary rater's codes an inter-rater agreement of 85% was reached.

Triangulation

Triangulation is a procedure used by qualitative researchers to explore or study an issue. In any study, there are concerns of threats to verification and trustworthiness. Triangulation is also a way to look at consistency in the data. In this study, the triangulation of methodology used consisted of audio taped key stakeholder interviews, interview transcriptions, field notes, and key artifacts. The audio taped interviews and interview transcriptions included multiple perspectives from the different key stakeholders. The field notes were completed following each interview and included the researcher's observations and personal notes. The key artifacts emerged from reviewing student records, communication between the key stakeholders, and items key stakeholders brought to the researcher's attention. The researcher developed a narrative that summaries the findings that emerged during the analysis process which is included in the next chapter.

Chapter 4

Results

In this chapter the results are presented as they relate to each of the research questions and corresponding group of key stakeholders. Themes that emerged are presented along with illustrative interview responses from the key stakeholders. Some of the codes associated with each theme are mentioned to provide the reader with a deeper understanding of each theme.

For example, core themes connected to the phenomena of primary key stakeholder perception of the expulsion experience emerged from analysis of the interview data. These core themes for the students and their parents who are primary key stakeholders are included in a table at the beginning of each key stakeholder group's responses. Next the secondary key stakeholders who included the district representatives and school administrator perceptions of their expulsion experience are shown by including a table for each of these key stakeholders followed by several interview responses from the key stakeholders.

Although participant responses and explanations were specific to each participant's experience, repeated similar responses led me to concentrate on what appeared to be the primary theme communicated in each interview response. Below are the research questions and the first table that illustrates the themes that emerged from the data analysis for the students.

1. How do the primary key stakeholders involved in expulsion experience the process?

Primary Key Stakeholders: Students

Research Question #1a: What are the perceptions of students with an Emotional

Disturbance?

As Table 3 displays, the five themes that emerged from student interviews are shown

with corresponding codes listed below each theme:

Table 3: Student Themes and Codes

| Dislike School | History of School Problems | Zero Tolerance Trap | Confusion | Expulsion Impact on Student Lives |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Retention | ISS | Drugs | Lack Understanding of School Rules | Attend Different School |
| School Experience | OSS | Alcohol | Unable to Control Behavior | School Drop-out |
| Academic Grades | Saturday School | Weapon | | Legal System |
| | Prior Expulsion | Bomb Ingredients | | |

Table Note: ISS = In School Suspension, OSS = Out of School Suspension

Student quotes are provided below to demonstrate their perception of expulsion in

their own words. In order to provide structure to how the quotes are presented each theme

section includes quotes for five of the students that were interviewed. Later in the chapter

quotes from five of the parents, five district representatives, and five school

administrators are included for each of the themes that emerged for the different key

stakeholders. It was determined that including quotes from five participants from each key stakeholder group would make the most sense so that the reader can follow the stories and lives from the different key stakeholders who attended the same expulsion meeting. Although there were seven students and seven parents who participated in the study, only five district representatives and five school administrators participated so selecting five from each key stakeholder group was decided to keep the number of quotes for each key stakeholder group consistent.

Student Dislike School

Dislike School included events frequently discussed by students such as being in the 9th grade or repeating the 9th grade. Most of the students reported having failing grades, difficulty getting along with others, and not liking school. The pseudonyms for the five students are Adam, David, Kevin, Nick, and Tony.

Adam described his school background by saying he never liked school and did not have good grades. "I hate school and I fail my classes. I am in the 9th grade again. I just want to get my GED because I don't have any credits anyway."

David described school as boring although his grades were good. "School is easy but it is boring. I can ace a class without studying. None of the kids like me because they are jealous of me. I am smarter than my parents too and I know this because they don't have a clue what I do at home or at school. They were actually shocked that I could build a bomb but that's because they are all stupid."

Another student, Kevin, said he moved from another state to come live with his aunt. He said he liked his last school but his current school was stupid. "My last school was

cool and I passed each grade level. I came to live with my aunt because I always got in fights at school before. This place is stupid so I am repeating 9th grade."

Nick said he has attended more schools then he can remember. "We move all the time so I never make friends and I have always had bad grades. Sometimes I try to make good grades and hand in my work but I usually forget to hand stuff in. I was held back in 3rd grade and was held back again last year."

Tony said he had several retentions throughout his school years but school is a good place to socialize. "I don't care about the teachers and they don't like me either. I have my friends and we are like brothers, we are tight. That is more important and fun to me. I will probably drop out since I am old enough to be a senior anyway. I am never going to finish high school."

Student History of School Problems

History of School Problem events consistently talked about by students became evident through examples of discipline such as in-school suspension (ISS), out of school suspension (OSS), Saturday school, and prior expulsion. All but one of the students admitted to being previously suspended for behaviors that included skipping school, fighting, and failure to report for Saturday detention. Several of the students had a prior expulsion.

Adam had extensive discipline problems. "I think I spend more days at school in trouble than I do out of trouble. I skip class all the time because I will get in trouble whether I am in class or not. I still owe them several Saturday school detentions but like I am going to spend my Saturday at school, you know, no way."

David was the only student who did not have a history of school problems. "I just keep to myself and do my work when I feel like doing those easy assignments. I am smarter than the teachers, even the gifted class teacher. I still don't think I should be in trouble for experimenting with a bomb. I will be a great inventor someday that will save the world."

One student, Kevin, said he has been suspended before for fighting. He had a previous expulsion for possession of drugs on the school campus. "That dean suspended me for fighting. Last year he said I had drugs and kicked me out. I am always getting in trouble and he sends me to ISS."

Another student, Nick, shared he has attended in-school suspension (ISS) room and received several out of school suspension days. "I like ISS better than the other classes and it's even better when I don't have to come to school. I don't know nobody since I keep changing schools. Sometimes I want to go to ISS and just ask my teacher if I can go."

While Tony claimed he spent a lot of time in the front office. He has frequently attended ISS classroom. "Well, I go to the office a lot and don't do nothing, and then hang out in ISS. It is better than going to class were I am going to fail or get into more trouble anyway."

Student Zero Tolerance Trap

Student Zero Tolerance events cited incidents by all students were infractions of the zero tolerance policy. The students indicated their discipline was due to violations of the school's zero tolerance policy. These included infractions involving drugs for three of the

students, alcohol for one student, weapon for one student, and bomb ingredients for one student.

Adam said he was keeping weed for his cousin and he was caught because his teacher smelled pot on him. "It was not mine, it my cousin. They just automatically kicked me out for drugs even though I told them it wasn't my weed. I was ready to hit that lying teacher but then I would also get suspended for fighting and I've been there, done that before."

David was the only student without a history of known discipline problems and he brought ingredients to make a bomb because he wanted to see what he could build. "It is neat to see what I could build. You would think the school would appreciate that I am smarter than most kids but all they cared about was the stuff I brought to see if I could make a bomb."

A student, Kevin, who had been previously expelled for drugs shared that his teacher smelled pot on him which led to his current expulsion.  He said he was considered for expulsion because of the pot. "She said I smelled and then I was in trouble for having pot. I was hanging out with my friend who smokes so I smelled like he did. The dean didn't believe it when I said I didn't inhale the stuff, I guess he thought I was the president and trying to be funny."

Nick said he has been suspended before and expelled for both drugs and alcohol possession on campus at his last school. "We drank the beer before we got to the game so it's not like they had proof that I had beer. I can drink at home if I want to."

Tony claimed that the school lied and planted the weapon because he was African American and he said he became angry because the teacher who turned reported him for

having a machete was African American and therefore should not have reported one of her own. "That white man believed my teacher who said the knife was mine. All that teacher cared about was enforcing their school rules."

Student Confusion

Students cited several examples of being confused about school rules and discipline procedures. Although all of the students were aware that a meeting was held, only four of the seven students attended their expulsion meeting. The students who did not attend their expulsion meeting said their lack of attendance was due to being sent to a juvenile justice facility for a few days after being caught with drugs or a weapon. Some of the students said their knowledge of expulsion stemmed from previous expulsions although most said they did not have specific knowledge of an expulsion. Most of the students said they did not know enough, could not define the words used at the expulsion meeting, or did not understand the questions at the expulsion meeting well enough to answer questions.

Adam stated that a meeting was held at his high school. He attended with his parent, teacher and dean. "I remember sitting at the meeting with my mom, teacher and dean but it did not make any sense when they discussed my behavior. They used a lot of words that I think were in another language, not English. A lot of kids at my school don't follow the rules and they don't get expelled. It's not fair."

David revealed he understood the consequences of his behavior because he shared during the interview that he knew his behavior was wrong. "I know it was wrong so I got in trouble but I couldn't stop myself at the time. It was like I was on an automatic pilot. When I am involved in my inventions I am the mad scientist out to develop new frontiers. Sometimes there are causalities in war and also in scientific progress."

Another student, Kevin, claimed he did not know or have any knowledge about expulsions He was in a juvenile detention center at the time of the expulsion meeting. "What you say? I don't know what you say. I wasn't expelled. I wanted to go to this school because I hated that school and the detention center is worse. They didn't kick me out, I left. I did not attend that meeting because it never happened just like I was never expelled at my last school either."

Nick commented that everyone knows you can't have beer at school but this was not at school. Based on his knowledge of expulsion he should not have been considered for expulsion. "This is just wrong. I know you can't have beer at school. I was not even at school when I was drinking."

Finally, Tony said he acknowledged what happened (incident) and they wrote down what I said (statement). "You know, I told them. That woman wrote what I said but I don't see why I should be expelled for writing what I was told to write. See, look, I know I have rights. They trapped me and my mom said they don't like us."

Expulsion Impact on Student Lives

All of the students said their lives had changed as a result of being expelled from school. These changes included students being placed in alternative education settings, students dropping out of school altogether and encounters with the legal system. Students were well aware of the outcome of their expulsion meeting and that the expellable incident resulted in life changes.

Adam said he was now attending the alternative school and was placed on probation by the court. He also said he wants to drop out of school and get his GED. "Man, I'm

gonna drop out. I don't like this school but my mom said the courts said I have to attend or I will be in jail."

David said he has been placed on homebound education so he can continue his education. He said homebound services were the only placement option offered to him. "I just do my school work at home so now it is really boring and I can't make friends. At least no one is around to see if I am creating anything or solving the world's problems. They ordered me to be on homebound classes for an entire year and my mom makes me see the mind and drug control doctor or whom you call the psychiatrist."

Another student, Kevin, shared he is attending the alternative school and is court ordered to attend anger management class. "I have to go to school and to the behavior class, the judge said so. I was already on probation for battery and I have to go back to court for this drug charge."

Nick said his family moves all the time so he is used to changing schools. "I don't care if I attend this school, I really don't care if I go to school anywhere. I know we will move soon but I will probably drop out anyway. I plan to drop out because when we move I will have to go to another alternative school and not a regular school so why go."

Tony attends a therapeutic day school. As a result of his expulsion meeting the committee recommended placement at a school where a therapeutic component was offered during the school day. "I have to talk to this therapist at school every day now which doesn't help. I am in a school with bad kids. I know I can drop out and they can't do nothing because I am over 16, I am 18 in a few months."

Student Field Notes and Key Artifacts

The student field notes helped me to remember interpersonal interactions, observations, and my impression of the student's behavior during the interview. None of the students shared any key artifacts. Examples from my field notes are included here to demonstrate my impressions during the interviews. Reviewing the field notes I took provided a method for recalling my impressions of the students during their interviews.

My overall impression of the students based on the notes I took was that all but one of the students had a negative attitude toward school. Most of the students were talkative and rapport was easily established with each student. The one student, David, who did have good grades said he sometimes liked school but was easily bored. David entertained himself by creating a world where he viewed himself as a mad scientist out to make changes in the world.

Several of the students appeared to have a depressed outlook while others presented as angry individuals. I describe the students as having a depressed outlook as those students who said they did not care about school, their home life, or themselves. They had given up on finishing school, making friends or even a crime free lifestyle. The students who appeared angry were ordered to attend anger management class, see a therapist, or psychiatrist and they said they were angry about these consequences which they viewed as punishments.

One student, Tony, suggested that an African American teacher and White administrator expelled him due to his race because they only cared about the school district's discipline policies. He said the teacher should never have reported him for having a knife in class because she should have understood that the knife was for

protection from the kids in his neighborhood. He also said he was angry since he was almost 18 years old and did not believe he would get a high school diploma, a job, or even be able to join the military.

Additional notes I kept, revealed that all the students were male and each had been retained at least once except for the gifted student. All of the students lived in home with a female adult. The students shared very little about their father except for two of the students who said their father was in jail. Several of the students admitted that they lacked a positive male role model.

Primary Key Stakeholders: Parents

Research Question #1b: What are the perceptions of parents?

The five core themes for the parents who are also considered as primary key stakeholders included frustration, repeated discipline problems, guilt, outnumbered by school personnel, powerless. Table 4 illustrates the five themes and corresponding codes that emerged from parent interviews.

Table 4: Parent Themes and Codes

| Frustration | Repeated Discipline Problems | Guilt | Outnumbered by School Personnel | Powerless |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Retention | ISS | Problems in Family and/or Neighborhood | Too many people at meeting. | Unclear procedures |
| Chronic Problems at Home | OSS | Single/Divorced parent, etc. | Felt attacked | Distrust of system |

| Lack of communication with child | Saturday School | Born drug addicted | Unfamiliar people | Disagree with outcome |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Lack of communication with school | Prior Expulsion | | | Lack of knowledge |

Table Note: ISS = In School Suspension, OSS = Out of School Suspension

Parent Frustration

Parents expressed their frustration related to chronic problems at home and at school. They expressed that they felt there was a lack of communication with their child and they had difficulty communicating with the school. Most of the parents acknowledged that their child had failing grades and a history of social and academic difficulty. In some cases parents felt that their child's behavior at home was extremely difficult but that the child managed to behave somewhat better at school.

Adam's mother said her son is repeating the 9th grade and only has 1 credit. She described her son as a jabber jaws at school. "You know, he just talks and talks like crazy all the time at home, school, everywhere, to anyone. He can't do no work cause he just talks."

David's parent said she that her son in the 9th grade usually makes A's in school and was quiet at school although she had difficulty with him at home. "He is my gifted boy, very quiet but he's bright. I am very frustrated because he had severe psychiatric problems that have caused problems at home and yet he has been able to behave at school up until his expulsion.

Kevin's aunt said she knew very little about his academic history since he had just recently moved to her home. She reports having a difficult time getting his school records. "Since my sister can't take care of him no more, he moved in with me. I don't know about his school experience before he came to me, you understand."

Nick's mother shared her frustration with her son's failing grades, no credits, and shared that he plays on the computer all night. "He won't listen to me. Maybe if I were a computer game he would listen. He plays computer all night but at least I am happy he is home and not out drinking and driving. I still can't believe he went to school after he had a few drinks at home. Why can't he just stay home so he doesn't get in trouble?"

Tony's parent said she is ready for him to get a job because he will never graduate anyway. "He's going to be the oldest boy, well man, in the 9th grade. Why should he go to school now? He should get a job and move out of this government slum housing. I've told him his life won't get no better unless he straightens up but it's like I am talking to myself."

Parent Repeated Discipline Problems

The theme Repeated Discipline Problems developed as an issue for parents as they discussed their child's discipline infractions and consequences such as ISS, OSS, Saturday School and Prior Expulsion. Most of the parents said their child had either experienced an in-school suspension or out-of-school suspension. Several of the parents/guardians said their child had a prior expulsion. All parents who participated in the study have a child or custody of a child who was recently recommended for expulsion. None of the parent responses indicated that the parent was surprised by the expulsion though many did express their disappointment. Each parent revealed the

incident that led to expulsion consideration and several shared events that led up to the expellable incident.

Adam's mother shared that her child had previously been expelled for drugs and was sent to a juvenile justice program through the court system. "Here we go again with the court system and he's still involved with the drugs."

David's mom said she tried to protect him by not telling the school that he has received psychiatric care for years. He was the only student who did not have a history of suspensions. "He was only bad at home so why should I cause problems for him at school or with the law? His teachers usually say he is a quiet kid and very smart. I knew he had serious emotional problems but at least he wasn't getting suspended, well, I mean, at least he wasn't in trouble at school before the expulsion."

Kevin's aunt shared that her nephew has attended in-school suspension (ISS) and Saturday School. Since he just came to live with her this year she said she was unaware of any past expulsions. "Well, there have been a few in-school suspensions. I wanted him to do good and make his mommy proud. It's a shame he uses drugs, just like his mom."

Nick's parent said he has been suspended many times and is tired of him going to ISS all the time. "He is permitted to drink at home so why does he have to make trouble by leaving our house? He just doesn't know how to avoid trouble. I've discussed the consequences with him many times."

Tony's parent conceded her child has been suspended before and sent to ISS on nearly a daily basis. He had been previously considered for expulsion. "Seems like every week he was in ISS but I never thought he would be a weapon to school until the assistant

principal called me for the expulsion meeting. There are gang bangers all over our neighborhood but I told Tony he better not be with them."

Parent Guilt

The parents shared their remorse by discussing problems within their own family or problems in their neighborhood. All of the parents were single female parents/guardians. Each parent/guardian stated that they struggled to raise their child and provide for their household on their own and often wished their child had a male figure to guide and help raise the child. Each parent further expressed some responsibility for their child's misbehavior and problems. Several parents blamed themselves or a family member for their child's discipline problems and admitted to using drugs in the past and/or being incarcerated in the past. All of the parents except for the parent of the child who is also identified as a gifted student said they did not attend college or any type of trade school after high school. The parent of the gifted child was a college graduate.

Adam's parent claimed the teacher said she smelled pot and the expulsion meeting was for drugs. This parent admitted the student uses marijuana at home and an older sibling uses drugs too. "It runs in our family, he was born drug addicted, just like his brother. It is hard to blame him for his behavior when he has been surrounded by drug use all his life. In fact, I am sure it is my fault for using drugs myself when I was young."

David's mother said she blamed herself for not letting the school know he needed help. "I thought he was just bad at home and as long as I took him to the psychiatrist and made him take his medications that everything would be alright. His father was diagnosed as a paranoid schizophrenic and my sister is bipolar, well mostly depressed and not manic type. Heck, I now I am a nervous wreck so I probably can't help."

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Kevin's aunt said she wanted to give Kevin a second chance and help raise him. He had problems with his mom and needed a new start. "I don't know much about his past schooling but I raised my own kids and thought I could help him get straight. I thought a fresh start would get him away from his old gang of bad friends. I guess I tried too late in his life."

Nick's parent has warned her child not to drink alcohol outside of their house. He was considered for expulsion due to being intoxicated at a school function. "I told that boy not to go outside when he drinks too much. He was asking for trouble and doesn't listen. If he would just stay at home and drink he wouldn't get in trouble. His father is in jail because he couldn't drink or use drugs in moderation. I used to drink too much myself and I know the damage it causes."

Tony's mother said her child had a knife on school campus and was shown a picture of the knife at the expulsion meeting. According to the parent, her child brought the knife for protection because there had been trouble in the neighborhood. "He only brought the knife to defend himself because of those really crazy neighbor thugs. I hate that we live where we live and being surrounded by crime every day."

Parent Outnumbered by School Personnel

Parents cited several examples of being outnumbered by school personnel such as saying there were too many unfamiliar people at the meeting and feeling as though they were being attacked at the meeting. All parents or guardians attended the expulsion meeting. Some parents were able to recall the meeting attendees while others were unsure of the role or identity of several attendees.

Adam's parent was notified by the principal to attend the meeting at the high school. She only could recall a big table of people but did remember the teacher and assistant principal in attendance. "There was this big table of all these people at the meeting. They each introduced themselves but there were too many of them to remember their names or what they did."

David's parent felt attacked and outnumbered at the meeting. She said the meeting was held in a conference room and "everybody and their brother" attended. She was notified on her cell phone of the meeting by the high school dean. "Too many people I didn't know were there and they all wanted to talk and blame my son for everything. I bet their kids are not perfect and at least mine is smart."

Kevin's parent was able to recall the principal was in attendance but did not know the names of some of the other attendees. The principal notified her of the expulsion meeting being held at the high school. "The only person I recall knowing was the principal and that's it. I didn't like the way the other people talked down to me so I ignored them."

Nick's parent said she did not know anyone at the meeting. Since they move a lot they had only been at this school for a few months and will probably be moving again soon. "They were all strangers to me and I think there were too many of them at the meeting. It is like they purposely don't want to meet with you alone so they gang up on you."

Tony's parent shared that the meeting was held while her son was in the juvenile detention center. "I went to the meeting by myself. I didn't want to go alone and then when I got to the room there were so many people that I just wanted to leave."

Parent Powerless

 The parents said they felt powerless because the expulsion procedures were unclear to them, they did not trust the system, they disagreed with the expulsion outcome and/or they just did not have enough knowledge of the expulsion process. Parents voiced their resentment of the school system during the interview sessions. Five of the parents shared their understanding of the expulsion procedures although two parents said they did not know enough or did not understand the procedures during the expulsion meeting. When probed the two parents furthered explained that the forms used during the expulsion meeting were difficult to read and contained several words that they were not familiar with and could not define. These key stakeholders were well aware of the outcome of their child's expulsion meeting and that the expellable incident resulted in a change of placement.

 Adam's mother firmly stated she has some knowledge of expulsion. "I know all about zero tolerance and the way they use that to railroad the kids they don't like. The school has all the power and abuses it when they don't like someone. If my son had been a teacher's pet he never would have been expelled."

 David mother said she was lost at the expulsion meeting. "I am familiar with the language our psychiatrist uses and I know a lot about the prescribed drugs my son is taking. After the expulsion meeting I have started reading about the meaning of the words used at the expulsion meeting. The people at the meeting did define some of things they said but I could tell they were familiar with the expulsion words and I knew asking them questions wouldn't make the outcome of the meeting any different anyway. So I just sat there quietly."

Kevin's aunt had knowledge of expulsions because her older son had been expelled for drugs too. "I have a lot of knowledge about expulsion since both my boys have been expelled and I know the administrators pick on my nephew because his older cousins were always in trouble."

Nick's parent said she was able to follow some of the procedures from the paperwork completed at the meeting although she did not agree with the procedures. Since he was born cocaine and alcohol addicted she did agree that the incident was a manifestation of his disability. "I followed some of the procedures by looking at the forms during the meeting. I did not agree but I kind of understood what they did."

Tony's parent mentioned that she understood the expulsion procedures since weapons were part of the zero tolerance policy. The parent did not agree with the manifestation determination made by the committee. "I know there is zero tolerance for weapons but the school should help him with his problems rather than send him to another school. Her son is now attending a separate school offering a therapeutic component and one-on-one therapy. "His new school is better and he has a therapist he trusts a little that he sees everyday. He didn't trust the people at his last school, and he doesn't really trust these new people much either but at least he has a chance at the new school."

Parent Field Notes and Key Artifacts

The field notes taken during the parent interviews provided a running account of what transpired during the interviews. The field notes included my impressions and observations during each interview session. Key artifacts shared by the participants during interview sessions related to research question #1b were collected. The key artifacts included a written expulsion meeting notice, an Individual Education Plan (IEP),

and manifestation determination form. Examples from my field notes are included here to show my observation of the emotions and feelings shared by the parents. Including the field notes was an effective method for recalling my impressions of the parents and to remind myself of the key artifacts parents shared during their interviews.

My overall impression of the parents or guardians based on the notes was that each parent/guardian cared deeply for their child and wanted their child to succeed. Several of the parents admitted to having substance abuse or emotional problems themselves in their younger years. The parents often said they felt somewhat guilty or blamed themselves for their child's emotional problems. Although these participants took some responsibility for their child's behavior they often glared or raised their voice when expressing how they felt about the discipline procedures and their expulsion experience.

The parents collectively and repeatedly expressed their sense of being overwhelmed at the meeting and viewed most of the meeting attendees as strangers who were not to be trusted. A couple of the parents brought forms as key artifacts so I could witness the long list of meeting attendees that they thought were meant to outnumber them at the meeting. Pointing to the manifestation determination form two of the parents expressed frustration that the form used too much legal jargon that was not easily understood by them. The field notes underscored that parents felt purposely confused and powerless during the expulsion process by the wording of the forms and that the school board employees did not make sincere efforts to break down the procedures into simple language that was easily understood.

Results for Secondary Key Stakeholders

This section describes the results for the secondary key stakeholders who are the district representatives and school administrators. The research questions for the secondary key stakeholders and results are included below. Again a table illustrates the themes that emerged for each of the key stakeholders. Illustrative interview responses from the key stakeholders are also included and the pseudonym given to the student is included again so the reader can follow the experience described by the different key stakeholders at the expulsion meeting.

2. How do the secondary key stakeholders involved in expulsion experience the process?

Secondary Key Stakeholders: District Representatives

Research Question #2a: What are the perceptions of district representatives?

The resulting four core themes for the district representatives included review of discipline history, meeting, experience with expulsions, and empowerment. Many of the themes overlap with the themes that emerged for the primary key stakeholders. Table 5 illustrates the four themes that emerged from district representative interviews with corresponding codes listed below each theme:

Table 5: District Representative Themes and Codes

| Student Discipline History | Meeting Responsibilities | Experience with Expulsions | Empowerment |
|---|---|---|---|
| Discipline Records | Prompt Meeting Notification | Experienced Educator | Leadership Role |

| Audit and Cumulative Records | Familiar with Meeting Participants | Extensive Training | Support School Administrator |
|---|---|---|---|
| Prior Knowledge of Student | Prepared for Meeting | Well Versed with Expulsion Procedures | Professional Confidence |
| | | Many Years Attending Expulsion Meetings | Protect Student Rights |

District Representative Student Discipline History

District representatives expressed that they reviewed the student's records and were familiar with the student due to previous meetings they had attended for the student being discussed due to past discipline infractions and consequences. The records reviewed included audit files, cumulative records, and discipline records. All but one of the district representatives discussed a student who had been previously suspended. The one district representative who did not mention that the student had been previously suspended was the district representative who discussed the student who was previously identified as gifted only and just determined eligible for the ED program at the expulsion meeting. This student had not previously been suspended at school. Several of the district representatives discussed students with prior expulsions.

Adam's district representative said the student had been previously suspended and had served in Saturday school as a discipline consequence. "The student's discipline

records indicated numerous, to say the least, suspension days and Saturday school days. His discipline file was one of the thickest files I have ever seen."

The district representative who attended David's meeting said he did not have a significant discipline history. She did notice that David skipped class one time last school year but did not have any current discipline infractions. The psychological report, psychiatric report, social history, functional behavioral assessment and behavior intervention plan were all very current since they had just been completed, updated and reviewed at the time of the expulsion meeting. He had a previous psychological report that was several years old that had been completed when he met the eligibility criteria for the gifted program. The school was unaware of David's psychiatric care that began several years prior to the expulsion meeting and was ongoing at the time of the expellable infraction. "David was in some honor classes and attended a regularly scheduled gifted seminar at the school. He was not reported for disciplinary reasons to the school administrators so he did not have a discipline file. We learned a lot about David when the parent singed a release to share information and then provided the school psychologist with the private psychiatric report and provided a verbal history of David's emotional problems to the school social worker."

Kevin's district representative disclosed a previous expulsion meeting was held due to the student having possession of drugs. Along with the prior expulsion, the student also has been suspended before. "I was aware of his history and reviewed his previous manifestation determination form completed last school year at his prior expulsion meeting."

The district representative who attended Nick's expulsion meeting said the school district had some of Nick's previous records but since Nick had attended so many different schools in the state as well as out of state, that his records were still being requested from the different schools. They did have records for his last three schools. "Nick has been retained several times and his records show a history of suspensions at his last three schools as well as at his current school.

Tony's district representative shared that the student has been issued multiple days of in-school suspension for chronic misbehavior. He had been previously expelled for drugs. Several discipline referrals have resulted in out-of-school suspension. "When reviewing his records he had a bunch of ISS days and a few out-of school suspension days. His audit file included several old psychological evaluations and a current psychological evaluation and behavior intervention plan. He had several audit files since he was identified as a student with emotional problems back when he was in elementary school."

District Representative Meeting Responsibilities

District representatives said they were provided immediate meeting notification, were familiar with meeting participants, and were prepared for the meeting. Specifically, the district representatives' responses revealed they were primarily notified of the upcoming expulsion meeting via e-mail from the high school. Each district representative revealed the reason for the expulsion and several shared events that led up to the expellable incident. The district representatives knew most of the teachers at the meeting; they knew all of the school administrators, social workers and school psychologist who attended the meeting. Some of the district representatives were already acquainted with the student and parent due to past discipline problems. Notably, the district representatives were

consistently able to verbalize who the attendees were at the meeting unlike the majority of the primary key stakeholders.

Adam's district representative said the student was reported to have drugs and upon being notified of the incident and upcoming meeting she reviewed the student's records so she would be prepared for the meeting. "We do not tolerate drugs in any form that are not kept for students by the school nurse. It is a legal and safety concern."

David's district representative specified those in attendance included the principal, assistant principal, school based ESE contact, general education teacher, ESE teacher, school psychologist, social worker, behavior analyst, parent, and of course themselves, the ESE staffing specialist. "We discussed the student's behavior and continued appropriate educational placement. In hindsight, since he brought ingredients to create a bomb to school the parent said she probably should have informed the school earlier of her son's psychiatric care but didn't want the school to be aware of his problems."

Kevin's district representative said they were prepared for the expulsion meeting which was for a student found with drugs and again shared the school districts zero tolerance policy with the interviewer. "He had drugs, we followed the district discipline manual, and it was a zero tolerance issue for us."

Nick's district representative said the high school used the e-mail format for reporting the expulsion meeting to the district office. The attendees included the assistant principal, parent, and usual CST (Child Study Team) members. "I was notified of the expulsion via the appropriate procedures the schools have been directed to follow. All appropriate personnel met in a conference room at the school."

A final district representative said she was immediately notified to attend Tony's expulsion meeting and that Tony was considered for expulsion because he had a weapon on campus. The school district has a zero tolerance policy against having a weapon. This district representative listed those in attendance along with themselves as the school psychologist, behavior analyst, teachers, assistant principal and parent. This ESE staffing specialist said she was notified of the meeting by e-mail. "After receiving the e-mail notification of the upcoming expulsion, I contacted the school and other appropriate individuals to prepare for the meeting. He had a weapon on school campus so it was clearly considered a zero tolerance expulsion."

District Representative Experience with Expulsions

The district representatives were experienced educators or administrators with extensive training. They were well versed with expulsion procedures and had many years attending expulsion meetings. District representatives were the key stakeholders who appeared to have the most training in the expulsion process through their responses to interview questions related to this theme. While school administrators were well versed regarding expulsion procedures they tended to rely on the district representative for guidance.

Adam's district representative had attended multiple district and state in-service trainings pertaining to expulsion procedures. Additional on-going on the job training is available to her by contacting the district's ESE Compliance resource teacher. "I have attended several in-service training on legal issues pertaining to the expulsion of students with disabilities and have provided mini in-service training at the schools I serve."

David's district representative said she uses the district's expulsion manual as a reference when needed for procedures. The behavior was a manifestation of the student's disability and the committee recommended the therapeutic setting at a separate day school for the student. "We decided at the meeting that this student really needed a therapeutic component infused throughout their school day."

Kevin's district representative said she uses the district county plan that outlines the procedures as well as the district discipline manual. The committee reviewed the expulsion packet, previous evaluation, IEP, FBA/BIP, and manifestation determination (MD) form. The MD form provided structure for the meeting that resulted in the committee agreeing to send the student to the alternative school. "Since we carefully review each question on the MD form it helps us make an appropriate and well thought out decision by all committee members."

Nick's district representative stated that the committee discussed the IEP services, counseling, ESE eligibility, placement, behavior intervention plan and manifestation determination form. The team then discussed several placement options and recommended the alternative school. "It took a lengthy discussion of several placement options before we agreed to the most appropriate placement."

Finally, Tony's district representative shared that due to her extensive experience with expulsions she is able to prepare quickly for an expulsion meeting and is very thorough in her preparation. "I have attended many expulsions throughout the years. I have a lot of experience and felt prepared for the meeting."

District Representative Empowerment

Empowerment was a theme expressed by the district representatives when discussing their leadership role and how they provided support to the school administrators. The district representatives also said they were confident in their understanding of the expulsion procedures. Many of the district representatives also shared the importance of protecting student rights at an expulsion meeting by making sure the meeting was held within the same week as the infraction, making sure the student was able to provide a statement, and that his IEP, FBA/BIP and any other school related services were current and appropriate. Several of these key stakeholders said the legal system (probation officer or pending court appearance) was the motivating factor for the primary key stakeholder's cooperation at the expulsion meeting. Each district representative said his/her role at the meeting was to make sure appropriate district procedures are followed.

Adam's district representative said she not only had plenty of training but also has trained several schools in the expulsion procedures. She viewed her role as taking the lead at the expulsion meeting along with the school administrator to assure the procedures in the district's discipline manual were followed. "They count on me to know the procedures and together we form a good team. I always make sure we review the IEP and current services."

David's district representative stated everyone agreed that homebound education was the most appropriate placement for the student. "It was so very unanimous; coming back on any school campus was not an option. The safety of this student and the other students at the school was a concern considering that this student attempted to create a bomb."

Kevin's district representative said the expulsion decision for the student to attend the alternative school was unanimous. "I made sure the expulsion procedures were followed at the meeting and I assisted the administrator when we completed the district expulsion forms. The committee agreed this young man should attend the alternative school."

Nick's district representative viewed his role as a support to the school based employees at the meeting and to assure the student's rights are protected. He had extensive expulsion training as a past administrator of an alternative school site before becoming a district administrator. "As a past principal myself, I understand the gravity of the situation and the diligence that each school board employee must follow."

Tony's district representative claimed the expulsion decision placing the student in a therapeutic separate day school was definitely unanimous and he was confident this was the most appropriate placement at this time. The probation officer for the student informed the committee that the judge may court order a placement through the juvenile justice system. "His probation officer informed us at the meeting that our school system based placement recommendation would probably be temporary until the student was ordered to attend a juvenile justice program."

District Representative Field Notes and Key Artifacts

The district representative themes, field notes and key artifacts shared by the key stakeholders during interview sessions were related to research question #2a. Examples from my field notes are included here to illustrate my impressions and observations during each district representative's interview session. Including the field notes was again an effective method for recalling my impressions of the district representatives and to remind myself of the key artifacts district representatives shared during their interviews.

The district representatives said they were self-assured and confident in their role at the expulsion meeting. Besides stating that they were confident, they each had extensive experience in their professional roles which I noted could be intimidating to the primary key stakeholders who attended meetings with them. I noted in my field notes the verbal ease with which they recounted the events surrounding and during the expulsion meeting. I was dismayed by the obvious personal detachment that was displayed toward individual students. For example I noted that these participants sometimes mistakenly said another student's name and then corrected themselves by saying the correct student's name but did not have difficulty recalling the procedures associated with the expellable incident.

My impression was that the district representatives were not only able to quote from the district's discipline procedures manual that several of them submitted as key artifacts but they were able to interpret and individualize the procedures based on the specific expellable incident being discussed. Included in my field notes was my impression that the district representatives were not new employees and that each did appear to have extensive training in the expulsion procedures.

Secondary Key Stakeholders: School Administrators

Research Question #2b: What are the perceptions of administrators?

As Table 6 displays, the five themes that emerged from school administrator interviews are shown with corresponding codes listed below each theme:

Table 6: School Administrator Themes and Codes

| Consumed by Discipline | Zero Tolerance Enforcement | Expulsion Meeting Responsibilities | Training | Concern for Safety |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | |

| Frequent Discipline Referrals | Drugs, Weapons | Responsible for Reporting Incident | In-service | Send Disruptive Student to Alternative Site |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Role of Disciplinarian | Automatic Expulsion Consideration | Responsible for Meeting Notification | District Support | Concern for Other Students on Campus |
| Same Students Suspended | District Policy | Responsible for Expulsion Meeting | Discipline Manual | Relieved by Justice System Support |
| Disappointed by Chronic Problems | | | Experienced Professionals | |

Administrator Consumed by Discipline

    Administrators expressed that they were consumed by discipline due to frequent

discipline referrals, their role of disciplinarian, the same students being suspended, and

their disappointment with chronic problems. All of the participants in this group of key

stakeholders have attended many expulsion meetings throughout their profession. These

key stakeholders were reminded to keep the one student participating in this study in

mind when responding to the interview questions. Each administrator was selected due to the fact that he or she attended the expulsion meeting for the specific student being discussed. The administrators knew each student since the administrators were responsible for the discipline at the school and responded to the referrals written by teachers and issued the discipline consequences. The vast experience this group of key stakeholders has with expulsions is similar to the experience with expulsion procedures held by the district representatives. The observable difference in the professional role of district representatives and school administrators, compared to the personal roles of the students and their parents, supports their identification as secondary key stakeholders for the purpose of this study.

Adam's school administrator said the student had been to the dean's office often, issued Saturday school, and has previously been suspended. "I knew him from his frequent referrals to my office."

The school administrator who attended David's meeting said she was not well acquainted with David. "I recognized his face when I saw him but he had never been sent to my office. He seemed to be a quiet kid. In preparation for his expulsion meeting and at the meeting itself, we saw a different side of David and learned a lot about him that we never knew before."

Kevin's school administrator knew the student well since the student had previous in-school and out-of-school suspensions, as well as a prior expulsion hearing for drugs. "You would think after his previous expulsion last school year he would have learned to stay out of trouble this school year."

The school administrator who attended Nick's meeting said she knew Nick although Nick was new to the school district that school year. "I was already familiar with Nick even though he had only been at our school for a few months. I think he skipped the honeymoon period and started out in trouble the first week of school."

Finally Tony's school administrator was familiar with the student due to previous suspensions and a prior expulsion. "Unfortunately, we are well acquainted. I have worked really hard with him and thought I was starting to see his behavior improve. It is disappointing to see him in trouble again."

Administrator Zero Tolerance Enforcement

Zero tolerance was mentioned by school administrators when discussing infractions such as drugs/weapons. All of the students in this study were automatically considered for an expulsion due to their infraction being a zero tolerance infraction defined in the school district's zero tolerance policy. Each school administrator was involved in the initial discovery of the expellable incident.

Adam's school administrator said the antecedent that triggered this expellable incident occurred when the teacher noticed a smell of marijuana. A pipe containing marijuana was found on the student. "When I spoke to the teacher, she said she could smell him coming down the hall. We have no tolerance for drugs on our campus and automatically consider the student with drugs for expulsion, although that often means holding the expulsion in abeyance and offering an alternative setting."

David's administrator was involved with a student who brought ingredients to build a bomb to school. The discussion during the expulsion meeting revealed an extensive psychiatric history that was previously unknown to the school officials. "There have been

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a few students who have been able to keep such deep emotional problems hidden and he is one of those students. He presented at the meeting simultaneously with characteristics of a gifted student and emotionally disturbed student as I have ever known."

Kevin's school administrator stated that he followed the school district's zero tolerance policy against drugs. "Kevin was previously expelled for drugs and was again expelled for drugs. Besides using drugs himself, he brings drugs to our campus which presents a problem for the other students. As a high school administrator, a drug free campus is a priority for me. His probation officer said at the meeting that Kevin is now on a waiting list for a drug program due to his repeated behavior."

The school administrator who attended Nick's expulsion meeting said she was walking around at the school game when she smelled the alcohol on Nick. She called the school's resource officer and the student's parents immediately. "We do not allow drinking or for student's to be under the influence of alcohol at a school function. Nick was being loud and disruptive which is why I initially walked in his direction. We have zero tolerance for this behavior."

Tony's school administrator followed the district's zero tolerance policy against weapons. The student was considered for expulsion due to having possession of a knife on school campus. "This was far from a butter knife, more like a machete. I know parents sometimes think we over-react but I have a picture of the knife and it is a large knife"

Administrator Expulsion Meeting Responsibilities

The school administrators expressed that they were responsible for reporting the expellable incident, responsible for meeting notification, and responsible for expulsion meeting. All of the expulsion meetings were held at the administrator's high school

except one meeting, which was held at the district office. The meeting held at the district office was for the student who brought the ingredients to build a bomb. Every administrator assumed responsibility for notifying all attendees of the meeting and for completing all appropriate forms required for an expulsion meeting by the school district.

Adam's school administrator explained the use of an e-mail form that is filled out and sent as an invitation and notification to the district office of the expulsion. The parent was called and sent a written invitation to the meeting. The teachers, district representative, social worker, school psychologist, and parent met in the front office conference room for the meeting. "Basically, I e-mail the district folks, call the parent and follow up by mailing the parent an invitation to the meeting."

The school administrator who attended David's meeting said she immediately contacted the school district office to notify them of the expulsion meeting. She said the meeting was held at the school district office rather than at the school. "The student and parent met with the school psychologist several times right before the expulsion meeting to make sure a complete and thorough psychological evaluation had been updated. The school psychologist also reviewed the psychiatric evaluation that was provided by the parent. It was the Child Study Team's responsibility to make sure the student had the opportunity to be appropriately evaluated and provided the appropriate services to continue his education."

Kevin's school administrator reported the incident to the district office and said the meeting was held at their high school. The attendees included the ESE guidance counselor, teachers, probation officer, school psychologist, guidance counselor for the alternative school, ESE staffing specialist, and social worker. "The meeting was held in

our front office conference room. I followed the district procedures at the meeting while the district representative made sure I did not miss any steps in the process. We are a good team and this protects the student at the meeting to make sure his or her rights are not overlooked in any way. ”

Nick's school administrator said she reports the expellable incident to the district office immediately after the incident occurs. She described a template that was used for inviting the district people per e-mail. The parent was called and sent a letter as an invitation to the meeting. The attendees included the district people, parent, guidance counselor and teachers. "Here is a blank e-mail invitation template we use to notify the district of an expellable offense. Also, I brought some blank forms we complete at an expulsion meeting. Basically, we have an expulsion packet of forms that we complete for students."

Tony's school administrator said he contacted the district personnel immediately as well as the parent. "It is my responsibility to make sure all appropriate parties are notified of the meeting. I call and send a written notice. I make sure I have all the appropriate records and forms ready for the meeting."

Administrator Training

The administrator said they received in-service training, had district support, discipline manuals as guides, and many years of experience with expulsions. None of the administrators were new to their profession, which became evident through their quick responses of the expulsion process and procedures. None of the administrators hesitated or paused to think about their responses. All the administrators had responsibility for student discipline and safety. One slight difference among the secondary key stakeholders

was that although the school administrators were well versed with the expulsion procedures and appeared confident, they did have a tendency to rely on the district representative for guidance in addition to relying on the district expulsion procedures manual.

Adam's school administrator stated he had been an administrator for about ten years. He received expulsion training offered at his high school, the district office, and state in-service training. His responsibilities consisted of ensuring the expulsion committee completed the items in the expulsion packet "I have received training here at school, and at the district and state level. Having completed so many expulsion packets, I feel extremely confident at expulsion hearings."

David's school administrator specified that four of her eleven years of experience as an administrator were at a middle school before transferring to the high school. She claimed to have been trained through district leadership team meetings and state in-services. "My cumulative experience with expulsion is quite extensive at this point."

Kevin's school administrator additionally explained the use of the manifestation determination form for determining that the behavior was a manifestation of the student's emotional disturbance. Two placement options were discussed at the meeting and the committee recommended the student attend the alternative school. "The manifestation determination form questions were discussed aloud by the committee which really helped guide our placement decision for this student."

Nick's administrator reviewed the expulsion packet at the meeting. The psychologist reviewed records and previous testing. The teacher reviewed the IEP and FBA/BIP. The team determined that the behavior was a manifestation of his disability and recommended

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the student attend the alternative school. "Each person brings his or her knowledge and input to the meeting, mine is to protect the school and student by reviewing the items in the expulsion packet."

The administrator who attended Tony's meeting said the records were reviewed and discussed along with a current IEP and behavior intervention plan. This participant explained the criteria used to determine if the behavior is a manifestation of the disability or not. "It is important that we carefully discuss the criteria out loud when determining if the behavior is a manifestation of the disability or not."

Administrator Concern for Safety

The school administrators expressed their concern for safety and said they had to consider the rights of the disruptive students while considering the safety of the remaining students on campus. These key stakeholder responses reflected that based on their perception the expulsion decisions were made unanimously by all team members to send the student to an alternative site especially when there was a concern for the safety of the entire student body. The administrators said they were responsible for all the students on the school campus and stated a need to consider the safety of all students when one student posed a threat to the school campus. Several of the administrators mentioned the existence of a probation officer assigned to the student.

Adam's school administrator said he is concerned about the problems caused by bringing drugs on school campus and this was discussed at the meeting. "The parent shared her concern about the gang activity around her home and that she was afraid it might follow Adam to school. The committee agreed it was a safety concern for the entire student body."

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David's school administrator claimed the expulsion decision was unanimous to place the student on homebound education. "There was no doubt about this student's placement decision since he tried to build a bomb on our school campus. His parent shared that she never thought David would harm anyone at school but now she is no longer so certain."

The school administrator who attended Kevin's expulsion meeting shared his concern for the safety on the high school campus. "The first time Kevin was expelled for having drugs he promised to never touch drugs again. I need to protect the rights of all students on our school campus and therefore need to enforce rules for everyone's safety.

Nick's school administrator said the child study team committee along with the student's probation officer agreed the student would attend the alternative school. "It really helped to have the probation officer included at the meeting, especially when discussing the student's continued appropriate placement."

Tony's administrator said the expulsion decision was definitely unanimous. The juvenile justice system is currently involved with this student. "The school, parent and everyone agreed with the expulsion decision."

Administrator Field Notes and Key Artifacts

The school administrator field notes and key artifacts shared by the key stakeholders during interview sessions were related to research question #2b. Examples from my field notes are included here to illustrate some of my observations and impressions. Including the field notes was an effective method for recalling my impressions of the school administrators and to remind myself of the key artifacts administrators shared during their interviews.

My impression was that the school administrators were highly motivated to protect and maintain the safety of the entire student body by following the district's zero tolerance policy and by stating their concern for all students at the high school. They told me they were exhausted by the constant discipline demands from a small group of students and their role as disciplinarians.

The school administrator's number of years experience in their roles was comparable to the number of years of experience obtained by their district representative counterparts. The difference I noted was their reliance on the district representative to assure and reinforce that they were following appropriate procedures. I noted the school administrators were the group of key stakeholders who mentioned daily involvement with on-going discipline problems when we discussed the expulsion of students with an emotional disturbance based on their statements of familiarity with the student and their statements that they were exhausted by the repeated discipline referrals for the same students.

Research Question #3: Do the perceptions of the different key stakeholders differ and if so, how?

In comparing and contrasting the perspectives of primary and secondary key stakeholders, it became evident that primary key stakeholders, which included students and parents, held perspectives similar to each other and secondary key stakeholders, which included district representative and school administrators, also held perspectives that were similar to each other, but different from the primary key stakeholders. In general, it seemed that the students identified as ED and their parents held similar views because of the personal stories of growing up and personal history they shared during the

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interviews. While, again generally, it appears that district representatives and school administrators had similar perspectives because of their shared professional experience with expulsions and training.

While students and their parents were able to talk freely about past school experiences including how they felt about going to school, socializing and failing classes, secondary key stakeholders did not share this history. The perception of how the primary key stakeholders perceived their school experience was unique to them. Several of the primary key stakeholders admitted problems started for the student when he was in elementary school or earlier. Several of the parents said their children were born addicted to drugs or alcohol and therefore had problems from birth.

Differences in perspectives between primary and secondary key stakeholders were numerous. When the primary key stakeholders were asked to share their knowledge of the expulsion process, both students and parents readily admitted they lacked knowledge about the process. They stated they were aware that they did not have experience with the legal vocabulary used during an expulsion. For example, all of the students and most of the parents revealed they did not have prior knowledge or meaningful definitions of what it meant to determine if an incident was a manifestation of the disability or not. Conversely, when secondary key stakeholders, district representatives and school administrators, were asked about expulsion, it was apparent that they were well versed in the process and confident about their training and experience with expulsions of students identified as Emotionally Disturbed.

Another main difference became evident through the repeated responses of the primary key stakeholders when responding to questions related specifically to the

manifestation determination. The primary key stakeholders did not understand the procedures used to make a manifestation determination while the secondary key stakeholders quoted the criteria used and provided blank MD forms. The primary key stakeholders also did not feel as though they were provided placement options. For example most of the primary key stakeholders said they were only given one placement as an option while in contrast the secondary key stakeholders expressed during the interviews that several placement options were discussed.

Differences between the primary key stakeholders, students and parents, were mostly evident during discussions of the expulsion meeting. Predominately, students who did not attend their own expulsion meeting were unable to discuss the events of their meeting. Roughly, half of the students did not attend their own expulsion meeting due to being held in a juvenile justice facility while all of the parents/guardians did attend the meeting. Additionally, a slight difference in perception was noted during the interviews when discussing procedures. All of the students were able to respond to questions about their school background while several of the parents were unsure about the child's school background. Finally, adults, parents/guardians, in this case, were somewhat better able to express their understanding of the procedures followed during the expulsion meeting than the students.

Differences between the secondary key stakeholders, district representatives and school administrators, were slightly evident when we discussed the expulsion procedures. For example, as mentioned earlier, one small difference among the secondary key stakeholders was that although the school administrators were well versed with the expulsion procedures and appeared confident responding to most themes they did have a

tendency to rely on the district representative for assistance with the expulsion

procedures. Although, this difference is noted between the two secondary key

stakeholders it is only considered a slight difference since key stakeholders did offer

viable responses to each interview question.

Chapter 5

Conclusions and Implications

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the perceptions held by key

stakeholders of the expulsion process for high school students identified as Emotionally

Disturbed. Seven ninth grade males, identified as ED, participated in the study along with

their parent. By chance none of the students selected were in the tenth grade although

some student participants were repeating the ninth grade and therefore certainly were

older than the typical age of most ninth graders. Five district representatives and five high

school administrators also participated in the study.

More African American students and their parents participated in the study than would

be expected when comparing the number of African American participants to the total

number of African American students expelled in the selected school district during the

2005-2006 school year (See Table 7 below). The number of White students who

participated in the study is lower than might be expected considering more White

students were expelled than any other group. It is less surprising that all of the students in

the study were male.

Table 7: Expulsions for School District, Students with ED and Study Participants

| Total District Expulsions | Total Expulsions of Students with ED | Total Expulsions in Study |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Total = 49 | Total = 18 | Total = 7 |
| White = 35 | White = 10 | White = 2 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| African Am. = 9 | African Am. =6 | African Am. = 4 |
| Hispanic = 4 | Hispanic = 2 | Hispanic = 1 |
| Other = 1 | Other = 0 | Other =0 |
| Male = 38 | Male = 14 | Male = 7 |
| Female = 11 | Female =4 | Female = 0 |

The key stakeholders who attended the same expulsion meeting were racially mixed groups of individuals. None of the participants said they were part of any other racial background than those listed in the table below. The study did not find that white district representatives attended white student expulsion meetings or any other pattern of purposeful matching of key stakeholders by race or gender. Interestingly, the student, Tony, who said the white school administrator expelled him because he was African American also blamed his African American teacher for reporting him to the school administrator for having a knife. Other than this one student's remarks no other comments were shared suggesting that any of the expulsions were racially motivated to expel any student based on their race. Since I work in the school district and have attended many expulsion meetings myself, I have not found any attempt by the school district to match or not match the student's race with the school administrator and district representative's racial background. Nor I have I ever witnessed anyone purposely attempting to expel a student based on their race. The school district does provide for interpreters to attend meetings when a language barrier exists between the key stakeholders but otherwise does not assign individuals of the same race or any similar characteristics to attend a meeting. Earlier Table 1 showed the racial background, gender

and expellable offense for each of the key stakeholders who attended the expulsion meetings for the students whose quotes were included in this dissertation.

As this study demonstrates, different key stakeholders do not live in isolation but are influenced by interactions with others. For this reason, the two groups of key stakeholders representing the primary objective of the study and the two groups of key stakeholders representing the secondary objective of the study were vital individuals towards gaining an understanding of the perceptions of all individuals involved in the expulsion process. Each key stakeholder is affected by multiple realties constructed through individual actions and perceptions. Such constructs in turn affect and influence attitudes held by individual key stakeholders.

The nature of this phenomenological study called for a qualitative inquiry. In order to curtail my own perceptions that might be associated with the phenomenon of perceptions held by key stakeholders, a rigorous inductive data analysis process was used. While I did adhere to a structured format, some of my own preconceptions did surface. For example, I was not surprised when the various key stakeholders stated that the student had previously been suspended or even expelled. This inquiry used a purposeful sampling strategy, seeking voluntary participation of students identified as ED and their parent as members of the study's primary objective. Attempts to recruit voluntary participation of the primary key stakeholders were made until data saturation became evident. A purposeful sampling strategy was also used to identify district representatives and school based administrators as members of the study's secondary objective. It had been predetermined that five school administrators and five district representatives would be asked to participate who knew the students who had been expelled and fortunately each

of these key stakeholders provided their consent to participate. The decision to select five district representatives and five school administrators was based on the fact that there were five school administrators employed at the selected high school and therefore it made sense to also select five district representatives for the study.

Two audio taped, semi-structured, face-to face interviews were attempted with each participant. Each of the key stakeholders participated voluntarily and provided their consent to be audio taped. Each participant was asked a prearranged set of open-ended questions during interviews, allowing each individual to reflect and explore his/her experiences of the expulsion process. Each of the 24 key stakeholders who participated in the first interview phase responded to each interview question, however, five key stakeholders withdrew from the study prior to completing the second phase of the interview process. The second phase of the interview process provided participants an opportunity to clarify and add to their first interview session responses. Upon completion of all interviews, the transcribed audio tapes yielded 87 typed pages of text. The emphasis in the study was to understand the overall text of our conversations and the emergence of key stakeholder perceptions in the context of their lives (Rubin & Rubin, 1995).

Data were coded using a qualitative text analysis approach that included a constant comparative method to analyze the data. A second coder and I reached an inter-rater agreement of 85% that enhanced the trustworthiness of the process. The second coder was an independent rater who has completed her doctoral degree in Educational Leadership and has conducted her own qualitative research in the past. Having an experienced individual with an earned doctorate as my second coder strengthens the

reliability and validity of the coding process. We were able to dialogue and discuss how the codes were defined.

Participants were also provided the opportunity to review their responses. The participants' review of their recorded responses verified that the data was being displayed and interpreted sufficiently. The time period between the expulsion meeting and interviews varied for the groups of key stakeholders. The least amount of time that lapsed between the expulsion meeting and interviews was just under two months. The most time that lapsed between the expulsion meeting and interview session was approximately eight months. Due to the fact that people sometimes forget details as the memory of an incident fades with the passage of time, I felt it was especially important to have the participants review their responses. Not only did I find this an honored experience to be entrusted with a momentary glimpse into the lived experiences of key stakeholders, but it was hoped, in return that it offered a venue for stakeholders to eloquently and anonymously give voice to their perceptions. Due to the fact that someone listened to them, several key stakeholders did state that they felt like their perspective was given some merit. By analyzing the multiple realities and experiences, new knowledge has been added to the literature, allowing educators and the community at large to better understand the perceptions the four groups of key stakeholders hold of the expulsion process for students identified as ED.

A visual display of the iterative process used in this study is illustrated below (see Table 8 and Table 9). The basic idea behind the iterative process was to develop a system where one could visually observe the iterations of analysis used during the study. Starting at the bottom of each table are the codes, the middle second includes the themes and at

the top of the table are the research questions. As Creswell (2002) states, there is not one

single or correct way to analysis qualitative data. The purpose of this process is to present

the reader with the analytical process, the codes, the salient themes, recurring language

and patterns that emerged for each of the key stakeholders. Developing the system

allowed me to understand and use the system during each phase or iteration as it evolved

during the study. The constant comparative method assisted in identifying the coding,

patterns and themes. I was able to monitor and tailor the process and ultimately process a

final quality product. The value of the triangulation of data became more apparent as the

iterative process was followed.

Table 8: Iterative Process for Primary Key Stakeholders

| Research Question 1A | Research Question 1B |
|---|---|
| What are the perceptions of students with an Emotional Disturbance? | What are the perceptions of parents? |
| Themes | Themes |
| A. Dislike School | A. Frustration |
| B. History of School Problems | B. Repeated Discipline Problems |
| C. Zero Tolerance Trap | C. Guilt |
| D. Confusion | D. Outnumbered by School Personnel |
| E. Expulsion Impact on Student Lives | E. Powerless |
| Codes | Codes |
| A. Retention | A. Retention |
| A. School Experience | A. Chronic Problems at Home |
| A. Academic Grades | A. Lack of Communication with Child |

| | |
|---|---|
| B. ISS (in-school suspension) | A. Lack of Communication with School |
| B. OSS (out of school suspension) | B. In-School Suspension |
| B. Saturday School | B. Out of School Suspension |
| B. Prior Expulsion | B. Saturday School |
| C. Drugs | B. Prior Expulsion |
| C. Alcohol | C. Problems in Family and/or |
| C. Weapon | Neighborhood |
| C. Bomb Ingredients | C. Single/Divorced Parent |
| D. Lack Understanding of School Rules | C. Born Drug Addicted |
| D. Unable to Control Behavior | D. Too Many People at Meeting |
| E. Attend Different School | D. Felt Attacked |
| E. School Drop Out | D. Unfamiliar People |
| E. Legal System | E. Unclear Procedures |
| | E. Distrust of System |
| | E. Disagree with Outcome |
| | E. Lack of Knowledge |

Table Note: To be read from bottom up

Table 9: Iterative Process for Secondary Key Stakeholders

| Research Question 2A | Research Question 2B |
|---|---|
| What are the perceptions of district representatives? | What are the perceptions of school administrators? |
| Themes | Themes |
| A. Student Discipline History | A. Consumed by Discipline |

| | |
|---|---|
| B. Meeting Responsibilities | B. Zero Tolerance Enforcement |
| C. Experience with Expulsions | C. Expulsion Meeting Responsibilities |
| D. Empowerment | D. Training |
| | E. Concern for Safety |

Table Note: To be read from bottom up

Summary of Findings

The summary of findings verbalizes participants' lived experiences of expulsions and how those experiences differ. From the analysis of data, the principal findings were that the primary and secondary key stakeholders need to work on bridging the communication gap that exists primarily between their knowledge, training and the procedures used during an expulsion as evidenced in the issues that surfaced during this study. One possibility is for school districts to develop student discipline handbooks that are written using language that is more community friendly for the families they serve. School districts do currently distribute student discipline handbooks to each student but the included legal jargon is not always easily understood by all parents and students.

The following insights constitute my aggregate sense of the key stakeholder's perceptions based on the italicized themes shown below that emerged. The perceptions held by the key stakeholders were of their expulsion experiences. Some of the themes overlap and are applicable for different key stakeholders which further supports that the key stakeholders do not live in isolation from each other but rather are part of a system. Additionally, the interview questions were slightly different for the different key stakeholders because, for example, the primary key stakeholders could share their

personal school experience while the secondary key stakeholders could only share their professional awareness of the student's school experience.

1.  *Student Dislike School:* All but one of the students had a history of academic difficulties and emotional problems. Several of the students admitted they enjoyed coming to school to socialize but overall had not enjoyed their school experience. Students disliked school and earned lower grades, made less academic progress, and experienced more disciplinary actions than students in other disability categories (Anderson, Kutash, & Duchnowski, 2001; Bradley, Henderson, & Monfore, 2004; Wagner et al., 2003). This issue naturally emerged for the primary key stakeholders and not for the secondary key stakeholders.

2. *Student History of School Problems and Parent Repeated Discipline Problems*: All but one of the students had been suspended multiple times before. Several of the students had also been expelled before this expulsion. The one student who did not have a history of discipline problems at school did have a severe and extensive psychiatric problem that had not previously surfaced at school. This one student was an exception and the other key stakeholders who attended his expulsion meeting said they suspected he was able to conceal his emotional disturbance from school personnel because he was also identified as a gifted student. Supporting previous research (Kaplan, 2005; Lyons 2003; Skiba 1997) demonstrates that students with emotional problems tend to have a repeated history of school problems including previous suspensions and expulsions. Students in this study had numerous previous in-school and out-of school suspensions.

3. *Student Zero Tolerance Trap*: Most of the students were expelled because their behavior was considered as an infraction that fell under the school district's zero

tolerance policy. Students in the study were often confused by the outcome and continued to face serious educational, emotional and legal problems. Skiba and Noam (2002) assert zero tolerance policies that rely solely on expelling students do not remedy student misbehavior. The primary key stakeholders tended to explain the expellable behavior as an incident that was not completely the student's fault. For example, one parent said that the student did have drugs but he was only holding the drugs for someone else and did not use drugs himself.  The secondary key stakeholders first and foremost viewed the possession of drugs and weapons as a violation of the zero tolerance policy.

   4. *Student Confusion*: The students often stated that they lacked an understanding of the school rules and their manifestation determination meetings determined they were often unable to control their behavior. The students admitted they did not feel as though they deserved to be expelled based on the incident the school said was expellable. Basically, they did not feel the punishment fit the crime and were confused as to why they had to attend an alternative school.

   5. *Expulsion Impact on Student Lives*: The students in this study were attending an alternative site other than their neighborhood public school. These sites included an alternative learning center, homebound education and a separate therapeutic day school. A few of the students said they considered dropping out of school; this was especially true for the students repeating ninth grade who had earned no credits toward graduation. Several of the students were also involved with the legal system which has had a negative impact on their lives as well.

   6. *Parent Frustration*: Parents were frustrated by the chronic and repeated problems they had with their child. Most parents said the problems were often evident at home. The

parents also said they were frustrated with their lack of communication with their child and with the poor communication they had with the school. Parents said they were particularly frustrated when they learned at the expulsion meeting that problems at school had been on-going and they were not aware of the problems.

7. *Parent Guilt*: Parents admitted some guilt during the interviews and said they blamed themselves for their child's problems at school. Most of the parents were raising the child by themselves and several of the parents admitted the child was born drug addicted. All of the parents said they were currently drug free but felt extreme guilt for their past behavior and any damage it might have caused the child. The parents who previously abused drugs or alcohol said they were substance abuse free but still struggled to make ends meet as single parents.

8. *Parent Outnumbered by School Personnel*: The parents often stated that they were in a room full of strangers who they could not name because they did not remember the role of each person much less the person's name. Parents perceived they were outnumbered and attacked by a group of people and they said this feeling appeared as soon as they walked into the meeting room.

9. *Parents Powerless*:  The parents perceived themselves as powerless during the expulsion meeting. Most of the parents did not understand the procedures, were unfamiliar with the expulsion forms, and were unfamiliar with the legal verbiage used during the expulsion meeting. This finding is similar to Van Acker, Boreson and Gable's (2005) finding that parents were often intimidated by the expulsion process. Although the parents did not trust the school system they felt powerless and unable to prevent their child from being expelled.

10. *District Representative Student Discipline History*: District representatives were prepared for the expulsion meeting and were able to review the audit, cumulative and discipline records before the meeting. They also reviewed these records at the meeting so the team could determine the continued appropriate placement for the student.

11. *District Representative Meeting Responsibilities*: Responses revealed that the school does an excellent job of inviting appropriate attendees to expulsion meetings but many students do not attend their own meetings. Due to the limited student attendance at these meetings, students were mostly uninformed of what transpired at the meeting. Each student did admit to being aware of the meeting even though some students were uninformed. The secondary key stakeholders knew each other at the meeting and felt prepared for the meeting.

12. *District Representative Experience with Expulsion*: The district representatives were well versed in the expulsion procedures. They could recite the words on the expulsion forms verbatim. Each of these individuals had many years of experience in the school system in a professional role, either as an educator and/or administrator.

13. *District Representative Empowerment*: The primary key stakeholders shared how they were unsettled and ill at ease at the expulsion meeting while the secondary key stakeholders expressed their confidence in their training and procedures at the expulsion meeting. Although school board employees profess to individualize meetings and placement decisions, roughly half of the students did not attend the meeting and those that did attend stated they did not understand the procedures or process followed during their expulsion.

14. *School Administrator Consumed by Discipline*: The administrators each said they were familiar with the student being expelled due to past discipline problems resulting in the student being suspended or some other discipline consequence. One administrator was unfamiliar with the student being discussed prior to the expulsion meeting because he had not been in trouble previously at school. The administrators all said that discipline took up a large part of their job responsibilities although most of the discipline problems were caused by a small number of students. Information related to the student's previous and current discipline supports previous research (Kaplan, 2005; Lyons 2003; Skiba 1997), demonstrating that male students with emotional problems tend to have a history of school problems which will continue rather than improve.

15. *School Administrator Zero Tolerance Enforcement*:  The administrators followed the district zero tolerance policy when considering whether an incident would be considered an expellable incident. The administrators each said they do not tolerate drugs or weapons on the school campus. This study and related studies by Moses (2001), Keleher (2000), and Phi Delta Kappan (1999) all suggest that expulsion under zero tolerance policies further segregate students who are already at risk for school failure.

16. *School Administrator Expulsion Meeting Responsibilities*: The school administrators were responsible for reporting the expellable incident to the school district office and for inviting all members of the expulsion committee to the meeting. The results of the study showed that the administrators called the parents immediately and promptly notified the appropriate meeting participants. Additionally, each administrator was responsible for appropriate completion of all the forms in the expulsion packet.

17. *School Administrator Training*: This theme pertaining to the secondary key stakeholders exposed that these participants have received extensive district and state level in-service training. School board employees (secondary key stakeholders) are well trained in expulsion procedures while families (primary key stakeholders) lack knowledge as demonstrated in the themes above and an uneven playing field became an obvious finding during the interviews. This study is consistent with the Florida DOE (2005) finding that school districts throughout Florida offer state in-service training to district representatives and school administrators related to expulsion procedures as new laws and procedures are developed (Florida Department of Education, 2005).

18. *School Administrator Concern for Safety*: All of the students were recommended for a placement other than their neighborhood school. Surprisingly, a few of the students and parents claimed to prefer the current placement that resulted from the expulsion decision to the previous placement. The reason provided was that the new educational placement was in a smaller setting which offered either more structure or more individual attention. In contrast, it was not a surprising finding that the secondary key stakeholders perceived the decision to remove the student from the neighborhood high school improved the safety for the remaining students at the high school. The finding that the students were a safety risk which influenced the resulting placement decision supported previous research (Wiemer, 2002; Smith 2005) substantiating the most frequently mentioned changes occurring for students facing expulsion were the implementation of interim alternative educational placements.

Discussion of the Findings

I found that much of the data collected in this study support existing literature. In fact through the themes dislike school, frustration and review of discipline history it is observable that most students had failing grades and a history of problems at school and home. Several of the students only had one academic credit and were repeating the ninth grade. The students and parents were able to discuss personal issues related to the student's school background but this was not true for the secondary key stakeholders. The secondary key stakeholders were able to respond to questions about the student's background by looking at records and transcripts. Therefore, the secondary key stakeholder responses were viewed predominately as professional responses rather than as personal responses when it came to discussing the student's background.

Students receiving special education services under the ED label not only perform below their general education peers, but also earn lower grades, make less academic progress, and experience more disciplinary actions than students in other disability categories (Anderson, Kutash, & Duchnowski, 2001; Bradley, Henderson, & Monfore, 2004; Wagner et al., 2003). According to Price (2002), students with low school grades are the most likely students to be suspended or expelled. Students in this study had few or no academic credits and several of the students said they had thought about dropping out of school.

Issues that surfaced relating to the student's previous discipline and supporting previous research (Kaplan, 2005; Lyons 2003; Skiba 1997) demonstrated that students with emotional problems tend to have a repeated history of school problems including previous suspensions and expulsions. Each student in this study had numerous previous

in-school and out-of school suspensions. The consequences of these high rates of disciplinary consequences for these students become more likely for them than their peers to experience unemployment, be involved in motor vehicle accidents, and require mental health services (Wagner et al., 2003; Walker, Ramsey, & Gresham, 2004). These consequences are too severe to overlook and often create a lifetime cycle of problems.

Expellable incidents cited as reasons for the expulsions support existing literature that reports common expellable incidents are fighting, weapons, or drugs. The NLTS2 (National Longitudinal Transition Study 2) has stated that those students entering high school are more likely to fight with other students than students in any other grade level. Findings from the U.S. Departments of Education and Justice (2000) support the finding that frequently reported expellable incidents include bringing a weapon to school, possession of drugs and fighting.

Issues related to the expulsion meeting support existing literature. Parents and/or guardians must be informed immediately when their child is being considered for expulsion and have the opportunity to attend a manifestation determination meeting and hearing (U.S. Department of Education, 2000). All of the parents/guardians said they were contacted immediately and all of the school administrators said they contacted the parent immediately. Purposefully selecting participants involved in the same expulsion hearing further demonstrated where the communication gaps existed when all key stakeholders attended the same meeting.

Training or knowledge held by the key stakeholders in this study supports existing literature that most students with an emotional disturbance who find themselves subject to disciplinary action under the provisions of the Florida Education Code, (Florida

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Department of Education, 2006), which may involve expulsion are unprepared for the steps that follow the action taken by the governing board of their school district. Students and parents, who often lack knowledge of the expulsion process, feel intimidated by the process (Van Acker, Boreson, & Gable, March 2005). For most, this is their first exposure to the expulsion process and for those key stakeholders in this study who had previous exposure claimed their actual knowledge of the steps taken during the meeting was still quite vague.

Additionally when the key stakeholders were asked about their training and experience with expulsion it brought to light the perceived confidence the secondary key stakeholders have of the training they have received regarding expulsions. School districts throughout Florida offer state in-service training to district representatives and school administrators and these school board employees are able to attend on-going state and district level in-service training related to expulsion procedures as new laws and procedures are developed (Florida Department of Education, 2005).

The primary key stakeholders struggled with the procedures and were not familiar with the language used during the expulsion meeting. Schools have procedures they follow when a meeting is convened and changing a student's placement is determined to be within the guidelines of the Education Code for expulsion (Florida Department of Education, 2006). Each school is familiar with the forms used during expulsions and the procedures which are outlined in district developed discipline manuals. Additionally, since this study looked at students with Emotional Disturbance (ED), it is not surprising the key stakeholders who understood questions pertaining to the expulsion procedures said the incident was a manifestation of the disability. This supports Kaplan's (2005)

assertion that often the inappropriate behavior exhibited by students with ED is determined to be a manifestation of the student's disability.

Findings of this study revealed that the resulting placement decision by the team supported previous research (Wiemer, 2002) substantiating the most frequently mentioned changes occurring for special education students facing expulsion were the implementation of interim alternative educational placements. The current study parallels Smith's (2005) findings that students with ED are often educated at an alternative school away from their neighborhood public school after being considered for an expulsion. Existing research provides sufficient evidence that expulsions decrease academic opportunities by often removing students from their neighborhood public school and accelerate the dropout process (Gonzalez, 2002; Moses, 2001; Skiba, 2000; Studley, 2002). Once again we are witnessing the disproportionate removal of students with emotional problems from their public school.

Several of the key stakeholders mentioned the possibility that the student may be sent to a juvenile justice facility or program which is consistent with previous research indicating that students who are expelled tend to be involved with the juvenile justice system at a higher rate than their peers who have not been expelled. A study conducted by the Advancement Project (2005) documented multiple examples in the literature of increased numbers of students entering the juvenile justice system upon being expelled from school. Although some students are able to re-enter their neighborhood school and continue to progress toward high school graduation requirements, it is evident throughout the literature that for many students an expulsion hinders them from making further academic progress. Most of the students in this study expressed a desire to finish high

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school but unfortunately they feel their attempts to gain a diploma are thwarted by unfeeling administrators and teachers which is consistent with the findings from a study conducted by Piechura (1993).

Overall the findings of this study affirm what other research studies indicate; specifically that expulsion negatively impacts students with ED. Moreover, the finding in this study and related studies by Moses (2001), Keleher (2000), and Curwin and Mendler (1999) all suggest that expulsion under zero tolerance policies further segregates students who are already at risk for school failure.

As a qualitative study, the intent is not to generalize findings, but rather to contribute to the literature a richer, more in-depth understanding of the findings. Implicit within this research approach is a post-positivistic lens where truth is presented from the participants' perspective. This methodology was particularly appropriate for this study because historically most studies examining the expulsion of students identified as ED are quantitative studies focusing on statistical summaries of demographic variables. Previous research often did not allow multiple key stakeholders to express their perspectives of the expulsion experience. This study attempted to add a more in-depth authentic view of how various groups of key stakeholders view an expulsion.

Implications for Future Practice and Research

The results of this study further demonstrate some of the problems and some of the perceived benefits expulsions create. Each of the key stakeholder perceptions is particularly meaningful since they relate to the same expulsion meeting and their perceptions are all of the same unique and individual expellable incident and experience. This study has contributed to the aforementioned gap by allowing perceptions of key

stakeholders to emerge where the student shared his own experience as well as by having the other key stakeholders who were involved with this individual student share their perception of the same expulsion meeting. The results illuminate the rich and personal perceptions of each participant. The current study is especially valuable due to the qualitative richness it adds to this body of literature.

Recognizing the gaps in information between the four groups of key stakeholders interviewed will assist and challenge school districts to improve discipline procedures and options for their students identified as ED. For example to build rapport the secondary key stakeholders should carefully introduce each participant at the meeting since parents often said they felt outnumbered by the school personnel. Another example would be for the secondary key stakeholders to ask if anyone has a question or does not understand a word or item on a form. By giving each key stakeholder's perception a voice and showing how their perceptions overlap, the study demonstrates where gaps in communication exist and where improvements are needed for supporting high school ninth grade students with ED. The qualitative approach used may elucidate patterns that will influence policy or program changes and ultimately reduce expulsion rates for students with an emotional disturbance.

Researchers and educators should continue to be aware of the disproportionate number of African American male students with ED who are expelled. Although 4 out of 7 students who participated in the study were African American, it should be noted that many of the students expelled in the study's school district are not African American. Why more African American students volunteered to participate in this study than any other group of students is unclear to the researcher. Students of different ethnic and racial

backgrounds were contacted to request their participation in the study and for reasons unknown the African American students volunteered while other students did not volunteer. Since no incentives were offered to participate and there was no threat for not participating, I can only assume that the racial background of the participants was random although noticeably disproportionate. The fact that all of the participants were male is not surprising since 14 of the 18 students who met the study's eligibility criteria for participation were male. Although it is not surprising that males participated in the study it is clear that males are disproportionately expelled.

Future research is needed to address several concerns. One recommendation would be to include other high schools (i.e., larger high school population or different demographics) to determine different and/or similar patterns. Another recommendation is to include focus groups at an alternative site for expelled students and include students with ED and students not identified as ED. I would also recommend future research that includes focus groups of various key stakeholders at different schools to strategize regarding the identified themes. As research on the expulsion process continues to unfold and legislation evolves, developing the appropriate balance between competing rights of multiple stakeholders continues to be a challenge that can best be met through careful consideration of all involved.

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Appendices

Appendix A: The 2006 Florida Statutes District School Board Duties

**1006.07  District school board duties relating to student discipline and school safety.**--The district school board shall provide for the proper accounting for all students, for the attendance and control of students at school, and for proper attention to health, safety, and other matters relating to the welfare of students, including:

(1)  CONTROL OF STUDENTS.--

(a)  Adopt rules for the control, discipline, in-school suspension, suspension, and expulsion of students and decide all cases recommended for expulsion. Suspension hearings are exempted from the provisions of chapter 120. Expulsion hearings shall be governed by ss. 120.569 and 120.57(2) and are exempt from s. 286.011. However, the student's parent must be given notice of the provisions of s. 286.011 and may elect to have the hearing held in compliance with that section. The district school board may prohibit the use of corporal punishment, if the district school board adopts or has adopted a written program of alternative control or discipline.

(b)  Require each student at the time of initial registration for school in the school district to note previous school expulsions, arrests resulting in a charge, and juvenile justice actions the student has had, and have the authority as the district school board of a receiving school district to honor the final order of expulsion or dismissal of a student by any in-state or out-of-state public district school board or private school, or lab school, for an act which would have been grounds for expulsion according to the receiving district school board's code of student conduct, in accordance with the following procedures:

1.  A final order of expulsion shall be recorded in the records of the receiving school district.

2.  The expelled student applying for admission to the receiving school district shall be advised of the final order of expulsion.

3.  The district school superintendent of the receiving school district may recommend to the district school board that the final order of expulsion be waived and the student be admitted to the school district, or that the final order of expulsion be honored and the student not be admitted to the school district. If the student is admitted by the district school board, with or without the recommendation of the district school superintendent, the student may be placed in an appropriate educational program at the direction of the district school board.

(2)  CODE OF STUDENT CONDUCT.--Adopt a code of student conduct for elementary schools and a code of student conduct for middle and high schools and distribute the appropriate code to all teachers, school personnel, students, and parents, at the beginning of every school year. Each code shall be organized and written in language that is understandable to students and parents and shall be discussed at the

beginning of every school year in student classes, school advisory council meetings, and parent and teacher association or organization meetings. Each code shall be based on the rules governing student conduct and discipline adopted by the district school board and shall be made available in the student handbook or similar publication. Each code shall include, but is not limited to:

(a)  Consistent policies and specific grounds for disciplinary action, including in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, expulsion, and any disciplinary action that may be imposed for the possession or use of alcohol on school property or while attending a school function or for the illegal use, sale, or possession of controlled substances as defined in chapter 893.

(b)  Procedures to be followed for acts requiring discipline, including corporal punishment.

(c)  An explanation of the responsibilities and rights of students with regard to attendance, respect for persons and property, knowledge and observation of rules of conduct, the right to learn, free speech and student publications, assembly, privacy, and participation in school programs and activities.

(d)  Notice that illegal use, possession, or sale of controlled substances, as defined in chapter 893, by any student while the student is upon school property or in attendance at a school function is grounds for disciplinary action by the school and may also result in criminal penalties being imposed.

(e)  Notice that use of a wireless communications device includes the possibility of the imposition of disciplinary action by the school or criminal penalties if the device is used in a criminal act. A student may possess a wireless communications device while the student is on school property or in attendance at a school function. Each district school board shall adopt rules governing the use of a wireless communications device by a student while the student is on school property or in attendance at a school function.

(f)  Notice that the possession of a firearm or weapon as defined in chapter 790 by any student while the student is on school property or in attendance at a school function is grounds for disciplinary action and may also result in criminal prosecution.

(g)  Notice that violence against any district school board personnel by a student is grounds for in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, expulsion, or imposition of other disciplinary action by the school and may also result in criminal penalties being imposed.

(h)  Notice that violation of district school board transportation policies, including disruptive behavior on a school bus or at a school bus stop, by a student is grounds for suspension of the student's privilege of riding on a school bus and may be grounds for disciplinary action by the school and may also result in criminal penalties being imposed.

(i)  Notice that violation of the district school board's sexual harassment policy by a student is grounds for in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, expulsion, or imposition of other disciplinary action by the school and may also result in criminal penalties being imposed.

(j)  Policies to be followed for the assignment of violent or disruptive students to an alternative educational program.

(k)  Notice that any student who is determined to have brought a firearm or weapon, as defined in chapter 790, to school, to any school function, or onto any school-sponsored transportation, or to have possessed a firearm at school, will be expelled, with or without continuing educational services, from the student's regular school for a period of not less than 1 full year and referred to the criminal justice or juvenile justice system. District school boards may assign the student to a disciplinary program or second chance school for the purpose of continuing educational services during the period of expulsion. District school superintendents may consider the 1-year expulsion requirement on a case-by-case basis and request the district school board to modify the requirement by assigning the student to a disciplinary program or second chance school if the request for modification is in writing and it is determined to be in the best interest of the student and the school system.

(l)  Notice that any student who is determined to have made a threat or false report, as defined by ss. 790.162 and 790.163, respectively, involving school or school personnel's property, school transportation, or a school-sponsored activity will be expelled, with or without continuing educational services, from the student's regular school for a period of not less than 1 full year and referred for criminal prosecution. District school boards may assign the student to a disciplinary program or second chance school for the purpose of continuing educational services during the period of expulsion. District school superintendents may consider the 1-year expulsion requirement on a case-by-case basis and request the district school board to modify the requirement by assigning the student to a disciplinary program or second chance school if it is determined to be in the best interest of the student and the school system.

(3)  STUDENT CRIME WATCH PROGRAM.--By resolution of the district school board, implement a student crime watch program to promote responsibility among students and to assist in the control of criminal behavior within the schools.

(4)  EMERGENCY DRILLS; EMERGENCY PROCEDURES.--

(a)  Formulate and prescribe policies and procedures for emergency drills and for actual emergencies, including, but not limited to, fires, natural disasters, and bomb threats, for all the public schools of the district which comprise grades K-12. District school board policies shall include commonly used alarm system responses for specific types of emergencies and verification by each school that drills have been provided as required by law and fire protection codes.

(b)  The district school board shall establish model emergency management and emergency preparedness procedures for the following life-threatening emergencies:

1.  Weapon-use and hostage situations.

2.  Hazardous materials or toxic chemical spills.

3.  Weather emergencies, including hurricanes, tornadoes, and severe storms.

4.  Exposure as a result of a manmade emergency.

(5)  EDUCATIONAL SERVICES IN DETENTION FACILITIES.--Offer educational services to minors who have not graduated from high school and eligible students with disabilities under the age of 22 who have not graduated with a standard diploma or its equivalent who are detained in a county or municipal detention facility as defined in s. 951.23. These educational services shall be based upon the estimated length of time the student will be in the facility and the student's current level of functioning. District school superintendents or their designees shall be notified by the county sheriff or chief correctional officer, or his or her designee, upon the assignment of a student under the age of 21 to the facility. A cooperative agreement with the district school board and applicable law enforcement units shall be developed to address the notification requirement and the provision of educational services to these students.

(6)  SAFETY AND SECURITY BEST PRACTICES.--Use the Safety and Security Best Practices developed by the Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability to conduct a self-assessment of the school districts' current safety and security practices. Based on these self-assessment findings, the district school superintendent shall provide recommendations to the district school board which identify strategies and activities that the district school board should implement in order to improve school safety and security. Annually each district school board must receive the self-assessment results at a publicly noticed district school board meeting to provide the public an opportunity to hear the district school board members discuss and take action on the report findings. Each district school superintendent shall report the self-assessment results and school board action to the commissioner within 30 days after the district school board meeting.

**History.**--s. 277, ch. 2002-387; s. 1, ch. 2004-272.

Appendix B: The 2006 Florida Statutes Policy for Zero Tolerance

**1006.13  Policy of zero tolerance for crime and victimization.**--

(1)  Each district school board shall adopt a policy of zero tolerance for:

(a)  Crime and substance abuse, including the reporting of delinquent acts and crimes occurring whenever and wherever students are under the jurisdiction of the district school board.

(b)  Victimization of students, including taking all steps necessary to protect the victim of any violent crime from any further victimization.

(2)  The zero tolerance policy shall require students found to have committed one of the following offenses to be expelled, with or without continuing educational services, from the student's regular school for a period of not less than 1 full year, and to be referred to the criminal justice or juvenile justice system.

(a)  Bringing a firearm or weapon, as defined in chapter 790, to school, to any school function, or onto any school-sponsored transportation or possessing a firearm at school.

(b)  Making a threat or false report, as defined by ss. 790.162 and 790.163, respectively, involving school or school personnel's property, school transportation, or a school-sponsored activity.

District school boards may assign the student to a disciplinary program for the purpose of continuing educational services during the period of expulsion. District school superintendents may consider the 1-year expulsion requirement on a case-by-case basis and request the district school board to modify the requirement by assigning the student to a disciplinary program or second chance school if the request for modification is in writing and it is determined to be in the best interest of the student and the school system. If a student committing any of the offenses in this subsection is a student with a disability, the district school board shall comply with applicable State Board of Education rules.

(3)  Each district school board shall enter into agreements with the county sheriff's office and local police department specifying guidelines for ensuring that felonies and violent misdemeanors, whether committed by a student or adult, and delinquent acts that would be felonies or violent misdemeanors if committed by an adult, are reported to law enforcement. Each district school board shall adopt a cooperative agreement, pursuant to s. 1003.52(13) with the Department of Juvenile Justice, that specifies guidelines for ensuring that all no contact orders entered by the court are reported and enforced and that all steps necessary are taken to protect the victim of any such crime. Such agreements shall include the role of school resource officers, if applicable, in handling reported incidents, special circumstances in which school officials may handle incidents without filing a report to law enforcement, and a

procedure for ensuring that school personnel properly report appropriate delinquent acts and crimes. The school principal shall be responsible for ensuring that all school personnel are properly informed as to their responsibilities regarding crime reporting, that appropriate delinquent acts and crimes are properly reported, and that actions taken in cases with special circumstances are properly taken and documented.

(4)  Notwithstanding any other provision of law, each district school board shall adopt rules providing that any student found to have committed a violation of s. 784.081(1), (2), or (3) shall be expelled or placed in an alternative school setting or other program, as appropriate. Upon being charged with the offense, the student shall be removed from the classroom immediately and placed in an alternative school setting pending disposition.

(5)(a)  Notwithstanding any provision of law prohibiting the disclosure of the identity of a minor, whenever any student who is attending public school is adjudicated guilty of or delinquent for, or is found to have committed, regardless of whether adjudication is withheld, or pleads guilty or nolo contendere to, a felony violation of:

1.  Chapter 782, relating to homicide;

2.  Chapter 784, relating to assault, battery, and culpable negligence;

3.  Chapter 787, relating to kidnapping, false imprisonment, luring or enticing a child, and custody offenses;

4.  Chapter 794, relating to sexual battery;

5.  Chapter 800, relating to lewdness and indecent exposure;

6.  Chapter 827, relating to abuse of children;

7.  Section 812.13, relating to robbery;

8.  Section 812.131, relating to robbery by sudden snatching;

9.  Section 812.133, relating to carjacking; or

10.  Section 812.135, relating to home-invasion robbery,

and, before or at the time of such adjudication, withholding of adjudication, or plea, the offender was attending a school attended by the victim or a sibling of the victim of the offense, the Department of Juvenile Justice shall notify the appropriate district school board of the adjudication or plea, the requirements of this paragraph, and whether the offender is prohibited from attending that school or riding on a school bus whenever the victim or a sibling of the victim is attending the same school or riding on the same school bus, except as provided pursuant to a written disposition order under s. 985.455(2). Upon receipt of such notice, the district school board shall take appropriate action to effectuate the provisions of paragraph (b).

(b)  Any offender described in paragraph (a), who is not exempted as provided in paragraph (a), shall not attend any school attended by the victim or a sibling of the victim of the offense or ride on a school bus on which the victim or a sibling of the victim is riding. The offender shall be permitted by the district school board to attend

another school within the district in which the offender resides, provided the other school is not attended by the victim or sibling of the victim of the offense; or the offender may be permitted by another district school board to attend a school in that district if the offender is unable to attend any school in the district in which the offender resides.

(c)  If the offender is unable to attend any other school in the district in which the offender resides and is prohibited from attending school in another school district, the district school board in the school district in which the offender resides shall take every reasonable precaution to keep the offender separated from the victim while on school grounds or on school transportation. The steps to be taken by a district school board to keep the offender separated from the victim shall include, but are not limited to, in-school suspension of the offender and the scheduling of classes, lunch, or other school activities of the victim and the offender so as not to coincide.

(d)  The offender, or the parents of the offender if the offender is a juvenile, shall be responsible for arranging and paying for transportation associated with or required by the offender's attending another school or that would be required as a consequence of the prohibition against riding on a school bus on which the victim or a sibling of the victim is riding. However, the offender or the parents of the offender shall not be charged for existing modes of transportation that can be used by the offender at no additional cost to the district school board.

**History.**--s. 283, ch. 2002-387; s. 129, ch. 2006-120.

Appendix C: Introductory Demographics and Interview Background Information

Demographic Data:

Male or Female? _____

African American, Hispanic, White or Other? _____

Exceptionality besides ED? _____

Demographic Questions:

1.  Interviewee title (student, parent, district representative, or school administrator)? _____

2.  Name of current school (if any)? _____

3. Name of school where expellable incident took place? _____

4. How long have you (or has your child) been at the school prior to the expulsion meeting? _____

5. Mailing address? _____

6.  Telephone? _____

7. Preferred method of communication (phone or mail)? _____

Appendix D: Interview Questions

*Student Interview Questions*

Opening Statement: I will ask you some questions about your expulsion.  If you do not recall some things or if something does or did not make sense then please say this is the case.  I am interested in your perceptions and want you to know that your answers are neither right nor wrong. You will not be identified in this study.

1.  What grade are you in?

2.  Where was the meeting held and who attended the meeting?

3.   What was your school experience like before this expulsion?

4.   Have you ever received other discipline consequences?

5.   Tell me about the specific events that led up to the expellable incident?

6.   Did you have any knowledge of the expulsion process before this expulsion?

7.  How did you find out that the incident would be considered an expellable one and

what was the incident?

8.  Tell me what happened and what was discussed at the expulsion hearing?

9.  Did you understand the procedures during the expulsion hearing?

10.  Do you recall attending a meeting where a team made a manifestation determination? If so, did it make sense to you whether this particular incident was a manifestation or not a manifestation?

11.  Were educational placement options discussed and if so what were the options?

12.  Did you feel that the decisions were unanimous or was there disagreement among the participants?

13.  Since this expulsion has anything changed for you?

*Parent Interview Questions*

Opening Statement: I will ask you some questions about your child's expulsion. If you do not recall some things or if something does or did not make sense then please say this is the case. I am interested in your perceptions and want you to know that your answers are neither right nor wrong. You will not be identified in this study.

1. What was your child's school experience like before this expulsion?

2. Where was the meeting held and who attended the meeting?

3. Has he/she ever received other discipline consequences?

4. Tell me about the events that led up to the expellable incident?

5. Did you have any knowledge of the expulsion process before this expulsion?

6. How did you find out that the incident would be considered an expellable one?

7. Tell me what happened and what was discussed at the expulsion hearing?

8. Did you understand the procedures during the expulsion hearing?

9. Did it make sense to you whether this particular incident was a manifestation of your child's disability or not a manifestation of his/her disability?

10. Were educational placement options discussed and if so what were the options?

11. Did you feel that the decisions were unanimous or was there disagreement among the participants?

*District Representative Interview Questions*

Opening Statement: I will ask you some background questions and then I will ask you some questions about a specific student. All identifiable information will be kept confidential.

1. How many years experience have you had attending expulsion hearings as a district representative?

2. Where was the meeting held and who attended the meeting?

3. Have you received training pertaining to expulsion of students with disabilities (i.e. state or district in-service)?

4.  Are you familiar with your school district procedures for conducting expulsion meetings for students who are emotionally disturbed (ED)?

5.  How did you become aware of the expulsion for the student we are discussing and what is your role at an expulsion meeting?

6.  Has this student previously been suspended or considered for expulsion?

7.  Why was this student considered for expulsion?

8.  Tell me what happened and what was discussed at the expulsion hearing?

9.  Describe the procedures used to determine if this particular incident was a manifestation of the student's disability or not a manifestation of his/her disability?

10. Were educational placement options discussed and if so what were the options?

11.  Did you feel that the decisions were unanimous or was there disagreement among the participants?

*Administrator Interview Questions*

Opening Statement: I will ask you some background questions and then I will ask you some questions about a specific student. All identifiable information will be kept confidential.

1.  How many years experience have you had attending expulsion hearings as a school administrator?

2.  Where was the meeting held and who attended the meeting?

3.  Have you received training pertaining to expulsion of students with disabilities (i.e. state or district in-service)?

4.  Are you familiar with your school district procedures for conducting expulsion meetings for students who are emotionally disturbed (ED)?

5.  Who must you invite to an expulsion meeting for a student identified as ED and how do you notice each of these individuals of the meeting?

6.  Has this student previously been suspended or considered for expulsion?

7.  Why was this student considered for expulsion?

8.  Tell me what happened and what was discussed at the expulsion hearing?

9.  Describe the procedures used to determine if this particular incident was a manifestation of the student's disability or not a manifestation of his/her disability?

10.  Were educational placement options discussed and if so what were the options?

11.  Did you feel that the decisions were unanimous or was there disagreement among the participants?

Appendix E: Checklist for Interviews

- Introductions
- Review and Sign Letters of Consent
- Review and Sign Permission for Audio Tape
- Overview of the Research Purpose
- Introductory Demographics and Interview Background Information Questions
- Interviews
- Key Artifacts
- Field Notes
- Audio Tapes

About the Author

Suzanne R. O'Neill received a B.A. in Elementary Education from the University of South Florida in 1990 and a M.A. in Special Education from the University of South Florida in 1992. She also met certification requirements for Educational Leadership while she attended USF. After the completion of her bachelor's degree she started teaching students with Specific Learning Disabilities until she entered the Ed.D. program at the University of South Florida.

While in the Ed.D. program at the University of South Florida she was a graduate teaching and research assistant. She co-presented a paper at the national annual convention for the Council for Exceptional Children. She also taught undergraduate and graduate level education courses during her graduate assistantship. After serving approximately two years as a university graduate assistant she returned to K-12 public education as an ESE Staffing Specialist.