THE TRANSITION FROM ELEMENTARY TO MIDDLE SCHOOL:

IMPLICATIONS FOR STUDENT DISCIPLINE

A Doctoral Thesis Presented to the
Faculty of the College of Education
University of Houston

In Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education
in Professional Leadership

by

Jimmy D. Nowell, Jr.

May 2013

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Dedication

For my parents, Jim and Sue Nowell

You always encouraged me to pursue aspirations I never thought I could achieve. You both saw my potential and sacrificed time, money, and years of your lives to support and help me realize my dreams.

You and dad were the best parents a child could have and I love you both more than you can ever imagine. For your love and patience with me during this long process of becoming… thank you. Who would have ever thought the kid who got the Olds trombone would be doing something like this…

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this quantitative study was to determine what effect transition had on discipline outcomes when fourth grade elementary students transition to middle school as fifth grade students. The study used descriptive statistics, statistical analysis, and variations of percentages to analyze discipline data from a class of fourth grade elementary students of a suburban Houston school district. The study showed a 72.36% increase in discipline events post transition when compared to the same class's discipline data the next year at a five/six middle school. Additionally, the study identified "repeated/persistent misbehavior", "class rules violation", and "excessive tardies" as the most frequent discipline issues that occurred during the students' fifth grade transition year. Lastly, this study identified physical, emotional, academic, and social development as key points for administrators to consider in improving future classes' discipline performance in the fifth grade, both pre and post transition.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The problem of student transitions has appeared throughout educational research for the last twenty years and continues as educators work to understand ways to improve student discipline and academic achievement. The need exists for educational research to foster an understanding of student support when experiencing transition across the grade levels. Thus, it is important that current research delve into the effects brought on by transition from one school to another – in this case, from elementary school to middle school. This study examined the effects such a transition has on student discipline outcomes when fourth grade elementary students transition to middle school as fifth grader students. The study analyzed discipline data from a class of fourth grader students within a feeder pattern of a suburban Houston school district whose elementary school campuses were Kindergarten through fourth grade.

The same cohort of fourth grade students' discipline data was compared to their discipline data the next year as fifth graders at a middle school campus with a fifth and sixth grade configuration. Additionally, the study identified the most frequent discipline issues that occurred during the students' fifth grade transition year. Lastly, this study aimed to identify key points for administrators to consider in improving future classes' discipline performance in the fifth grade, both pre and post transition.

Such a study is important in that it has inevitably lead to contributions in relation to the overall understanding of changes in student discipline as a result of the transition from elementary to middle school. Additionally, this study proved important in that it assisted in formulating guiding recommendations that proved useful in supporting

positive improvements to current discipline practices – particularly with regard to the aforementioned transition, which represents an extremely critical juncture in a young person's academic and personal life.

This study included discipline records of three elementary schools and one middle school using archival discipline data from a suburban Houston school district. This examination provided valuable insights for district leaders, especially in planning for methods of (a) how to address various types of discipline events, (b) improving their students' discipline choices, and (c) strengthening the transition process from elementary to middle school campuses.

Brief Review

Schools in today's educational climate should be positive places for cultivating a safe learning environment. Creating such an environment within the context of our day, however, can be a daunting task to achieve. This unfortunate reality is especially true when considering the myriad of – often interwoven – internal and external factors that contribute to affecting school climate at all ages and levels of education. Nevertheless, the climate of students' educational experience has a direct influence on determining whether they become adults who are life-long learners who can contribute to the stability of a democratic society (Smith, 2000).

One particular component of creating positive learning environments for students includes understanding how to prepare them for the inevitable transitions that will occur throughout their educational career. The theme of transition is part of the renewal process and opportunity for growth that facilitates one's own ability to develop adaptive skills (Akos, 2002). Only through such change and adaptation can one expect to become a

lifelong learner. It is how one deals with transition, or change, that determines his or her own happiness in the world; a world that itself perseveres and continuously changes with increased rapidity (Elias, 2002).

Much like adults who transition through life experiences, such as relocation for employment, family moves for personal and/or financial reasons, or changes in the composition of the immediate family unit altogether, children are subjected to natural, progressive milestones as they grow and develop into young adults. Part of this growth process involves at least one, and often, multiple transitions from one school context to the next, as dictated by the grade level configuration system within their respective school district.

In most instances, the move from elementary to middle school is the first major transition students experience in their lives and can be a very stressful time (Theriot & Dupper, 2010). Consequently, students often have many valid fears about what lies ahead of them as they anticipate making such a transition. One of the foremost concerns students have is how they will make friends or how they will feel around a new group of peers in their novel social realm (Theriot & Dupper, 2010). Other fears include not knowing the physical layout of a new building or understanding where to go, or not knowing an adult from whom they might ask for help. Students often are concerned about learning new rules or expectations from a set of adults with which they, as students have no familiarity. In addition, students can often experience high stress levels about unknown scheduling or daily routine (Mowen & Mowen, 2004).

Theriot and Dupper (2010) state that there are critical issues to consider when children transition from an elementary school to the middle school environment. Several

factors contribute to student stress in both anticipating and adapting to the daily functions of a middle school campus. Students who are transitioning to middle school from a self-contained elementary school configuration face challenges considering the extreme changes in terms of environment and personnel. There are other changes students must navigate through such as; greater numbers of students; the presence of new students from other feeder elementary schools; and greater numbers of faculty and staff (Akos, 2002).

Developing transitional programs that are effective in alleviating students' stress related to their shift from elementary to middle school also makes a positive impact on student attendance, discipline, achievement, and retention. Cauley and Jovanovich (2006) state that transition programs, which prove effective, are more valuable when targeting multiple activities involving students, parents, and teachers. It is also important to note that an effective transition program does not conclude at the beginning of each school year. Rather, a truly effective transitional program must continue throughout the fall and spring semesters in order to adequately monitor and assist students who are new to a campus. The specific activities of these ideal programs should also involve all stakeholders of the individual school. Furthermore, it is crucial that preparations for student transitions for future groups continue throughout the school year at multiple levels – for both the sending and receiving campus (Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006).

Rogers and Freiberg (1983) cite a 1975 study by Aspy and Roebuck where teachers trained in Rogers' facilitative teaching model established student-teacher interactions. These interaction models focused on teachers' acknowledgement of and response to student feeling, instructional dialogue inclusive of student generated ideas, and student and teacher discussion. Teachers also worked to develop positive

reinforcement and praise for student performance, instructional delivery of concepts more suited for individual students' frame of reference, as well as positive facial gestures, such as smiling, while interacting with students.

In a 1977 follow-up study cited by Rogers and Freiberg (1983), Aspy and Roebuck found that students exposed to teachers with higher student-lead facilitative classrooms improved student attendance. By comparison, students in lower student-lead facilitative classrooms missed an average of nine school days within an entire year, while classrooms with higher levels of student-lead facilitative interaction only missed an average of five days. Moreover, Aspy and Roebuck's 1977 study found that classrooms with increased levels of student facilitation performed higher on academic achievement measures – with fewer discipline incidents; with higher levels of student engagement; and, with more creative and critical thinking during class. In addition, Abraham Maslow (Maslow, 1962) placed love and belonging in the middle of his hierarchy of needs; thus, constituting love and belonging a requirement to be met prior to reaching levels of self-actualization (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

It is important that school administrators provide necessary support for positive transitions for elementary students entering middle school, taking into consideration the aforementioned research and theories on belonging. Such consideration, therefore, will serve as a catalyst for continued awareness as to how future transition plans can improve for all persons involved.

Statement of the Problem

Campus level transitions create myriad outcomes in terms of social, behavioral, and academic experiences for students who move from elementary school to middle

school. The problem this study answered is whether discipline infractions referred to the office change when fourth grade elementary school students transition to fifth grade in a middle school configuration. More specifically, this research addressed the following questions: (a) Do the number and type of discipline infractions referred to the office change when fourth grade elementary school students transition to fifth grade in a middle school configuration? (b) What discipline events occur most frequently? And, (c) what trends or issues can be identified for administrators to consider concerning discipline infractions that will improve future classes' discipline performance as fifth grade students?

Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this study was to determine what effect transition has on discipline outcomes when fourth grade elementary students transition to middle school as fifth grader students. The study analyzed discipline data from a class of fourth grader students within a feeder pattern of a suburban Houston school district whose elementary school campuses were Kindergarten through fourth grade.

The data was compared to the same class of students and their discipline data the next year as fifth graders at a middle school campus with a fifth and sixth grade configuration. Through data analysis, the study identified the most frequent discipline issues that occurred during the students' fourth to fifth grade transition year and identified key points for administrators to consider in improving future classes' discipline performance in the fifth grade (both pre- and post-transition).

This study made contributions to the overall understanding of changes in student discipline as a result of the transition from elementary to middle school, as well as

recommendations to support the positive improvement of discipline from the aforementioned transition. Using archival discipline data from a suburban Houston school district, this study included discipline records of three elementary schools and one middle school. It has provided valuable insight for district leaders as they plan for addressing types of discipline events, improving their students' discipline choices and strengthening the transition process from elementary to middle school campuses.

Research Questions

Considering the goal of gaining a greater understanding of how discipline changes for fourth grade students after the transition to middle school in the fifth grade, this study focused on the following questions:

1. Do the number and type of discipline infractions referred to the office change when fourth grade elementary school students transition to fifth grade in a middle school configuration?

2. What discipline events occur most frequently?

3. What trends or issues can be identified for administrators to consider concerning discipline infractions that will improve future classes' discipline performance as fifth grade students?

For clarification purposes in relation to question one, the word "change" refers to observable increases or decreases in frequency of behavior infractions between the two studied years.

Definition of Terms

Elementary School: This particular term will be referred to throughout the study in relation to the elementary school grade configuration that consists of Kindergarten through fourth grade levels.

Middle School: This term will be referred to throughout the study in relation to middle school grade configuration that consists of fifth grade and sixth grade.

Transition: This term will be referred to throughout the study as the process of students moving from one school campus to another in vertical progression as they are promoted from one grade to the next.

Climate: This term will be referred to throughout the study as the "prevailing attitudes, standards, or environmental conditions of a school, campus, or group" (Climate, 2012).

PEIMS: This term will be referred to throughout the study. In particular, PEIMS refers to the "Public Education Information Management System". The system is used on a statewide basis throughout Texas as a means for which the Texas Education Agency (TEA) gathers data about school districts with regard to organization, finances, staff, and students. TEA utilizes PEIMS in order to determine what data it needs from school districts in Texas four times a year. Each time, however, the required and requested information is slightly different.

Limitations

Due to the complexity and variety of external situations affecting the consistency of the student subject data during transition, there were several limitations that were considered regarding this study.

Firstly, any discovered correlation between increases or decreases in discipline data parameters cannot prove causation, or definitively explain reasons for any given change or choice in behavior or resultant discipline events. Such a consideration becomes even more salient when one takes into account that social relationships are in continuous flux during student development and growth, particularly between the fourth grade and fifth grade years. Hence, as a student's perceptions of his/her social relationships and environment change, so do his/her relationships with all things contained in that environment. Changes in social perceptions for each subject may or may not affect their choice in behavior; nonetheless, one must consider the possibility that social perception could affect the behavioral choice and resultant data between or during each grade from which data will be extracted. Moreover, one should consider inherent individual or group personality traits for the subjects in the study that might (or might not) influence behavioral choices pre- and post-transition.

Furthermore, other extraneous factors, such as socio-economic status and family stability, must be taken into consideration. Perhaps this is critically important when considering socio-economic status, which may have strong impact on whether or not students remain in the cohort from fourth to fifth grade. In particular, students with a lower socio-economic background may move in or out of the cohort during or between school years as parents seek improvement to the family's financial future. Similarly, this may also affect family stability and student behavior as fathers or mothers leave the family unit in search of stronger financial stability, indirectly affecting the stability of the family and, consequently, the emotional stability and behavioral choices of the child at home and in the educational environment. Other factors that may be specific drawbacks

are skewed discipline events or behavior choices made by subjects based on unstable, unique student – teacher relationships, unstable, unique student-administrator relationships, or possible errors in coding by administrators entering discipline data. It is also important to note that discipline infractions occurring during student travel on district school buses are subject to referral through the district's transportation department as opposed to the discipline officer, or administrator of the student's home campus.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

The primary purpose of this study was to determine what effect transition has on discipline outcomes when fourth grade elementary students transition to middle school as fifth grader students. The study analyzed discipline data from a class of fourth grader students within a feeder pattern of a suburban Houston school district whose elementary school campuses were Kindergarten through fourth grade. The same cohort of fourth grade students' discipline data was compared to their discipline data the next year as fifth graders at a middle school campus with a fifth and sixth grade configuration. This study also identified the most frequent discipline issues that occurred during the students' fifth grade transition year. Lastly, this study aimed to identify key points for administrators to consider in improving future classes' discipline performance in the fifth grade, both pre and post transition.

The following is a selected literature review that focuses on changes in discipline as a result of the transition from elementary to middle school. The first section, "Why United States Middle Schools Need to Improve", sets the framework for the literature review beginning with a clearer picture of today's youth and summary assessment of points for improvement and why such growth is needed in U.S. schools. The following section, entitled "How Important Principal Leadership is in School Improvement" discusses the principal's role in deciding the vision of a campus and moving to improve the school through the campus vision. The third section, entitled "What Effective Principals do in Improving Student Discipline", will review articles that discuss strategies of effective administrators regarding their discipline management program. The fourth

section of the literature review, which is titled "Student Transitions and Development", is intended to explore various topics relative to this doctoral thesis in terms of what students experience as they transition between grade levels and new campuses. The fifth section of the literature review, titled "Environment and Schedules", focuses on relevant research related to school environments and the effects scheduling has on transition. The sixth section of the literature review, which is labeled "Student Discipline", explores research related to discipline across grade levels specific to elementary and middle school. The seventh, and final section of the literature review, entitled "The Texas Education Code" discusses Chapter 37 as it applies to this study.

Why United States Middle Schools Need to Improve

Jackson and Davis (2000) make the argument that there is much at risk for American public school education. The primary focus of the majority of publications on the topic of the American public education system is our economy. It is undeniable that in the last thirty years our economy has moved from one where individuals with basic working skills were not in danger of being unemployed to one where the same individuals would struggle greatly in finding a job that would barely support them above the poverty line. The economy of the 21st century requires workers who are highly trained individuals with a concentrated level of education appropriate to a workplace that both perpetuates productivity and creates growth. These skills begin in middle level education. It should be the purpose of all middle level education to "promote young adolescents' intellectual development" with the ultimate goal of creating an individual prepared for high school, receptive to understanding the required skills necessary of him or her to be a productive citizen in our American society and economy (Jackson & Davis, 2000).

As young people enter the workforce, they will be required to learn at higher levels for the duration of their careers. They must demonstrate abstract thinking and problem solving skills, while working with others to communicate and effectively negotiate complex issues. These are the types of workers needed for the future economies of the world market and American young people must be educated in a manner that fosters the aforementioned skills. Middle level schools must accept the responsibility for building this platform of learning to prepare America's middle school students for success (Jackson & Davis, 2000).

A report published in 2011 by the National Center for Educational Statistics demonstrated several trends that are evolving in American youth as education transitions into the twenty-first century. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, there are sharp increases in students taking advanced courses, primarily math and science. "76% of high school graduates in 2009 had taken Algebra II and 70% had taken chemistry, compared with 40% and 32% of their 1982 peers" (Aud, KewalRamani, & Frohlich, 2011). Aud, KewalRamani, and Frohlich also discovered that the dropout rate made improvements, decreasing from 12% in 1990 to 8% in 2009. They note the dropout rate did not decrease evenly among all subpopulations, noting too that dropouts are at greater risk for unemployment and earning less in the long run than their peers who graduated from high school.

Another trend worth noting is that there are more students going directly to college from high school when compared to data from 1980. Around 47% of men and 52% of women were reported to transition directly to college, compared to 66% for men and 74% for women in 2009 (Aud, KewalRamani, & Frohlich, 2011). Taking into

consideration the aforementioned data and information from the report, educational success and attainment is increasing from past generations of students. In comparing data, we once again find that in 2009, 36% of high school graduates had completed some form of higher education or college, where 29% of high school graduates did not pursue higher education of any sort. High school graduates from 1980 had much lower percentages in both categories, with 46% having completed high school with no college experience, while another 25% of high school graduates from the same data set had completed some level of college.

Other motivating data consisted of parents reporting that on average a student in their household would spent seven hours a week on homework, with 65% of those same reporting parents acknowledging they did monitor their student's homework. After-school activity participation also increased from 1980 to 2009, where students between the ages of 16 and 24 had completed at least one community volunteer activity linked to their school. Also of note was the decline in numbers of students who admitted to carrying weapons, driving drunk, or fighting on campus between the 1991 and 2009 school years (Aud, KewalRamani, & Frohlich, 2011).

Specific to the topic of this doctoral thesis Aud, KewalRamani, and Frohlich, discussed extensive data relative to discipline for American youth within three annual sets of data. The study compared suspension and expulsion rates for students by sex and race/ethnicity between 1999, 2003, and 2007. The authors establish that students may be suspended or removed from school either "in or out of school", for example, in-school suspension, or out-of-school suspension, or students may be permanently removed through expulsion as a result of behavior choices, chronic events, or persistent

misconduct. The authors note that in 2007 roughly 25% of all students grades nine through twelve in a public school had ever been suspended with 3% of the same population having been expelled (Aud, KewalRamani, & Frohlich, 2011).

Aud, KewalRamani and Frohlic discovered signifigant differences in suspension rates between the sex, gender and race of the student population studied for 2007. The authors found that suspension rates for male students was nearly twice as high as for female students, around 32% for boys and 17% for girls. With regard to racial variance, about 50% of all Black high school students had ben suspended at one point or another in their high school career, compared to 26% of all Hispanic students, 18% of all White students, 13% of all Asian/Pacific Islanders and 29% of all students identified as two or more races.

Aud, KewalRamani and Frohlic (2011) note that there were no significant changes between the numerical suspension rates for students between 1999 and 2007. There were however signifigant increases for Black males. The percentage of suspension for Black males in 1999 was 41% compared to an increase of 57% in 2007. Aud, KewalRamani and Frohlic (2011) found similar comparisons for expulsion rates for male and female high school students as well as the various subpopulations for race and ethnicity. For example, male students were found to have been expelled at twice the rate of their female peers for the 2007 year data set. 4% of all male students were expelled from secondary school during 2007 where 2% of all female students were expelled. Another notable contrast in ethnic/racial data from 2007 was that 10% of the Black student population had been expelled. Within the same ethnic/racial data, White students had only made up about 1% of the expulsions for 2007. The authors found no

signifigantly measurable difference in expulsion rates over time between 199 and 2007, except that White males showed a small drop in expulsion rates from 5% to 2% between 2003 and 2007 (Aud, KewalRamani, & Frohlich, 2011).

While the aforementioned set of data is outside the scope of ages for this doctoral thesis, the data has relevance in framing the disciplinary norms currently experienced in society where most, if not all, young adults experienced discipline management systems across transitions between multiple grades and campuses. Understanding the disciplinary trends of our generation will better allow us to analyze, plan, implement, and evaluate current treatment systems regarding discipline and transition.

As the previous article has set a framework for understanding historical discipline data and traditional consequences relative to that data, one sees the impact on students in terms of gender, race, and ethnicity. While the scope of this doctoral thesis is discipline as a result of transition from the elementary level to the middle school level, it is important to discuss middle school reform efforts in the last ten years within the framework of Aud, KewalRamani, and Frohlich's 2011 report.

Among other topics discussed, Jackson and Davis (2000) dedicate a chapter to the organization of relationships for learning. Young adolescents thrive in academic performance through effective relationships with their teachers. Students learn best when they feel they are known by at least one adult on their campus. This is critical as it is through the child's relationship with their own parents, or caregivers, that learning first began for them. Likewise, learning is associated with relationship building, and continuously improved through increasing the quality and amount of relationships with adults in childrens' educational lives. As students continue to build quality relationships

with teachers, students strength their capacity for learning and risk taking. It is the goal of the school as a learning community to grow children who identify with a sense of academic, communal growth and value (Jackson & Davis, 2000). It should likewise be the goal of each teacher to foster those relationships with each child, as the principal drives the relationship building between student, teacher, and parent.

The Importance of Principal Leadership in School Improvement

Principal leadership in school improvement is critical to campus success. Campus leaders drive the vision of the campus as well as the execution of that vision. A major aspect to perpetuating the energy of the campus vision and school improvement comes from a fair, efficient, executable plan to support instruction and facilitate the management of the student body. Principals must be visionary leaders while maintaining the ability to effectively manage their campus and keep in touch with all stakeholders.

Lin (2012) designed a study to discern principals' actions in cultivating an environment that contributes to teaching and learning in schools. Lin's study encompassed 321 principals who provided their answers to a survey with the following questions: "How do you shape the environment that contributes to teaching and learning in your school? How do you make the school environment healthier to teaching and learning?" (Lin, 2012). Lin based these questions off previous research and literature reviews. In all, 183 principals representing 60% of all high schools in Taiwan responded. Lin notes that the strongest limitation of the study was principals' self-reported behaviors, instead of objective external observations of the same.

The results of the study showed that principals cultivate a productive teaching and learning environment through (Lin, 2012):

- Leading by personal example

- Improving organizational functions

- Enhancing professional development for staff

- Getting support and learning from communities in and out of school

Lin notes that over fifty principals mentioned leading by personal example as a means by which to cultivate a productive teaching and learning environment. Many principals describe being a moral, learning, and problem solving model for members of the learning community. Being a moral model includes exhibiting quality character traits administrators want to see in others on their campus, including demonstrating "honesty, sincerity, encouragement, devotion, and passion" (Lin, 2012). The goal for all administrators should be to exhibit faith and trust in their own school's learning environment.

Improving organizational functions involved principals setting the campuses unique direction through shared vision and consensus with all members of the learning community for effective implementation. This was considered the most important aspect for improving organizational functions. Over 25% of all respondents emphasized the importance of the aforementioned actions in improving organizational functions for schools (Lin, 2012). The second most important aspect of improving organizational functions was building an effective and organized structure. Lin writes that over 30 principals in the study agreed that this was paramount to school success. Examples included fair and equitable room rotations for teachers on an annual basis, proper

recruitment techniques and the hiring of quality staff, and proper systems thinking on

behalf of the administration in planning, implementing, and evaluating the effectiveness

of all structural systems within the organization. Thirty percent of principals noted that

they made strong efforts to renovate and maintain facilities regularly, or to some degree,

maintain a systematic pattern of maintenance. The author notes that previous studies have

stressed the importance of school climate on the maintenance and updating of school

facilities and professional resources (Lin, 2012).

Enhancing professional development for staff was recognized by another 25% of

all respondent principals to Lin's survey as a critical effort for principals in cultivating a

productive teaching and learning environment for school improvement. Important to note

here was that most principals recognized simply having professional development for the

sake of itself was hardly enough to grow staff and stabilize turnover among faculty.

Rather, principals must building professional development for faculty that incorporates

their experiences and skills into the vision and mission of the campus itself. Quality

principals use professional development to enhance teachers' instructional skills while

building teacher autonomy and efficacy. Data from the survey also showed principals

beliefs that professional development centered on student learning while encouraging

teacher self-observations and dialogue to improve teaching quality (Lin, 2012).

The fourth and final critical element for principals in cultivating a productive

teaching and learning environment for school improvement was for administrators to

gather support for the learning environment from internal and external sources. In Lin's

study, principals showed great increases in the value of their school through learning and

connecting from other schools' successes, strengthening community ties through

important cultural functions and fostering positive relationships through business and commerce. Lin notes that several school principals in the study showed growth in their schools by visiting other successful schools and learning from what those communities did. Other principals made special efforts to include parents in school functions and daily activities. Principals also increased the amount of activities throughout the school year that included community connections and support (Lin, 2012). Lin's article demonstrates how principal leadership in school improvement is critical to campus success. Campus leaders drive the vision of the campus as well as the execution of that vision.

Waldron, McLeskey and Redd (2011) share similar points with Lin that principals must create a vision for their campus and establish a plan for achieving that vision, while executing the ability to understand people and growth them professionally. Principals must be sensitive to the functionality of their school's organizational structure, knowing when to reorganize and redesign for improved results with regard to student success through the instructional and behavioral programs (Waldron, McLeskey, & Redd, 2011).

Waldron, McLeskey and Redd's study was driven by defining the role a principal plays in developing and sustaining a highly effective, inclusive school. Analysis of the study's data showed five universal themes. First, principals of effective, inclusive schools were engaged with teachers and showed leadership in executing the goal of the school in achieving the established vision. Second, that effective principals knew when redesigning of campus-based programs was necessary. Third, effective principals demonstrated leadership in improving working conditions for school staff. Fourth, effective school principals were committed to providing high-quality instruction for students of all

settings. And, fifth, effective principals used data to make decisions about all programs in the school (Waldron, McLeskey, & Redd, 2011).

Knoeppel and Rinehart (2008) considered the issue of how principals influence student achievement. Knoeppel and Rinehart adopted a direct-effects model with antecedent effects in order to measure the relationship between student achievement and principal qualities. The authors presuppose certain principal characteristics and experience, which allowed the researchers to anticipate how a principal would perform in a learning community where student achievement would be influenced. Their findings showed that principal characteristics were strong determinants for student achievement with a 3.9% variance in achievement (Knoeppel & Rinehart, 2008).

The researchers found in reviewing literature consistent with their topic of interest, that two decades of research proves successful schools are successful because leaders with a dynamic, focused, and knowledgeable skill base lead them. Principals have an indirect effect on student learning through setting the vision and culture of the school they serve in terms of leadership, vision, and quality of instruction delivered to students.

In summary, we find shared themes in the literature regarding the role of principal leadership in school improvement from the Lin study as well as Waldron, McLeskey and Redd's work. Necessary skills include a principal's ability to build a vision for their campus and create a direction of forwardness for learning; the ability to understand various kinds of people and know how to grow them professionally; the ability to redesign, reorganize and adjust the internal workings of a school's infrastructure for success; management of the instructional programs; effective responsiveness to various campus situations; practicing the distribution of leadership responsibility to faculty and

staff as appropriate; and maintaining a set of values at the very core of the principal's being while demonstrating open-mindedness, self-learning, resilience and a sense of eternal optimism. We also can predict through the lens of Knoeppel and Rinehart's study that these characteristics can have significant impact on student achievement and campus success.

What Effective Principals Do to Improve Student Discipline

Effective execution of the discipline management program is critical to campus success. School leaders drive the vision of the campus as well as the execution of the discipline management system. A major aspect to perpetuating the energy of the campus vision and school improvement comes from a fair, efficient, executable plan to support instruction and a positive campus climate by managing the campus discipline efficiently and fairly. Effective principals understand that to support instruction and protect the learning environment in the classroom, systems must be in place to redirect students back to instruction from poor behavior choices made in the learning community. The following articles provide examples of effective learning communities and how principals are successful in managing the discipline of their schools.

Lasley and Watson (1982) wrote an article based on the 1979 research of the Phi Delta Kappa Commission on Discipline that outlined five major characteristics of schools with administrators who were successful in managing student discipline. The authors write that the first characteristic of a campus with good discipline stems from all stakeholders' involvement in problem solving. Successful discipline management systems are those that have shared input from all persons involved in the system itself. Lasley and Watson write that even students are "given meaningful ways of being

involved in the leadership of the school" including the discipline management program (Lasley & Wayson, 1982). As various stakeholders carry out different roles in the program, all are ultimately responsible for the positive climate and success of student discipline. Campuses with successful discipline programs are aware of this and effectively execute shared responsibility of roles. Effective principals maintain the balance and awareness of this shared responsibility.

The second characteristic of schools with administrators who were successful in managing student discipline was having a school that is viewed as a place to experience success. Lasley and Watson (1982) write that students who have the opportunity and climate to experience success make better choices and perform better academically. This contributes strongly to students' sense of self and likewise perpetuates positive behavior and responsible student choices. Schools where administrators foster a successful experience exhibit fewer discipline problems and are more able to promote a strong climate of success and academic achievement (Lasley & Wayson, 1982).

The third characteristic of campuses with good discipline is where problem solving focuses on causes as opposed to the symptoms. Principals who focus on student behavior as a symptom of another problem are better able to understand the cause for students' behavior choices and make adjustments as necessary to eliminate the opportunity for a discipline event to occur. This is also shared with other stakeholders of the campus, including students, teachers, and parents. Although not a guarantee for eliminating all possibilities of behavior infractions, campuses that are self-reflective of root causes of student behavior choices will have greater success in growing their

students' own self-awareness and power to choose responsibly when faced with future behavior choices (Lasley & Wayson, 1982).

Characteristic four centers around rewarding what positive behaviors the students practice, as opposed to punishment for poor behaviors, as well as measures to be taken in order to prevent poor discipline choices from occurring. Lasley and Wayson (1982) write that consequences should only be given as a last resort, after all procedures, expectations, and rules have been clearly communicated. Emphasis should always be on how faculty and staff can help students feel better about themselves and rewarding the positive behavior choices the majority of the student body makes. Teachers who experience higher rates of success in dealing with students who have behavioral issues use positive, symbolic rewards and behavior contracts, while continuously supporting the student emotionally through the experience of the discipline infraction. Less successful teachers use punishments that are more punitive and do not serve as emotional supports for their students during increases in students' behavioral infractions (Lasley & Wayson, 1982).

The final characteristic, and most connected to this doctoral thesis, involves the strength of the principal's leadership on a campus to a positive effect on campus discipline. Lasley and Wayson state, "no person has as great an impact on the school atmosphere" (Lasley & Wayson, 1982). All faculty and staff look towards the principal for support and role modeling. Principals on campuses with effective discipline programs find balance between providing direction to students, faculty and staff while respecting instructional autonomy in the classroom.

Continuous points to consider regarding what effective principals do to improve school discipline involve a positive campus climate, responsible faculty and staff, and

strong principal leadership. Myers (2009) writes that in 2007 his school set the goal of

reducing overall discipline infractions of the learning community. By 2009, Myers'

middle school campus had lowered out-of-school suspensions by 77%; in-school

suspensions by 38%; truancies by 76%; fights by 44%; and bullying / harassment /

insubordination by 69% (Myers, 2009). The population of the campus remained steady

through the downward turn of discipline events. Myers attributes the changes to setting a

campus vision and leading the campus to achieving that vision. The goal for Myers'

campus was to lower each category of discipline by 10% when compared to the previous

school year. Myers writes that the strongest reason for the campus reduction in discipline

events over the two-year period is mostly the result of the campus staff and

administration's renewed commitment to executing the discipline management plan that

was already in place. Parents, faculty and staff taking ownership of the plan made the

difference in creating a positive change (Myers, 2009). Faculty and staff committed to

monitoring hallways as stipulated in the campus duty schedule, remaining at duty stations

for the entire duration of the period necessary to monitor students' free time on campus,

and coming together as teacher teams to address issues with students where parent

contact was a necessary means of correcting, or rewarding behaviors immediately.

     Administrators committed to changing the culture of the office, where, in the past,

students looked forward to getting out of class and sitting in the office for a discipline

referral. Now, students would be seen immediately upon arrival, eliminating the culture

of the office referral from previous years. Also, students would consistently be afforded

the opportunity to explain their version of events leading to the office referral. Students

also understood that their version of events would be fairly compared to other witnesses'

testimony as well as the teacher of records account of the event. Administrators

continuously stressed that fairness would be exercised when administering consequences

and students would be held accountable for their behavior choices (Myers, 2009).

The day to day obligations of any campus administrator includes effective

management of a discipline system that promotes the stability of the learning

environment of the campus that administrator oversees. In a 2005 article Robert Ruder, a

retired principal, describes a four-step process by which he effectively negotiated the

discipline of his middle campus. Ruder states that discipline issues that are not dealt with

will weaken the school's climate (Ruder, 2005). Principals must foster a positive,

productive campus climate first before they can be effective instructional leaders.

The success of any discipline management program depends on the personnel at

that campus. The premise for effectively improving student discipline begins with

students taking responsibility for their own actions, and likewise, accepting the

consequences that result from their behavioral choices. It is important that adult

stakeholders in the learning community take responsibility for their part in a successful

discipline management program. Particularly, parents should have full knowledge of the

program and be willing to accept responsibility for their child's choices and subsequent

consequences. Teachers, too, must make sound, professional judgment regarding the

appropriateness of when to refer a student to the office for a discipline infraction.

Ruder's discipline procedures, though simple, were effective in principle and

consistent with regard to every incident he dealt with as an administrator. Ruder's first

step involved having each student that committed a discipline infraction report to the

principal's office. It is important to note that the student was not sent to the school office

but rather directly to the principal's office. After the infraction occurred, each teacher would directly contact Ruder to let him know the student was on their way to his office where he would meet them, regardless of what he had been doing or where he was. Therein lies a major difference with Ruder's system and most other campus referral systems, in that the student reported directly to the principal's office, as opposed to the front office where visitors and other staff were located.

Ruder's second step involved passing ownership of the issue to the student by making them contact their parents to explain their own behavior. Ruder would then speak to the parents himself regarding the events as to his knowledge. Before Ruder ended the parent phone conference he would further explain that there would be two more steps involved in the process. The teacher would send a discipline referral with the written account of the student's behavior, and, at that time, Mr. Ruder would decide on the appropriate consequence for the discipline infraction, with a follow-up phone call to the parents completing the process (Ruder, 2005).

The third step in the process involved the teacher sending the referral to Mr. Ruder. The teacher was responsible for being as objective as possible, showing no bias with regard to the event itself. The referral was to define the events of the incident, with no consideration given to previous actions of the teacher or student, or considerations for academic issues the student might have been exhibiting at the time. Ruder emphasizes the importance of the teacher referral in that it serves as primary documentation for the incident itself. Even more crucial than the procedure is each teacher's ability to determine when it is appropriate to refer a student to the principal instead of continuing interventions or consequences at the classroom level (Ruder, 2005).

Ruder's fourth step in the process involved scheduling a conference with the student the same day the discipline event took place. Same day conferencing was most effective in that delayed consequences were less effective to correcting the immediate issue. Ruder would have the student read the referral aloud or the contents would be read to the student. The student was always asked for their version, or response to the contents of the referral, allowing them the opportunity to voice their version of the events. The conference would always conclude with the discipline consequence and notification of the parent as to what the final outcome of the situation might be (Ruder, 2005).

The aforementioned discipline management plan executed by Mr. Ruder is not necessarily grounded in formal theory, but did work for the middle level campus to a very effective extent. Mr. Ruder concludes his article emphasizing that all stakeholders share responsibility for making the four-step discipline referral system a workable, successful discipline management plan. The results should yield a campus that enjoys a positive learning environment free from changes in climate from disciplinary disruptions if properly implemented (Ruder, 2005).

Student Transitions and Development

Children are subjected to natural, progressive milestones as they grow and develop into young adults. Part of this growth process involves at least one, and often, multiple transitions from one school context to the next, as dictated by the grade level configuration system within their respective school district. The following articles serve as a review of previous literature with respect to historical research on student transitions between schools and characteristics of student development during adolescence.

Chung, Elias and Schneider (1998) completed a study that focused on individual adjustment changes of early adolescents when transitioning from elementary school to middle school. The resultant data from the study showed significant changes in student adjustment after the transition. Of specific interest were separate differences by gender, which suggests that boys and girls are affected in dissimilar manners. The authors also noted that the middle school transition is a significant source of stress for students leaving elementary school. One of the primary causes for this stress is the change in environment (i.e., moving from one campus to another) (Fenzel, 1989). It was also noted that the students must learn a new role inside the environment to which they are transitioning (Chung, Elias, & Schneider, 1998).

Traditional elementary school learning environments are smaller in campus population and classroom population and trend more towards being task-focused (Chung, Elias, & Schneider, 1998). The middle school learning environment, in contrast, is more largely populated – in terms of both campus and classroom. Instructional and curricular material at the middle school level is more content driven with student achievement as its core focus. The new middle school environment, moreover, brings changes to academic performance standards, teacher expectations, and the relationship students build with each teacher (Chung, Elias & Schneider, 1998). Considering the aforementioned vertical disruptions when transitioning to a new campus, the skills necessary for younger adolescents to successfully navigate, such an encompassing change, are considerable.

Chung, Elias and Schneider's 1998 study set a number of specific goals in analyzing both personal and environmental factors affecting student transition. Firstly, the study set out to examine early adolescents' adjustment before and after middle school

transition. Within this end in mind, Chung, Elias and Schneider found significant changes in student adjustment post middle school transition. The study continued to examine gender differences among early adolescents in their adjustment patterns before and after middle school transition. Again, these researchers discovered that boys and girls in the sample each showed a significant increase in psychological distress across the transition, while girls showed significant correlations between peer-related problems in sixth grade and across time adjustment measures, such as academic achievement, self-concept, school behavior, and social support (Chung, Elias, & Schneider, 1998).

In terms of their pre- and post-transition adjustment, the academic achievement of boys showed a significant decline, while girls' performance showed no significant change. With regard to school behavior, Chung, Elias, and Schneider's study revealed that teachers' reports reflected that girls showed more positive school behavior than did boys. It is hypothesized that this could be indicative of girls internalizing stress (rather than externally through behavior problems), and social support. This would also be consistent with Chung, Elias, and Schneider's findings of increased psychological distress and academic decrease in achievement. It is also worth noting that boys showed more academic and social adjustment problems in connection with academic achievement and school behavior (Chung, Elias & Schneider, 1998).

Akos and Galassi completed a 2004 study based on a questionnaire distributed to sixth grade students, parents and teachers as well as ninth grade students, parents and teachers. The results of this study highlighted that transitions provided challenges and opportunities for students involved. In relation to previous research, Akos and Galassi (2004) found that this study provided for a more balanced perspective by discussing both

positive and negative issues facing students transitioning to middle school or high school; whereas, previous research studies focused more on negative factors alone.

One of the more significant finds of the study showed that teachers' perceptions of the difficulty of the transition for students were much higher than the perceptions of the students themselves. Sixth and ninth grade students' perceptions were that the transition to another school would be easier, contrasting with the aforementioned teacher perception that the student transition would be more difficult (Akos & Galassi, 2004).

Regarding the improvement of transition programs, students, parents, and teachers brought many suggestions specific to both pre- and post-transition. Akos and Galassi's 2004 review of previous research for transition concerns lead them to the question of what primary student concerns should be addressed first. Previous research (Akos, 2002; Maute, 1991; Mizelle, 1995; Odegaard & Heath, 1992) led Akos and Galassi to identify the following three major areas wherein students are concerned regarding transition: academic, procedural, and social. In conclusion, Akos and Galassi (2004) found that the perception of students, parents, and teachers of both sixth grade and ninth grade populations are somewhat similar in terms of anticipated challenges and opportunities. Each group provided information in guiding future transitional programs to aid students in successful transitions to middle school and high school.

The primary goal of Akos' (2002) study was to investigate and discover more information about students' perceptions during the elementary to middle school transition. Akos (2002) discusses that the transition from elementary to middle school is especially troublesome considering it is not simply a change in personnel for students; rather, it signals a complete change in both context and environment. Transitioning

students encounter new students from other feeder elementary schools in multi-campus districts, as well as new and possibly larger faculty and staff settings.

Akos (2002) discusses personal changes with each student during this transitional period, as well as contextual changes that inevitably occur during this time. Pubertal considerations regarding "physical, emotional, and social changes" must also be considered as well as "defiance of adults" (Akos, 2002; Berk, 1993). Thus, the "external contextual" as well as "internal pubertal changes" faced by students transitioning to middle school are complex and multifaceted (Akos, 2002).

Akos (2002) cites further research by Chung, Elias, and Schneider (1998), which demonstrates that both girls and boys display increased levels of anxiety in terms of transitioning to middle school. For instance, boys show more of a drop in academic success, while girls demonstrate more social stress with relationships. Akos (2002) also cites Simmons and Blyth (1987) to show that both genders' attitudes towards school and overall motivation drop during the transition to middle school. In addition, there were stronger negative outcomes for students transitioning to a middle school versus those students who attended a Kindergarten through eighth grade configuration.

Akos (2002) found that fifth grade students' questions concerning transition to a new school were primarily about the context and logistics of the new campus. Fifth graders, for example, wanted to know more about specific rules and procedures they would need to understand during the transition. Akos (2002) also found that, with this particular study, there was a wide variety of concerns expressed by students. Akos recommends that transition programs must take into consideration a substantial array of worries that would cover a very broad base of concerns. Recommendations made by

Akos include informational programming about campus based bullying programs to address social concerns as reflected by findings made in a 1992 study by Arowosafe.

Akos (2002) states that campuses should seek strong "orientation programs" in order to build upon positive transitional outcomes, which could encourage greater student enthusiasm about the process, such as mentoring and buddy programs that are peer facilitated. The strength of a transition program also depends on the diversity of persons involved at the campus level, including counselors, administrators, teachers, other parents, peer student relationships, and community programs. Akos describes how each aforementioned group of individuals brings their own useful information that, ultimately, serves to strengthen the overall student transition experience.

The goal of a study conducted by Alspaugh (2001) was to research the "nature of achievement loss" during the transition from elementary to middle school and middle school to high school, and to explore possible connections between high school dropout rates with school-to-school transitions. In this research, Alspaugh discusses that change in school environment is an experience many – if not most – students have experienced throughout their educational career. Most experience this change as they transition from school to school through various campus-based grade configurations. Alspaugh references many studies that show declines in "student self-perception and self-esteem" most specifically with the elementary to middle school transition (Seidman, Allen, Aber, Mitchell, & Feinman, 1994; Wigfield, Eccles, Mac Iver, Reuman, & Midgley, 1991). According to Alspaugh, the Seidman study found the drop not dependent at all on specific "age, grade level, and ability level" (Seidman et al., 1994).

Alspaugh refers to his own study with Harting that, when students transition between "self-contained" elementary classes to middle grade schools (i.e., grades five, six, seven, or eight), there is a loss of student achievement across the four major content areas of math, science, English language arts, and social studies (Alspaugh & Harting, 1995). Alspaugh and Harting also discuss that post-transition scores showed recovery to pre-transitional levels of achievement roughly one year after the transition. Alspaugh also refers to studies by Seidman, Allen, Aber, Mitchell, & Feinman (1994), which predicted that students experiencing two transitions during the educational career (elementary to middle school, then middle to high school) were at greater risk of dropping out of school during their high school education (Seidman, Allen, Aber, Mitchell, & Feinman, 1994). Alspaugh sets out to understand in greater depth the decline in student achievement during the elementary to middle school transition and the middle to high school transition with a focus on exploring the possible relationship between high school dropout rates and school transitions.

As reported by Alspaugh and Harting in 1995, Alspaugh's 2001 study established a consistency with achievement loss during the elementary to middle school transition. One finding of particular note here was that students experiencing transition to a middle school fed by multiple elementary schools experienced greater achievement loss than those students attending a direct feeder pattern of a single elementary feeding a single middle school. Alspaugh refers to a study by Pamperien (1997), which states that "implementation of middle school practices had little influence on student achievement scores" (Alspaugh, 2001).

Alspaugh's study further concluded that a greater achievement loss was experienced for students who experienced transitions from elementary to middle school and middle to high school when compared to students who only experienced one transition from a Kindergarten to eighth grade campus configuration to high school. Alspaugh also concludes that findings from the 2001 study are consistent with other research referenced throughout the article that transitional experiences reflective of "instability and adjustments" on students' behalf "were associated with educational outcomes." Moreover, Alspaugh concludes that students in smaller group situations with fewer transitional experiences in their educational career experience less achievement loss than those who experience a greater number of educational transitions.

Cauley and Jovanovich (2006) write that there are many levels of anxiety involved in transitioning for students at any level of education; yet, this can be especially true for those students who are at-risk. In particular, middle school transitions are very different given the often-drastic shift necessary to move from the elementary model, which primarily utilizes a self-contained mode of instruction, to the content-based, whole group instruction approach to instructional content employed at the middle school level. Cauley and Jovanovich (2006) state that transitions at any level bring challenges to students that could negatively affect their school performance. It is the authors' belief that schools can and should institute measures that can improve student transitions to alleviate some of the measures having a negative impact on students' ability to perform academically and adjust socially.

Cauley and Jovanovich (2006) discuss the psychological needs students have in addition to other challenges students will face when entering middle school and high

school. In reference to a study by Eccles and Wigfield (1997), the middle school transition has more changes in more areas than almost any other transitional period in a student's educational career. For example, entering middle school students begin to deal with the first effects of puberty, inclusive of all the hormonal and physical changes that define this transition in a child's development. Girls specifically will experience social and physical changes regarding puberty on an average of eighteen months earlier than boys of the equivalent numeric age. Cauley and Jovanovich reference a 2006 study by Eccles and Wigfield, which holds that this makes social adjustment among students of opposing genders more complicated than normal. In addition to changes related to physical appearance and social adjustment, Eccles and Wigfield (2006) make note of the changes in students' cognitive ability in abstract and hypothetical thinking. The importance of activities related to acquiring peer acceptance through peer group time and socialization as a whole is also worth noting. Cauley and Jovanovich (2006) quote Eccles and Wigfield saying, "cliques become especially prominent and students engage in gossip, teasing and bullying to maintain social status."

Erdley and Kingery (2007) conducted a study of peer experiences as predictors to student success in adjusting to transitions specific to middle school. The study found that students with low peer acceptance are more likely to experience behavior difficulties, poor academic performance, and social adjustment issues during their elementary education and are at high risk of poor adjustment across the middle school transition. The authors write that teachers and counselors must take measures to identify students likely to suffer from low peer acceptance while the students are in elementary school. This will significantly increase the likelihood that these students will have a more positive

experience with the transition to middle school. The study examined 146 students across

two different time checkpoints in the students' elementary and middle school careers.

The first check point assessed the students' during the spring of their fifth grade year

while the second check point assessed the students' during the fall of their sixth grade

year. Both times students were evaluated using a sociometric rating scale that also

assessed students' feelings of loneliness, school involvement, and special friendships.

The study revealed that over the time period measured, students experienced decreases in

mutual friendships. Analysis of the measures revealed that peer acceptance and the

quality as well as quantity affected students' feelings of loneliness and involvement in

school during the middle school transition. The researchers also made several suggestions

for peer programs for students during the elementary years that would improve their

chances at successful management of the middle school transition.

Environment and Schedules

The following section of this literature review provides information concerning

issues relevant to affecting the positive or negative outcomes of student transitions

between campuses. Emphasis is placed on the main theme of this doctoral thesis, being

the transition from elementary school to middle school. There are several issues to be

compared and contrasted as the two environments are very different and must be

considered as principals develop transition plans to build better relationships with

students new to the middle school learning environment.

The traditional elementary school schedule provides students the opportunity to

develop and grow within a stable educational and social atmosphere with small

fluctuations. Moreover, the most stable element in an elementary student's schedule is the

constancy of a singular teacher (Schiller, 1999). At most, elementary students normally have two principal teachers during the regular school day. The benefit of this focused student-teacher interaction is an intense relationship built between student and teacher. With students spending nearly eight hours of a school day with one or two teachers, those students are able to build a very strong bond with that teacher in addition to other classmates (Schiller, 1999).

Mowen and Mowen (2004) published an article debating as to why schools would consider block scheduling. Certainly there is not a complete solution or the perfect model of scheduling for any school according to Akos (2002). Mowen and Mowen (2004) write that there are particular benefits for considering the block-schedule. According to Mowen and Mowen (2004), block schedules can make more positive impacts on school climate with regard to elementary students' transition to middle school. Block-scheduling limits the amount of class changes as well as the total number of classes students attend on a daily basis (Mowen & Mowen, 2004), which would have a positive impact on the transition process for fourth graders conditioned to a self-contained instructional environment such as elementary school. A middle school environment that has as few class changes as possible would create an environment that would take much less time adjusting to with greater positive outcomes for middle school students' academic and behavioral performance (Mowen & Mowen, 2004).

Mowen and Mowen (2004) state there are several factors that administrators must consider in order for block scheduling to be successful. First, principals must understand what best fits their campus needs and have a thorough understanding of various types of block scheduling applicable to their desired outcome. Second, principals must work

through drafts of schedules with their administrative team to customize the best schedule for the campus. Third, a pilot master schedule should be put in place to understand the feasibility of the block schedule model utilized so the administration may make the final decision, plan for campus-wide professional development in terms of daily routine and instructional modifications, and receive feedback from stakeholders to finalize the schedule (Mowen & Mowen, 2004).

In 1994, Jan Waggoner conducted a study comparing a sixth grade teacher teaming instructional environment to the traditional self-contained elementary sixth grade configuration and the subsequent effects of both instructional climates on the sixth grade transition to the seventh grade junior high school. Waggoner (1994) focused her study on concerns sixth grade students experience as they shift to the seventh grade; how different those concerns are between sixth graders in an academic teaming situation and from those in self-contained instruction; and, how the use of teaming may have an effect on the way sixth graders from that instructional environment transition to the next grade level.

Findings from Waggoner's study show that sixth graders who come from an academic teaming background demonstrated lower levels of concern about the transition to the next grade as well as "a stronger affiliation in school activities" (Waggoner, 1994). Shared concerns for the transition between the teamed group and non-teamed group when entering the next grade were being late to class, locker management, understanding where to go, and anticipated poor treatment by peers and students older than themselves. According to Waggoner (1994), the above list of student concerns is a universal theme experienced by all middle grade students when transitioning between grade levels and most especially between campuses.

Galvan, Spatzier and Juvonen conducted a 2011 study to understand adolescent behavior through peer influence and social contagion. The authors established that adolescent students copy behaviors of their peers in order to be accepted or to avoid some level of social rejection. The authors also state that though certain levels of assimilation are important in gaining access to social levels of acceptance, adolescents may experience the need to adopt specific behaviors in order to gain higher levels of acceptance from peers. Galvan, Spatzier and Juvonen state that it is important to know what behaviors peers find most important that associate with the highest levels of peer acceptance.

The results of the study showed conclusive trends and changes in what adolescents in fourth and fifth grade found "cool" when compared to those of sixth, seventh, and eighth grade. The most striking trend was that high social status was associated with students who were considered highly academically engaged in the fourth and fifth grade. Also correlated to this was that positive classroom behaviors for students included in the data set reflect that the same group of fourth and fifth grade students had relatively low behavior issues and positive classroom behaviors. In summary, fourth and fifth graders that were academically engaged and performing well, and had positive classroom behaviors, also had high social value to their peers (Galvan, Spatzier, & Juvonen, 2011).

During the sixth grade year, trends began to shift for the group of students in the data set, where higher social standing was strongly associated with students who were strongly correlated to antisocial behaviors towards their peers. Likewise, as students from this group cross grade levels, increases in academic disengagement bring greater social

value to students with their peers through the end of the eighth grade (Galvan, Spatzier, & Juvonen, 2011).

Galvan, Spatzier, and Juvonen suggest that interventions could be "developed to reduce negative academic and social behaviors in middle school" (2011). It is critical to understand and prevent ways "in which hostile and dishonest conduct among peers and academic disengagement do not get "glorified" in middle school" (2011).

Student Discipline

The following section of this literature review provides information concerning issues relevant to student discipline and resultant consequences as possible outcomes of student transitions between campuses. There are several issues to be compared and contrasted as the disciplinary environments of elementary, middle and high school are very different and must be considered. Review of the following articles will help frame historical research for principals working to foster relationships with students new to the middle school learning environment, post transition and through developmental adolescence.

In her 2007 study, Emily Arcia addressed recent concerns over the extensive increase in suspensions at the middle school level. In particular, Arcia cites six major concerns in the use of suspensions as a consequence for students. First, students who are most likely to be suspended are the very students who cannot afford to miss instructional time. Second, that for students who prove more hyperactive and aggressive in nature, suspensions actually increased the likelihood of future discipline events and subsequent suspensions. Third, ethnic minorities are suspended at a disproportionately higher rate, as compared to their total campus student representation. Fourth, when students are out of

the educational setting of a school during the regular school day, there is more opportunity for them to participate in delinquent behavior when unsupervised. Fifth, that suspension as a consequence is misused when other forms of discipline for student behavioral choices would serve the dual purpose of consequence as well as counseling students to better behavior choices. Lastly, the use of suspension has also been seen as what Arcia describes as a "pushout" plan of action for students that are chronic behavior problems (Arcia citing National Association of Child Advocates, 1998; Skiba et al., 2000).

The study's analysis of suspension rates among similar populations across three types of grade configuration was particular interest. Arcia (2007) studied three sixth-grade transition groups: Sixth graders who attended a Kindergarten through eighth grade elementary configuration in sixth grade and again in seventh grade; sixth graders who attended a Kindergarten through eighth grade elementary school in sixth grade, then a middle school sixth through eighth grade configuration in seventh grade; and sixth graders who attended a middle school sixth through eighth grade configuration for sixth and seventh grade. The subsequent data revealed that suspension rates increased dramatically for students in the latter two middle school groups, as compared to those same students' suspension rates during their elementary education (Arcia, 2007).

Arcia establishes limitations of the study as follows. First, that Kindergarten through eighth grade enrollment is at the discretion of the family, which may influence behaviors that lead to suspension. Second, that the sample was not an accurate representation of other relevant school districts in the nation (Arcia, 2007). Arcia's results indicate that suspension rates increased greatly for African American and Latino

students, which is consistent with other studies (Mendez & Knoff, 2003; Skiba et al., 2000).

Arcia also notes that suspensions were higher for seventh grade populations, as compared to sixth graders. Additionally, it is important to note that suspension data reflected a higher rate of suspension events for students who had prior records of being suspended the year before when compared with other students that had received suspensions that same year. Arcia (2007) also found that students with general academic achievement above the 50th percentile showed fewer tendencies to receive a suspension when compared to students with academic achievement below the 50th percentile. As compared to varying grade configuration systems, Arcia's most important finding of the study was that "sixth and seventh grade students in middle schools, regardless of associated factors had substantially higher percentage suspensions than sixth and seventh graders in elementary/K-8 schools" (Arcia, 2007). The study also showed that students who transitioned to a middle school from a Kindergarten through eighth grade school had a higher rate of suspension, especially if they had not been suspended the prior year. With results showing a consistency for higher suspensions across all groups of "race/ethnicity, sixth grade suspension history, and reading achievement", this research suggests that setting may be of strong consideration in explaining the changes in data of suspension (Arcia, 2007).

Arcia's 2007 study does not give further understanding towards what specific environmental influences affected suspension data changes. Arcia encourages others to pursue further details in regard to environmental effects on transition and suspension in a continued attempt to meet middle school student needs in determining the best grade

configuration for lowering suspension rates and improving education in the elementary and middle school years.

Theriot and Dupper (2010) designed a study where transition was investigated in terms of changes in discipline from one grade to the next. They specifically investigated the transition from fifth grade to sixth grade. The results showed an increase in student discipline events as well as an increase in the use of school suspensions as a consequence for discipline events. The increase in discipline infractions was most dramatic for subjective discipline such as "class disturbance and failure to follow rules" instead of more clear, objective incidents with consequences to follow (Theriot and Dupper, 2010).

Transitions to middle school from elementary are critical times for student achievement, and must be positive if academic success in subsequent years is to occur (Theriot & Dupper, 2010). Theriot and Dupper cite Crockett, Peterson, Graber, Schulenberg, and Ebata (1989), as well as Hirsch and Rapkin (1987), as supportive, research-based proof of this notion. Theriot and Dupper also cite the existence of a substantial amount of research which indicates that the elementary to middle school transition is a very stressful time for most students (Alspaugh, 1998; Anderman, 1996; Chung, Elias, & Schneider, 1998; Crockett et al., 1989; Elias, Gara, & Ubriaco, 1985; Harter, 1981; Jackson & Davis, 2000; Linney & Seidman, 1989; Simmons & Blyth, 1987).

Hirst's (2005) article discusses implementing skills and techniques for reducing the amount of office referrals in the middle school setting. The administrative team of Haile Middle School in Bradenton, Florida discovered that a small portion of their student population was responsible for the majority of their discipline referrals. Haile

Middle school administration decided to target that population of students with a program designed to assist in permanent behavior changes for the better. The program the administration decided to use was created by one of the administrative team members, Greg Robinson, and was funded by a grant from the Florida Council for Educational Research.

The program centered on students who had three or more office referrals at the time of program implementation. Those students were assigned to meet with Mr. Robinson in a single class for two weeks, twenty minutes a day, at the beginning of each school day. Mr. Robinson met and gave guidance to all students attending. The program materials consisted of items drawn from "Rational-Emotive Behavior Therapy", which is based on the work of psychoanalyst Albert Ellis (Ellis, 2004).

The primary goal for the class and program was to assist students in identifying negative behavior choices that resulted in them being placed in an environment where there was limited control of behavior choices. The secondary goal of the program was to instruct students about the initiation of their own negative emotions about a particular event and preventing poor behavior choices as a result. In particular, self-awareness was the key ingredient that led to students' success and ability to make positive behavior choices from negative situations (Hirst, 2005).

The program utilized peer-coaching, role-playing, support groups, and hot buttons as a means to assist students in reframing their thinking about a negative environment that may put them at risk of making a poor choice about behavior (Hirst, 2005). These approaches were used to make more tangible the types of behavior outcomes necessary for true change with each individual student. The goal of the program was to assist

students in becoming and being aware of more positive choices when faced with very

difficult situations.

Students who successfully complete two weeks of the program were celebrated

and considered eligible to be mentors in the program themselves. Not only did the

participating students gain new interpersonal skills in behavioral management, but also

they developed quality relationships with the instructors of the program. While most of

the students in the program were able to see positive results in their behavior record,

some students continued to see referrals for their behavior choices. However, the overall

effect of the program showed remarkable decreases in student referrals, specifically for

those thirteen percent of students that accounted for a large majority of the school

discipline issues on campus (Hirst, 2005).

In their 2007 study, Sherrod, Getch, and Ziomek-Diagle sought to decrease office

referrals for an urban elementary school while improving school climate and relations

with staff and students. The study examined resultant outcomes from positive behavior

support. The researchers implemented a campus-wide initiative, targeted at students

identified as having the most frequent discipline events campus wide. Studies after the

program's implementation showed a decrease in office referrals for students targeted in

the study.

Sherrod, Getch, and Ziomek-Diagle discovered that administrative approaches

with the targeted students tended to be more reactionary in nature rather than proactive

(2007). The researchers implemented a year long, positive behavior support plan with

the school counselor to effect change with the targeted population as mentioned earlier.

Eight lessons were implemented over a period of eight weeks to students with high

instances of discipline referrals. The counselor taught one lesson each week. The first lesson focused on student orientation and experiences, while introducing shared ownership of rules for the group to follow. Lesson two continued the implementation of the group rules while discussion a world where there were no rules, and what might be the result of such a world. Lesson three focused on the importance of relationships and problem solving through conflicts that result in relationship building and human interaction. Various types and values of character were discussed and assessed with each student participating. Of other importance during lesson three was the benefit of role-playing scenarios where conflict solutions were demonstrated by and for participating students (Sherrod, Getch, & Ziomek-Daigle, 2009).

Lessons four and five focused on behavior distractors that detract from their academic performance during class and at home, while building direct connections between their ability to make proper behavior choices and improve their academic results. Lesson six addressed positive communication skills as an alternative to accusatory and inflammatory remarks resulting in poor behavior choices and detrimental outcomes. Lesson seven assisted students who felt they had been specifically labeled with chronic behavior problems and effective techniques to overcome those labels, while chapter eight brought students through lessons one through seven, asking them the major items that the students felt had the most impact on their behavior choices and how those items will help them in the future. The closing lesson included methods for students to anticipate future scenarios which might tempt them to revert to old behavior choices and attitudes and what positive steps to take in avoiding that outcome should disappointments lead to facing those choices again (Sherrod, Getch, & Ziomek-Daigle, 2009).

Sherrod, Getch and Ziomek-Daigle found a 26% decrease in office referrals for

the 2007-2008 school year, with 219 discipline events to 162 the next year, and a positive

decrease in the six highest reported discipline categories over the past four years. The

most significant knowledge resulting from the study showed that when educators have

character expectations from students and teach students those expectations, there is a

positive impact on resultant discipline (2007). The more a student's knowledge and skill

set improves in dealing with social circumstances that may or may not be in their control,

the more likely the student is to use that knowledge and skill set to work through an issue,

resulting in fewer behavior issues for the student and the campus. Likewise, this

improves the learning environment for the campus, improves the classroom and campus

climate and increases rigor in learning (Sherrod, Getch, & Ziomek-Daigle, 2009)

The Texas Education Code, Chapter 37, and Student Codes of Conduct

The Texas Education Agency (TEA) in conjunction with the State of Texas has

established the Texas Education Code (TEC), Chapter 37 to provide statutes related to

student discipline, law and order in Texas public schools. The state of Texas empowers

each school board with the task of establishing district policy in compliance with TEC,

Chapter 37 to provide safe learning environments for all students attending public schools

in the State of Texas. According to the Texas Education Agency website (Texas

Education Agency, 2013), TEC, Chapter 37 acts to:

- Provide leadership to school districts with information needed to create local

  disciplinary policies in line with Chapter 37 of the Texas Education Code

  (TEC).

- Serve as a resource for school districts in implementing positive, proactive discipline management strategies.

- Provide a central point of contact within TEA for agency staff, parents, students, public and private agencies, and other seeking clarification concerning, discipline, law and order under the Texas Education Code.

- Provide assistance in recording PEIMS 425 Records Data from all school districts relating to disciplinary actions required by TEC Chapter 37 and Federal Law.

- Works with Texas Juvenile Probation Commission and other agencies on issues affecting school safety (Texas Education Agency, 2013).

The Historically, districts have created Student Codes of Conduct and Student Handbooks that explain the district discipline management system as well as standardized disciplinary consequences for behavior choices by students. Chapter 37, Sec 37.001 establishes that the board of trustees will establish a student code of conduct which should be made publicly available and posted at each campus or available for review in the office the campus principal (State of Texas, 2013).

Relevant to this literature review is the procedures by which the categories and codes have been established for the study proposed by the primary researcher of this doctoral thesis. All derive from TEC Chapter 37 and the suburban Houston school district's board of trustees through which the district's student code of conduct and handbook come.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this study was to determine what effect transition has on discipline outcomes when fourth grade elementary students transition to middle school as fifth grader students. Specifically, the study analyzed discipline data from a class of fourth grader students within a feeder pattern of a suburban Houston school district whose elementary school campuses were Kindergarten through fourth grade. The same cohort of fourth grade students' discipline data was compared to their discipline data the next year as fifth graders at a middle school campus with a fifth and sixth grade configuration. In addition, the study identified the most frequent discipline issues that occurred during the students' fifth grade transition year. Lastly, this study aimed to identify key points for administrators to consider in improving future classes' discipline performance in the fifth grade, both pre and post transition.

This study has contributed to the overall understanding of changes in student discipline as a result of the transition from elementary to middle school, as well as recommendations to support the positive improvement of discipline from the aforementioned transition. By utilizing archival discipline data from a suburban Houston school district, this study included discipline records of three elementary schools and one middle school. It has provided valuable insight for district leaders as they plan for addressing types of discipline events, improving their students' discipline choices and strengthening the transition process from elementary to middle school campuses.

Description of the Research Design

The research design for this quantitative study aimed to study changes between discipline events from a cohort of fourth grade students to the same cohort of fifth grade students one year later. The primary investigator gathered raw data reflective of discipline events recorded for the subjects of the 2009/2010 fourth grade class as well as the discipline events recorded for the same class of subjects as fifth graders during the 2010/2011 school year. The investigator used descriptive statistics, statistical analysis and variations of percentages to analyze changes in data compared between the two academic years with the same cohort of students.

Research Questions

With the goal of more fully understanding how discipline changes for fourth grade students as they transition to middle school in the fifth grade, this study focused on the following research questions:

1. Do the number and type of discipline infractions referred to the office change when fourth grade elementary students transition to fifth grade in a middle school configuration?

2. What discipline events occur most frequently?

3. What trends or issues can be identified for administrators to consider concerning discipline infractions that will improve future classes' discipline performance as fifth grade students?

For clarification purposes in question one, the word "change" refers to observable increases or decreases in frequency of behavior infractions between the two studied years.

Setting

The specific data accessed and utilized within this study was drawn from a primarily suburban public school district. Moreover, the largest employer inside the district's boundaries is the school district itself. The majority of the district's adult population commutes to the largest populated city nearest the district's boundaries – Houston, Texas. Also, all of the students included within this particular study belong to the same suburban school district in the state of Texas. The school district itself is made up of 23 campuses; manages a student enrollment of 19,210; and, has an average student-teacher ratio of 24.6 to 1. The district also has an average attendance rate of 98.51% and a dropout rate of 0.37%.

The demographic and program subpopulation make-up of the school district for the 2009/2010 and 2010/2011 school year from which subject data was derived were as follows:

Table 3.1

Demographic and Program Subpopulation Data for District

Subjects	District (2009/2010)	District (2010/2011)
White	46.5%	44.6%
Hispanic	25.9%	26.1%
African American	17.2%	16.4%
Asian/Pacific Islander	10.2%	9.9%
Economically Disadvantaged	24.6%	26.5%
Limited English Proficient	7.6%	6.4%
Bilingual/ESL Education	7.3%	6.4%
Gifted and Talented Education	7.1%	7.4%
Special Education	9.1%	9.3%
Disciplinary Placements	12.4%	0.7%
At-Risk	30.6%	29.3%
Students per Teacher	16.7%	16.8%
Class Average Size (Grade Four)	20.1	20.1
Class Average Size (Grade Five)	26.7	24.9

Of the three elementary schools to be studied, elementary schools A and B were rated as "Exemplary" by the Texas Education Agency, while elementary school C was rated as "Recognized" for the 2009/2010 school year. The largest populated campus by total enrollment was elementary school A with 794 students in grades Kindergarten through four. Elementary campus C was second overall in enrollment with 718 students, while Elementary campus B was third with a total student population of 642.

For the 2009/2010 academic year, the total combined number of fourth grade students from all three elementary schools was 431. The highest average fourth grade class size was 21.7 (at elementary school C), while elementary schools A and B had an average fourth grade class size of 19.3 and 20.5, respectively. The average years of

teacher experience for all three elementary schools was 8.53 with less than 0.5 years separating each campus individually. Further, all three elementary schools shared the same numerical administrative personnel assignment – namely, one counselor, one assistant principal, and one principal.

The demographic and program subpopulation make-up of elementary campuses A, B, and C from 2009/2010 school year used in the sample were as follows:

Table 3.2

Demographic and Program Subpopulation Data for Elementary Campuses A, B, and C for the 2009/2010 School Year

Campus Demographic/Subpopulation	Elementary Campus A	Elementary Campus B	Elementary Campus C
White	31.5%	51.7%	54.5%
Hispanic	44.1%	28.2%	22.7%
African American	19.0%	15.6%	10.3%
Asian	5.3%	3.9%	12.0%
Native American	0.0%	0.6%	0.6%
Economically Disadvantaged	45.8%	25.4%	19.1%
Limited English Proficient	25.1%	8.1%	5.6%
Bilingual/ESL Education	25.1%	7.2%	4.7%
Gifted and Talented Education	2.8%	3.9%	9.3%
Special Education	7.9%	7.5%	4.9%
Disciplinary Placements	2.0%	2.2%	0.2%
At-Risk	40.4%	24.3%	15.0%
Mobility	12.8%	10.5%	7.9%
Students per Teacher	15.4	15.5	16.3
Class Average Size (Grade Four)	19.3	20.5	21.7

The middle school where the respective fifth grade cohort attended for the 2010/2011 school year earned a rating of "Recognized" by the Texas Education Agency,

and was the second largest populated middle school campus in the district by total enrollment with 772 students in grades five and six. The total number of fifth grade students was 389 for the 2010/2011 school year. The average fifth grade class size was 25.7 students. The average years of teacher experience for the middle school was 8.7 years. The middle school also shared the same numerical administrative personnel assignment as the elementary schools – namely, one counselor, one assistant principal, and one principal.

The demographic and program subpopulation make-up of the middle school feeder campus for the 2010/2011 school year used in the sample were as follows:

Table 3.3

Demographic and Program Subpopulation Data for Middle

School Campus for the 2010/2011 School Year

Campus Demographic/Subpopulation	Percentage of Total Population
White	44.6%
Hispanic	30.3%
African American	16.5%
Asian	4.9%
American Indian	0.9%
Pacific Islander	0.1%
Two or More Races	2.7%
Economically Disadvantaged	33.4%
Limited English Proficient	4.7%
Bilingual/ESL Education	4.4%
Gifted and Talented Education	6.7%
Special Education	8.7%
Disciplinary Placements	0.0%
At-Risk	28.4%
Mobility	11.5%
Students per Teacher	17.7
Class Average Size (Grade Five)	25.7

Subjects

The combined demographic and program subpopulation make-up of the cohort of

fourth grade students from the 2009/2010 school year used in the sample were as follows:

Table 3.4

Demographic and Program Subpopulation Data for Fourth Grade
Subjects for 2009/2010 School Year

Demographic/Subpopulation	Percentage of Total Population
White	42.23%
Hispanic	32.71%
African American	16.01%
Asian	6.96%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	0.23%
Two or More Races	1.86%
Economically Disadvantaged	28.77%
Limited English Proficient	2.55%
Bilingual/ESL Education	8.59%
Gifted and Talented Education	8.12%
Special Education	8.58%
At-Risk	28.31%

The combined demographic and program subpopulation make-up of the cohort of

fifth grade students from 2010/2011 school year used in the sample were as follows:

Table 3.5

Demographic and Program Subpopulation Data for the Fifth Grade

Subjects for the 2010/2011 School Year

Demographic/Subpopulation	Percentage of Total Population
White	40.87%
Hispanic	35.73%
African American	17.22%
Asian	4.37%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	0.26%
Two or More Races	1.54%
Economically Disadvantaged	33.16%
Limited English Proficient	2.83%
Bilingual/ESL Education	11.57%
Gifted and Talented Education	7.97%
Special Education	8.74%
At-Risk	29.31%

Procedures

The hypothesis for the proposed study was tested using archival discipline data

from the fourth grade class of the 2009/2010 school year who subsequently attended their

respective middle school feeder for the 2010/2011 school year. Prior to initiating the

study, an application for archival discipline data of the aforementioned groups was

submitted to the previously described school district referred to throughout this doctoral

thesis. Upon receipt of district approval for archival data, the primary investigator

submitted a research application to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the Division

of Research at the University of Houston for approval. Once approval was obtained from

the University of Houston IRB, the primary investigator requested student discipline data

from the school district, specific to elementary schools A, B, and C, and to the middle

school the three elementary campuses fed. Data specific to discipline records for the 2009/2010 fourth grade cohort of the three elementary schools and the same cohort of students as fifth graders during the 2010/2011 school year at the feeder middle school was then analyzed through descriptive statistics to prove the hypothesis of this study. The primary investigator provided the school district with an assurance of maintaining confidentiality of student records and district/campus anonymity throughout the study. The primary investigator then worked with the appropriate department at the school district's administration building to coordinate and extract discipline data records for this study. The Technology Department and student management system maintain discipline records and data for the school district electronically.

Once the primary researcher retrieved the student records, random student identification numbers were given to students that connected them from their fourth grade cohort to their fifth grade cohort and linked each student's discipline data for comparisons between the two years. The primary investigator dropped fourth grade students not represented in the fifth grade cohort at the middle school in the respective feeder pattern from all analyses in order to maintain as much consistency in comparison as possible between the two classes. Likewise, fifth grade students who were not in the fourth grade cohort from the previous school year were also dropped from the study for the same reason.

Once all data was gathered and the primary researcher verified student members of the fourth and fifth grade cohorts, the data collected was edited and cleaned to ensure data integrity and eliminate data anomalies such as duplicate records, invalid student identifiers, or coding errors not consistent in discipline events and resultant

consequences, or actions. After data cleaning, the primary investigator coded all data for analysis and used descriptive statistics, statistical analysis and variations of percentages to analyze changes in data compared between the two academic years with the same cohort of students to draw conclusions and answer the research questions of the study.

Instruments

For the purpose of this doctoral thesis, the independent variable consisted of the cohort of fourth grade elementary students as they transition to middle school as fifth graders. The dependent variable consisted of the discipline data from the cohort of students involved in the study during the two years they were fourth grade elementary students, then as fifth grade middle school students. The data analyzed included the following discipline infraction descriptors as defined by the school district's Student Code of Conduct and Handbook (District Student Code of Conduct, 2009-2011) :

- Building

- Grade Level

- Infraction Code

- Infraction Description

- Infraction Location Code

- Infraction Location Description

The data analyzed included the following discipline infractions (District Student Code of Conduct, 2009-2011):

- Assault (other than employee)

- Cheating

- Class Disruption

- Class Rule Violation

- Conduct Code Violation

- Disruptive Behavior

- Electronic Device/Laser Point

- Excessive Tardies

- Fighting

- Graffiti

- Horseplay

- Insubordination

- Repeated/Persistent Misbehavior

- Skipping Class

- Theft

- Truancy 10 Days

- Truancy 3 Days

- Truancy Parent

- Unacceptable Language

- Vulgar Gesture

The data analyzed also included the following discipline actions as described in the district student code of conduct and handbook (District Student Code of Conduct, 2009-2011):

- 1 Hour Detention Hall

- 2 Hours Detention Hall

- Called Parents

- Conferenced with Student

- In School Suspension

- Lunch Detention Hall

- No Action

- Out of School Detention

- Partial Day: In School Suspension

- Partial Day: Out of School Suspension

- Placement Off-Campus (Alternative Education Placement)

- Truancy No Fine Assessed

The categories listed above reflected literature that was available online to all stakeholders in the suburban Houston school district where data for this study was retrieved. All students of the district were required to sign and return an acknowledgment form contained in the Student Code of Conduct and Handbook each year they attended any campus within the organization of the district being studied (District Student Code of Conduct, 2009-2011).

The 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 school year district Student Codes of Conduct and Handbooks were products of the board of trustees of the suburban Houston school district from which the data for this study derives. The Student Codes of Conduct and Handbooks complied with the Texas Education Agency and Texas Education Code, Chapter 37 – infractions and consequences (Texas Education Agency, 2013) (District Student Code of Conduct, 2009-2011).

Limitations

Due to the complexity and variety of external situations affecting the consistency of the student subject data during transition, there were several limitations that must be considered regarding this study.

Firstly, any discovered correlation between increases or decreases in discipline data parameters cannot prove causation, or definitively explain reasons for any given change or choice in behavior or resultant discipline events. Social relationships are in constant flux during student development and growth between the fourth grade and fifth grade years. Moreover, as students' perceptions of their social relationships and environment change, so do their relationships with all things contained in that environment. Changes in social perceptions for each subject may or may not affect their choice in behavior; yet, one must consider the possibility that social perception could affect the behavioral choice and resultant data between or during each grade from which data will be extracted. In addition, one must consider inherent individual or group personality traits for the subjects in the study that may (or may not) influence pre- and post-transition behavioral choices.

Furthermore, socio-economic status and family stability must be taken into consideration. Socio-economic status is especially critical; in that, it may have strong impact on whether or not students remain in the cohort from fourth to fifth grade. More specifically, students with a lower socio-economic background may move in or out of the cohort during or between school years as parents seek improvement to the family's financial future. This occurrence may subsequently also affect family stability and student behavior as fathers or mothers leave the family unit in search of stronger financial

stability, indirectly affecting the stability of the family and, likewise, the emotional

stability and behavioral choices of the child at home and in the educational environment.

Other factors which may be a drawback could be skewed discipline events or behavior

choices made by subjects based on unstable, unique student-teacher relationships,

unstable, unique student-administrator relationships, or possible errors in coding by

administrators entering discipline data not eliminated in the data cleaning process as

described in the procedures section. It is also important to note that discipline infractions

occurring during student travel on district school buses are subject to referral through the

district's transportation department as opposed to the discipline officer, or administrator

of the student's home campus.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS OF THE STUDY

Introduction

The primary purpose of this study was to determine the effect transition had on discipline outcomes when fourth grade elementary students transition to middle school as fifth grader students. Specifically, the study analyzed discipline data from a class of fourth grader students within a feeder pattern of a suburban Houston school district whose elementary school campuses were Kindergarten through fourth grade. The study compared the same cohort of fourth grade students' discipline data to their discipline data the next year as fifth graders at a middle school campus with a fifth and sixth grade configuration. Utilizing archival discipline data from a suburban Houston school district, this study analyzed discipline records of three elementary schools and one middle school. The research design for this quantitative study analyzed changes between discipline events from a cohort of fourth grade students to the same cohort of fifth grade students one year later. The primary investigator gathered raw data reflective of discipline events recorded for the subjects of the 2009/2010 fourth grade class as well as the discipline events recorded for the same class of subjects as fifth graders during the 2010/2011 school year. The investigator used descriptive statistics, statistical analysis and variations of percentages to analyze changes in data compared between the two academic years with the same cohort of students

The cohort consisted of sixty-nine students during their fourth grade year at one of the three elementary schools included in the study and the same group of students

during their fifth grade year at the respective feeder middle school the following year.

The demographics of the fourth grade cohort in the study were as follows:

Table 4.1

Demographic and Program Subpopulation Data for Fourth Grade

Subjects for 2009/2010 School Year

Demographic/Subpopulation	Percentage of Total Population
White	42.23%
Hispanic	32.71%
African American	16.01%
Asian	6.96%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	0.23%
Two or More Races	1.86%
Economically Disadvantaged	28.77%
Limited English Proficient	2.55%
Bilingual/ESL Education	8.59%
Gifted and Talented Education	8.12%
Special Education	8.58%
At-Risk	28.31%

The combined demographic and program subpopulation make-up of the cohort of

fifth grade students from 2010/2011 school year used in the sample were as follows:

Table 4.2

Demographic and Program Subpopulation Data for the Fifth Grade

Subjects for the 2010/2011 School Year

Demographic/Subpopulation	Percentage of Total Population
White	40.87%
Hispanic	35.73%
African American	17.22%
Asian	4.37%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	0.26%
Two or More Races	1.54%
Economically Disadvantaged	33.16%
Limited English Proficient	2.83%
Bilingual/ESL Education	11.57%
Gifted and Talented Education	7.97%
Special Education	8.74%
At-Risk	29.31%

Results

Data analysis from the individual discipline infraction by event showed 37 fourth grade students had one or more documented discipline events during the 2009/2010 school year (See Appendix D), while 32 fifth grade students of the same cohort had one or more documented discipline events during the 2010/2011 school year. Sixteen students had one or more documented discipline events during both school years. In total, the cohort of fourth grade students had a combined 76 discipline events recorded for the 2009/2010 school year. The same fifth grade cohort had a combined 131 recorded discipline events for the 2010/2011 school year, resulting in a 72.36% increase in documented discipline events as the cohort transitioned from their respective K-4 elementary schools to the feeder 5-6 middle school.

As displayed in Table 4.3, data analysis from the individual discipline infraction by location showed that fourth grade students and fifth grade students had more discipline infractions in the classroom than any other location. Discipline infractions in the cafeteria were more prominent for fifth grade students than fourth grade students, where fourth grade students had more discipline infractions in the gymnasium than did fifth grade students (Note Table 4.3 and Figure 1). Also of note was the increase in overall discipline infractions in the hallway for fifth graders. The same cohort's fourth grade hallway discipline infractions were significantly lower (Note Table 4.3 and Figure 2). It is important to note that fifth grade students have more class changes in the teaming system than do fourth grade students who are assigned a single homeroom location for the majority of the day. It is also important to note that discipline infractions occurring during student travel on district school buses are subject to referral through the district's transportation department as opposed to the discipline officer, or administrator of the student's home campus.

Table 4.3

Individual Discipline Infraction by Location

Location	Gr 4 Count	Gr 4 Percent	Gr 4 Total	Gr 5 Count	Gr 5 Percent	Gr 5 Total	Final
Bus	4	5.26%	100%	0	0.00%	0%	4
Cafeteria	6	7.89%	29%	15	11.45%	71%	21
Classroom	32	42.11%	29%	79	60.31%	71%	111
Computer Lab	0	0.00%	0%	2	1.53%	100%	2
Gymnasium	17	22.37%	89%	2	1.53%	11%	19
Hallway	1	1.32%	6%	16	12.21%	94%	17
Library	2	2.63%	100%	0	0.00%	0%	2
Office	4	5.26%	25%	12	9.16%	75%	16
Playground	5	6.58%	100%	0	0.00%	0%	5
Restroom	5	6.58%	50%	5	3.82%	50%	10
Grand Total	76	100%	37%	131	100%	63%	207

Figure 1. Individual discipline infraction by location grade 4. This figure provides a visual graphic of the differences in individual discipline infraction by location for grade 4 as shown in table 4.3.
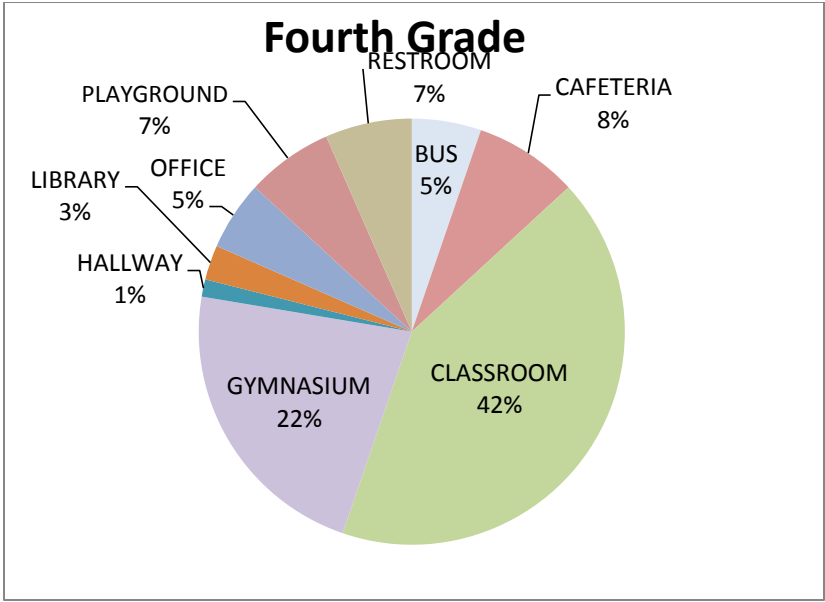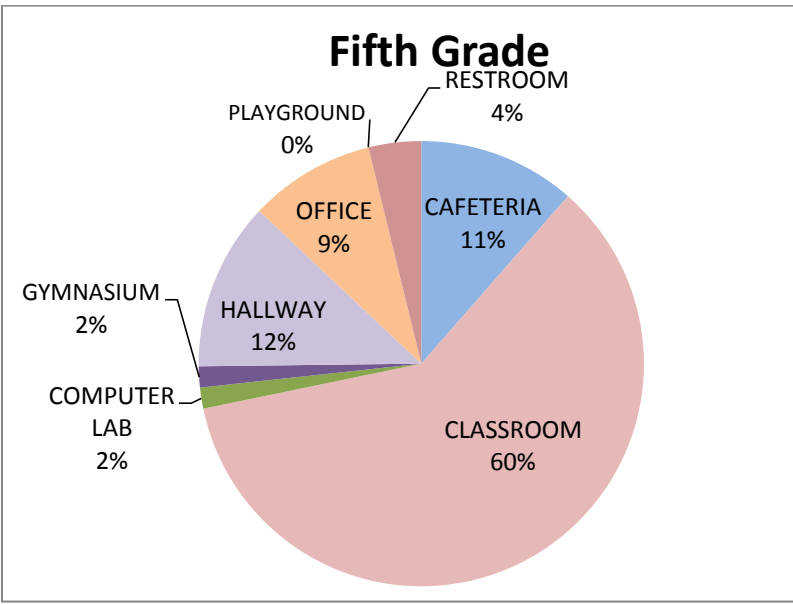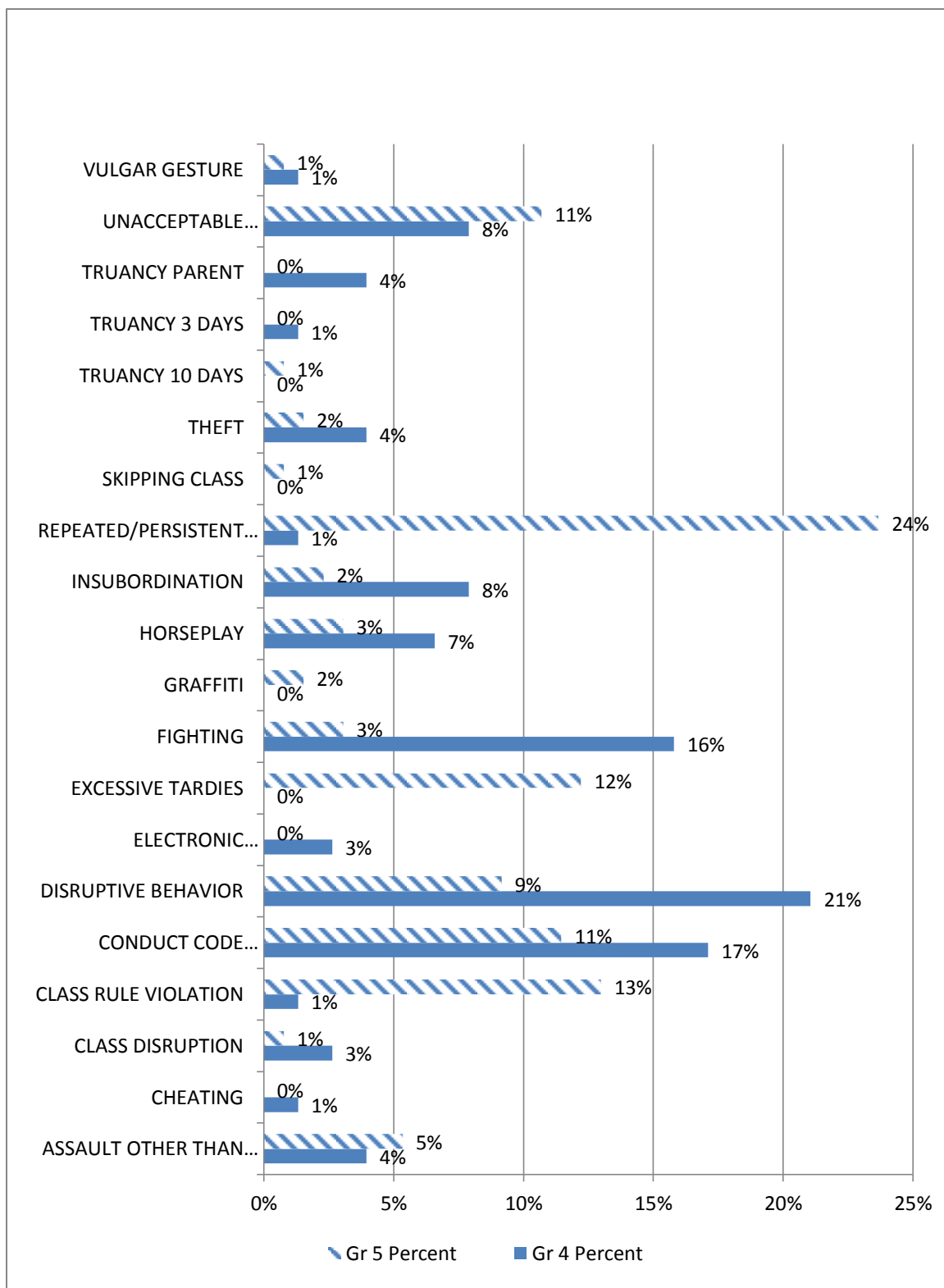

Figure 2. Individual discipline infraction by location grade 5. This figure provides a visual graphic of the differences in individual discipline infraction by location for grade 5 as shown in table 4.3.

According to Table 4.4 and Figure 4.3 data analysis from the individual discipline infraction by type showed significant increases in excessive tardies, unacceptable language, repeated/persistent misbehavior, and class rule violation for fifth grade students when compared to discipline even data from the same cohort's fourth grade year.

Table 4.4

Individual Discipline Infraction by Type

Type	Gr 4 Count	Gr 4 Percent	Gr 4 Total	Gr 5 Count	Gr 5 Percent	Gr 5 Total	Final
Assault Other Than Employee	3	4%	30%	7	5%	70%	10
Cheating	1	1%	100%	0	0%	0%	1
Class Disruption	2	3%	67%	1	1%	33%	3
Class Rule Violation	1	1%	6%	17	13%	94%	18
Conduct Code Violation	13	17%	46%	15	11%	54%	28
Disruptive Behavior	16	21%	57%	12	9%	43%	28
Electronic Device/Laser Pointer	2	3%	100%	0	0%	0%	2
Excessive Tardies	0	0%	0%	16	12%	100%	16
Fighting	12	16%	75%	4	3%	25%	16
Graffiti	0	0%	0%	2	2%	100%	2
Horseplay	5	7%	56%	4	3%	44%	9
Insubordination	6	8%	67%	3	2%	33%	9
Repeated/Persistent Misbehavior	1	1%	3%	31	24%	97%	32
Skipping Class	0	0%	0%	1	1%	100%	1
Theft	3	4%	60%	2	2%	40%	5
Truancy 10 Days	0	0%	0%	1	1%	100%	1
Truancy 3 Days	1	1%	100%	0	0%	0%	1
Truancy Parent	3	4%	100%	0	0%	0%	3
Unacceptable Language	6	8%	30%	14	11%	70%	20
Vulgar Gesture	1	1%	50%	1	1%	50%	2
Grand Total	76	100%	37%	131	100%	63%	207

Figure 3. Individual discipline infraction by type. This illustration shows the differences in individual discipline infraction by type for grades four and five as shown in table 4.4.

Data analysis from the descriptive analysis of individual discipline infractions by action of administration showed increased use of one-hour detention hall and in school suspension for fifth grade discipline events. By contrast, out of school suspensions were used more often in fourth grade than in fifth grade. In addition, elementary administrators coded seventeen discipline events as no action taken, where middle school administrators did not code any discipline event as no action for the same cohort of students.

Table 4.5

Individual Discipline Infraction by Action of Administrator

| Action	Gr 4 Count	Gr 4 Percent	Gr 4 Total	Gr 5 Count	Gr 5 Percent	Gr 5 Total	Total
1 Hr Detention Hall	2	3%	3%	74	56%	97%	76
2 Hr Detention Hall	0	0%	0%	1	1%	100%	1
Called Parents	21	28%	100%	0	0%	0%	21
Conf w/Student	4	5%	100%	0	0%	0%	4
In School Suspension	10	13%	18%	45	34%	82%	55
Lunch Detention Hall	1	1%	100%	0	0%	0%	1
No Action	17	22%	100%	0	0%	0%	17
Out Of School Suspension	16	21%	62%	10	8%	38%	26
Part Day ISS	3	4%	100%	0	0%	0%	3
Partial Day OSS	1	1%	100%	0	0%	0%	1
Placement Off Campus AEP	1	1%	100%	0	0%	0%	1
Truancy No Fine Assessed	0	0%	0%	1	1%	100%	1
Grand Total	76	100%	37%	131	100%	63%	207
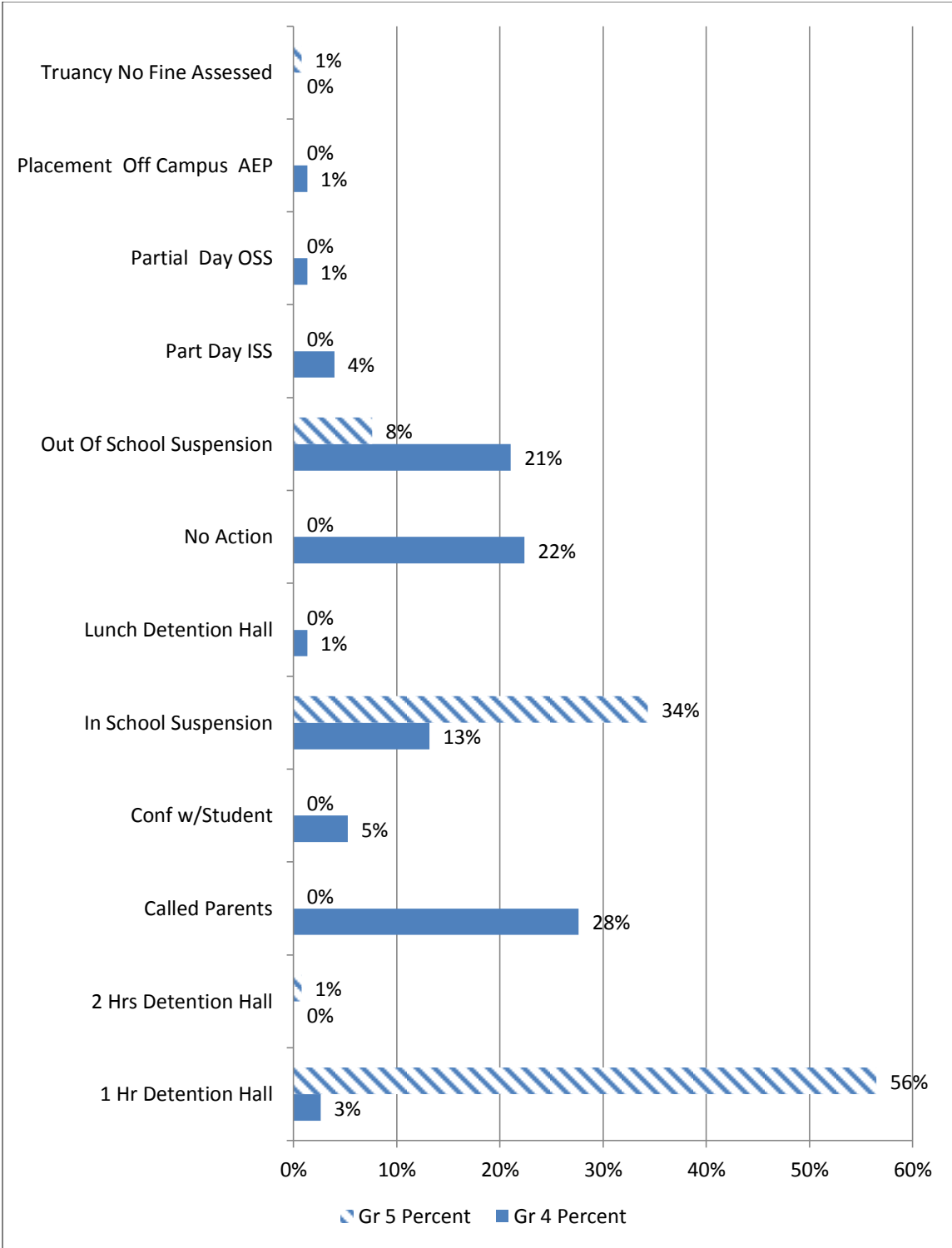
Figure 4. Individual discipline infraction by action of administrator. This illustration shows the differences in individual discipline infraction by action of administrator for grades four and five as shown in table 4.5.

Summary of Findings

The data in chapter four focused on answering two of the three research questions proposed at the beginning of this study: Do the number and type of discipline infractions referred to the office change when fourth grade elementary students transition to fifth grade in a middle school configuration? And, what discipline events occurred most frequently?

Analysis of the descriptive data showed that the number and type of discipline referrals do change when fourth grade elementary students transition to fifth grade in a middle school. In particular, discipline referrals increased from 37% in the three elementary schools during the 2009/2010 school year to 63% in the respective feeder middle school with the same cohort of students during the 2010/2011 school year. Seventy-six discipline events were documented as referrals at the elementary level during the cohort's fourth grade year, while 131 discipline events were documented for the same cohort of students at the middle school level during their fifth grade year. Of the 69 students included in the study, 16 students had one or more discipline infractions referred to the office in both the fourth and fifth grade. Thirty-seven had one or more discipline infractions during their fourth grade year, while 32 different students had one or more discipline infractions during their fifth grade year. This is important due to the anomaly that less students in the fifth grade (32 total) were responsible for a greater amount of discipline infractions (131) post-transition, as opposed to a greater amount of fourth graders (37 total) who were responsible for fewer discipline infractions (76) the year before.

Data analysis of the individual discipline infraction by location showed that both fourth grade and fifth grade had the majority of discipline infractions documented in the classroom. While students in the cohort during the fourth grade had second and third highest documented discipline infractions in the gymnasium and cafeteria, respectively, their fifth grade discipline infractions were second and third greatest in the hallway and cafeteria. It is also important to note that discipline infractions occurring during student travel on district school buses are subject to referral through the district's transportation department as opposed to the discipline officer, or administrator of the student's home campus.

Discipline events that occurred most frequently for fourth grade students in the cohort were "disruptive behavior", "conduct code violation", "fighting"," insubordination", and "unacceptable language". Discipline events that occurred most frequently for the same cohort as fifth grade students were "repeated/persistent misbehavior"," class rule violation", "excessive tardies", and "unacceptable language" (District Student Code of Conduct, 2009-2011). This research determined which discipline events had the highest documented occurrences by calculating the percentage amount each event represented among the total percentage of all discipline events per each grade level, and selected the top-four most frequently occurring discipline events based from the percentage found. Moreover, "insubordination" and "unacceptable language" each represented 8% of the total percentage of discipline infractions for the student cohort as fourth graders – essentially tying the two discipline codes in fourth place (District Student Code of Conduct, 2009-2011).

Data analysis of action by administration showed that middle school administrators used "one hour detention hall" and "in school suspension" for fifth graders more often than did elementary administrators for the same cohort of students as fourth graders. It is interesting to note that elementary administrators used "called parents" only 7% more than "out of school suspension" for action by administrator, whereas middle school administrators had no record of making parent contact (i.e., "called parents") for any recorded discipline infraction for the cohort as fifth graders (District Student Code of Conduct, 2009-2011). The author acknowledges that the aforementioned anomaly is more likely a result of administrative coding error than accurate discipline coding action on behalf of the recording administrator.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Introduction

This study examined the effect transition has on student discipline outcomes when fourth grade elementary students transition to middle school as fifth grader students. The study analyzed discipline data from a class of fourth grader students within a feeder pattern of a suburban Houston school district whose elementary school campuses were Kindergarten through fourth grade.

The same cohort of fourth grade students' discipline data was compared to their discipline data the next year as fifth graders at a middle school campus with a fifth and sixth grade configuration. Additionally, the study identified the most frequent discipline issues that occurred during the students' fifth grade transition year. Lastly, this study aimed to identify key points for administrators to consider in improving future classes' discipline performance in the fifth grade – both pre and post transition. Considering the goal of gaining a greater understanding of how discipline changes for fourth grade students after the transition to middle school in the fifth grade, this study focused on the following questions:

1. Do the number and type of discipline infractions referred to the office change when fourth grade elementary school students transition to fifth grade in a middle school configuration?

2. What discipline events occur most frequently?

3. What trends or issues can be identified for administrators to consider

concerning discipline infractions that will improve future classes' discipline

performance as fifth grade students?

After reviewing the data from this study, it was determined that the number and

type of discipline infractions do, in fact, change in number and type. Discipline referrals

increased from 37% in the three elementary schools during the 2009/2010 school year to

63% in the respective feeder middle school with the same cohort of students during the

2010/2011 school year. Of the discipline events that occurred in middle school, the most

frequent infractions were "repeated/persistent behavior", "class rule violations",

"excessive tardies", "conduct code violations", "unacceptable language", and "disruptive

behavior". At the elementary level, the most frequent discipline infractions were

"disruptive behavior", "conduct code violations", and "fighting" (District Student Code

of Conduct, 2009-2011). This study intends to determine trends or issues that can be

identified for administrators to consider concerning discipline infractions that will

improve future classes' discipline performance as fifth graders in the "Discussion of

Results" portion of chapter five.

Discussion of Results

Out of 69 total students, data analysis from chapter four of the study showed that

37 fourth grade students had one or more documented discipline events during the

2009/2010 school year, while 32 fifth grade students of the same cohort had one or more

documented discipline events during the 2010/2011 school year. This is important due to

the anomaly that less students in the fifth grade (32 total) were responsible for a greater

amount of discipline infractions (131) post-transition, as opposed to a greater amount of

fourth graders (37 total) who were responsible for fewer discipline infractions (76) the year before. Sixteen students had one or more documented discipline events during both school years. In total, the cohort of fourth grade students had a combined seventy-six discipline events recorded for the 2009/2010 school year. The same fifth grade cohort had a combined 131 recorded discipline events for the 2010/2011 school year; thus, resulting in a 72.36% increase in documented discipline events as the cohort transitioned from their respective K-4 elementary schools to the feeder 5-6 middle school.

Relative to this data anomaly is Hirst's (2005) article from this study's literature review that discussed implementing skills and techniques for reducing the amount of office referrals in the middle school setting. The administrative team of Haile Middle School in Bradenton, Florida discovered that a small portion of their student population was responsible for the majority of their discipline referrals. Haile Middle school administration decided to target that population of students with a program designed to assist in permanent behavior changes for the better. While most of the students in the program were able to see positive results in their behavior record, some students continued to see referrals for their behavior choices. The overall effect of the program showed remarkable decreases in student referrals, specifically for those thirteen percent of students that accounted for a large majority of the school discipline issues on campus (Hirst, 2005). The author of this study recommends that administrators identify groupings of students with high numbers of discipline referrals for in-depth counseling and character training as early as possible in their educational career. Intense behavioral and counseling interventions need to happen during the primary years to help improve

students' chances of success in middle school as discussed in the aforementioned program.

Data analysis from the individual discipline infraction by location showed that fourth grade students and fifth grade students had more discipline infractions in the classroom than any other location. Specifically, fourth grade students had 32 classroom infractions while the same cohort of fifth grade students had 79 classroom infractions (an increase of 147%). With this data in mind, and reflecting back on chapter two, Chung, Elias and Schneider (1998) note that middle school transition is a significant source of stress for students leaving elementary school. One of the primary causes of this stress is the change in environment, where students must learn a new role inside the campus to which they transition. With traditional elementary school learning environments having a smaller campus and classroom population than the typical middle school, the increase of classroom discipline infractions in the middle school setting by 147% could be resultant of larger classrooms from the middle school environment. The highest average fourth grade class size was 21.7 (at elementary school C), while elementary schools A and B had an average fourth grade class size of 19.3 and 20.5, respectively. The average fifth grade class size was 25.7 students.

Chung, Elias and Schneider (1998) also discuss the differences in teacher expectations between the elementary and middle school campus. While instructional and curricular material at the middle school level is more content driven with student achievement as its core focus; conversely, the elementary school climate is more task-focused and teacher-student relationships more nurturing. It is also worth noting that the middle school "teaming" system utilized by the middle school in this study maintained

three-to-four homeroom teachers per seventy-five to 100 students, where the self-contained model of the elementary schools in the study maintained at least a twenty-two to one student teacher ratio.

Also of note was the increase in overall discipline infractions in the hallway for fifth graders. The same cohort's fourth grade hallway discipline infractions were significantly lower. Considering again that fifth grade students have more class changes in the teaming system than do fourth grade students who are assigned a single homeroom location for the majority of the day. Discipline infractions in the cafeteria were more prominent for fifth grade students than fourth grade students, whereas fourth grade students had more discipline infractions in the gymnasium than did fifth grade students. Data analysis from the individual discipline infraction by type showed significant increases in "excessive tardies", "unacceptable language", "repeated/persistent misbehavior", and "class rules violation" for fifth grade students when compared to discipline even data from the same cohort's fourth grade year.

From the descriptive analysis of individual discipline infractions by action of administration, data analysis revealed an increased use of one-hour detention hall and in-school suspension for fifth grade discipline events. By contrast, however, out of school suspensions were used more often in fourth grade than in fifth grade. In addition, elementary administrators coded seventeen discipline events as "no action taken", where middle school administrators did not code any discipline event as no action for the same cohort of students.

Implications for School Leaders

For the specific purpose of this study, elementary school grade configuration has been defined as Kindergarten through fourth grade. During the first five years of primary school, students develop strong connections with their teachers as well as peers in their classrooms. Middle school schedules, however, are different from elementary school schedules in that, for the first time in students' educational career, they begin experiencing more class-to-class transitions in conjunction with changing teachers. In some instances, student class groups can change as frequently as every hour. Such change continues to occur given that many middle school faculties are more content driven versus generalist driven. For the purpose of this study, a middle school configuration with fifth and sixth grades used the concept of academic teacher team whereby students stay in the same team of content teachers, while transitioning to those teachers' classrooms as a single homeroom class within a specific schedule unique to that team of teachers only.

Students begin to experience relationship building with a larger number of teachers at one time when transitioning to middle school, rather than with a minimal few (as experienced with the elementary school model). The typical elementary school master schedule – at least within the confines of this particular study topic – maintains the same students in each section, or homeroom, throughout the day. Students may move to a few electives, such as music and physical education, but academic instruction for all content areas comes from at most two teachers, or a team to which one group of students is assigned. The middle school master schedule used for this study is based on the team

concept, whereby students stay in the same section, or in the same homeroom, while transitioning to various content teachers classrooms together.

Another factor worth noting when discussing transition effects on discipline for fourth grade students moving to the fifth grade middle school concept is the merging of other feeder school elementary campuses into a singular fifth grade class at the respective middle school. As former elementary students beginning their fifth grade year on a different campus, they are submerged in a new multicultural and behaviorally diverse social environment. This transition is alleviated somewhat by the middle school's use of academic teaming to stabilize the student's social experience. Much like the elementary concept, the academic teaming concept in middle school keeps a section (or homeroom) of students together while transitioning to a maximum of three to four content teachers' classrooms throughout the day. Students will nevertheless experience a broader-based social dynamic among new peers from other feeder elementary campuses whose demographic make-up and educational expectations may differ from their own. Students will also experience more than one or two teachers during their school day for the first time. This new context places an additional responsibility on each student to develop a clear understanding of expectations among several teachers. Each teacher will also have her or his own set of classroom rules and expectations that each fifth grade student will be responsible for understanding.

Trends for Administrators

What trends or issues can be identified for administrators to consider concerning discipline infractions that will improve future classes' discipline performance as fifth grade students? In most instances, the move from elementary to middle school is the first

major transition students experience in their lives and can be a very stressful time (Theriot & Dupper, 2010). Consequently, students often have many valid fears about what lies ahead of them as they anticipate making such a transition. One of the foremost concerns students have is how they will make friends or how they will feel around a new group of peers in their novel social realm (Theriot & Dupper, 2010). Other fears include not knowing the physical layout of a new building or understanding where to go, or not knowing an adult from whom they might ask for help. Students often are concerned about learning new rules or expectations from a set of adults with which they, as students have no familiarity. Also, students can often experience high stress levels about unknown scheduling or daily routine (Mowen & Mowen, 2004).

Theriot and Dupper (2010) state that there are critical issues to consider when children transition from an elementary school to the middle school environment. Several factors contribute to student stress in both anticipating and adapting to the daily functions of a middle school campus. Students who are transitioning to middle school from a self-contained elementary school configuration face challenges considering the extreme changes in terms of environment and personnel. There are also other changes students must navigate through such as; greater numbers of students; the presence of new students from other feeder elementary schools; and greater numbers of faculty and staff (Akos, 2002).

Transitional Programs for Students

Developing transitional programs that are effective in alleviating students' stress related to their shift from elementary to middle school also makes a positive impact on student attendance, discipline, achievement, and retention. Reflecting on Cauley and

Jovanovich (2006), the authors state that transition programs that prove effective are more valuable when targeting multiple activities involving students, parents, and teachers. It is also important to note that an effective transition program does not conclude at the beginning of each school year. Rather, a truly effective transitional program must continue throughout the fall and spring semesters in order to adequately monitor and assist students who are new to a campus. The specific activities of these ideal programs should also involve all stakeholders of the individual school. Furthermore, it is crucial that preparations for student transitions for future groups continue throughout the school year at multiple levels – for both the sending and receiving campus (Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006).

Teachers and Transition

Rogers and Freiberg (1983) cite a 1975 study by Aspy and Roebuck wherein teachers trained in Rogers' facilitative teaching model established student-teacher interactions. These interaction models focused on teachers' acknowledgement of and response to student feeling, instructional dialogue inclusive of student generated ideas, and student and teacher discussion. Teachers also worked to develop positive reinforcement and praise for student performance, instructional delivery of concepts more suited for individual students' frame of reference, as well as positive facial gestures, such as smiling, while interacting with students.

In a 1977 follow-up study cited by Rogers and Freiberg (1983), Aspy and Roebuck found that students exposed to teachers with higher student-lead facilitative classrooms improved student attendance. By comparison, students in lower student-lead facilitative classrooms missed an average of nine school days within an entire year, while

classrooms with higher levels of student-lead facilitative interaction only missed an average of five days. Moreover, Aspy and Roebuck's 1977 study found that classrooms with increased levels of student facilitation performed higher on academic achievement measures – with fewer discipline incidents; with higher levels of student engagement; and, with more creative and critical thinking during class. Abraham Maslow also placed love and belonging in the middle of his hierarchy of needs; thus, constituting love and belonging a requirement to be met prior to reaching levels of self-actualization (Maslow, 1962; Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

Other Stakeholders involved in Transition

Akos (2002) states that campuses should seek strong "orientation programs" in order to build upon positive transitional outcomes, which could encourage greater student enthusiasm about the process, such as mentoring and buddy programs that are peer facilitated. The strength of a transition program also depends on the diversity of persons involved at the campus level, including counselors, administrators, teachers, other parents, peer student relationships, and community programs.

This study is important in that it has led to contributions in relation to the overall understanding of changes in student discipline as a result of the transition from elementary to middle school. In addition, this study is important in that it has assisted in formulating guiding recommendations that will be useful in supporting positive improvements to current discipline practices – particularly with regard to the aforementioned transition, which represent an extremely critical juncture in a young person's academic and personal life.

This study included discipline records from three elementary schools and one middle school using archival discipline data from a suburban Houston school district. This examination has provided valuable insights for district leaders, especially in planning for method of: (a) how to address various types of discipline events; (b) improving their students' discipline choices; and, (c) strengthening the transition process from elementary to middle school campuses.

Implications for Further Research

It is important that school administrators provide necessary support for positive transitions for elementary students entering middle school, taking into consideration the aforementioned discipline research and theories on belonging. Such consideration, therefore, will serve as a catalyst for continued awareness as to how future transition plans can improve for all persons involved. The author suggests research that connects and understands the constant of peer relationships to the success of the middle school transition. As stated in Kingery and Erdley (2007), the quality of peer relationships becomes increasingly important during students' elementary years. The quality of those relationships can have a significant impact on students' transition through the middle school years and their involvement in school activities. However, further research is needed to understand the variances in different types of student peer relationships and how those relationships change throughout the elementary years. Likewise, resultant research can strengthen transition programs with information for planning student successes across the transition period.

The author also suggests further research with in the area of student-to-teacher-to-parent contact and relationships at both the elementary and middle school levels.

Reviewing the data of this study showed fourth grade students' parents were called 28% of the time for a discipline infraction; whereas, the data set for fifth grade students showed no documented parent phone calls for any discipline infraction. In fact, "call to parent" was the most likely discipline action, or outcome for all elementary discipline events of the data set studied; yet, fifth grade resultant discipline was overwhelmingly dealt with on campus with no parent contact recorded. Fifty-six percent of all discipline infractions for fifth grade resulted in one hour of after school detention where 34% of all fifth grade discipline infractions resulted in In-School Suspension. Such discrepancies in resultant discipline across the campus levels may indicate a gap in student-to-teacher-to-parent communication and relationships. Further research would be able to assist in finding whether this indeed is consistent across larger data sets. The result of this study shows a strong likelihood that the relationship between student-to-teacher-to-parent is stronger during the fourth grade year, than the fifth grade year.

Furthermore, the author suggests that school districts focus carefully on internal coding policy for documentation of discipline infractions. In addition to the Texas Education Agency mandated PEIMS coding, districts should avoid classification of administrative actions to discipline infractions that give the impression of passive responses to student behavior. Coding examples such as "no action taken" would be better described as "no formal action taken" or recoded as "conferenced with student" since the very nature of acknowledgement of an infraction in the data indicates some sort of action was indeed taken.

Conclusions

This study examined the effect transition has on student discipline outcomes when fourth grade elementary students transition to middle school as fifth grader students. The study analyzed discipline data from a class of fourth grader students within a feeder pattern of a suburban Houston school district whose elementary school campuses were Kindergarten through fourth grade.

The same cohort of fourth grade students' discipline data was compared to their discipline data the next year as fifth graders at a middle school campus with a fifth and sixth grade configuration. Additionally, the study identified the most frequent discipline issues that occurred during the students' fifth grade transition year. Lastly, this study aimed to identify key points for administrators to consider in improving future classes' discipline performance in the fifth grade – both pre and post transition. Considering the goal of gaining a greater understanding of how discipline changes for fourth grade students after the transition to middle school in the fifth grade, this study focused on the following questions: Do the number and type of discipline infractions referred to the office change when fourth grade elementary school students transition to fifth grade in a middle school configuration? What discipline events occur most frequently? And, what trends or issues can be identified for administrators to consider concerning discipline infractions that will improve future classes' discipline performance as fifth grade students?

There are several limitations that must be considered regarding this study due to the complexity and variety of external situations affecting the consistency of the student subject data during transition. Firstly, any discovered correlation between increases or

decreases in discipline data parameters cannot prove causation, or definitively explain reasons for any given change or choice in behavior or resultant discipline events. Such a consideration becomes even more salient when one considers that social relationships are in continuous flux during student development and growth, particularly between the fourth grade and fifth grade years. Therefore, as a student's perceptions of his or her social relationships and environment change, so do his or her relationships with all things contained in that environment. Changes in social perceptions for each subject may or may not affect their choice in behavior; nonetheless, one must consider the possibility that social perception could affect the behavioral choice and resultant data between or during each grade from which data will be extracted. One should also consider inherent individual or group personality traits for the subjects in the study that might (or might not) influence behavioral choices pre- and post-transition.

Other extraneous factors, such as socio-economic status and family stability, must also be taken into consideration. Perhaps this is critically important when considering socio-economic status, which may have a strong impact on whether or not students remain in the cohort from fourth to fifth grade. In particular, students with a lower socio-economic background may move in or out of the cohort during or between school years as parents seek improvement to the family's financial future. Similarly, this may also affect family stability and student behavior as fathers or mothers leave the family unit in search of stronger financial stability, indirectly affecting the stability of the family and, consequently, the emotional stability and behavioral choices of the child at home and within the educational environment. Other factors that may be specific drawbacks are skewed discipline events or behavior choices made by subjects based on unstable, unique

student-teacher relationships, unstable, unique student-administrator relationships, or possible errors in coding by administrators entering discipline data. It is also important to note that discipline infractions occurring during student travel on district school buses are subject to referral through the district's transportation department as opposed to the discipline officer, or administrator of the student's home campus.

After reviewing the data from this study, it was determined that the number and type of discipline infractions do, in fact, change in number and type. Discipline referrals increased from 37% in the three elementary schools during the 2009/2010 school year to 63% in the respective feeder middle school with the same cohort of students during the 2010/2011 school year. Of the discipline events that occurred in middle school, the most frequent infractions were "repeated/persistent behavior", "class rule violations", "excessive tardies", "conduct code violations", "unacceptable language", and "disruptive behavior". The most frequent discipline infractions at the elementary level were "disruptive behavior", "conduct code violations", and "fighting".

The majority of trends or issues that can be identified for administrators to consider related to discipline infractions, which will improve future classes' discipline performance as fifth graders from the aforementioned, involve physical, emotional, academic, and social development. Likewise, these same issues are primary components to building a successful school transition program across grade level and campus level changes. The body of research discussed in this study's chapter two reveals that students who find value and worth in a campus climate experience greater success in that campus than students who do not. Kingery and Erdley (2007) believe the quality of relationships is pivotal to the success of students transitioning across the middle school years.

Campus administrators must prepare their students for transitions between schools by creating programs that improve student-to-student relationships, student-to-teacher relationships, and student-to-teacher-to-parent relationships. This is essential in addressing and improving discipline issues during the grade levels and strengthening grade transitions. The climate of any school and its culture are extremely important in supporting these relationships. A student will be more inclined to make better behavior choices if they feel valued and experience a high sense of self-worth both inside the classroom and on campus. Teachers and parents must make the effort to build and maintain relationships across the middle school transition as students begin to grow through adolescence and the resultant changes that invariably occur as a result, with administrators leading the effort in building those relationships.

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APPENDIX A

HUMAN SUBJECTS RESEARCH COMMITTEE APPROVAL

Appendix A

UNIVERSITYof **HOUSTON**

DIVISION OF RESEARCH

July 18, 2012

Mr. Jimmy Nowell
c/o Dr. Angus MacNeil
Curriculum and Instruction

Dear Mr. Jimmy Nowell,

Based upon your request for exempt status, an administrative review of your research proposal entitled "The Transition from Elementary to Middle School; Implications for Student Discipline" was conducted on July 5, 2012.

At that time, your request for exemption under **Category 4** was approved pending modification of your proposed procedures/documents.

The changes you have made adequately respond to the identified contingencies. As long as you continue using procedures described in this project, you do not have to reapply for review. * Any modification of this approved protocol will require review and further approval. Please contact me to ascertain the appropriate mechanism.

If you have any questions, please contact Alicia Vargas at (713) 743-9215.

Sincerely yours,

Kirstin Rochford, MPH, CIP, CPIA
Director, Research Compliance

*Approvals for exempt protocols will be valid for 5 years beyond the approval date. Approval for this project will expire **June 1, 2017**. If the project is completed prior to this date, a final report should be filed to close the protocol. If the project will continue after this date, you will need to reapply for approval if you wish to avoid an interruption of your data collection.

Protocol Number: 12535-EX

316 E. Cullen Building   Houston, TX 77204-2015   (713) 743-9204   Fax: (713) 743-9577
COMMITTEES FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS

APPENDIX B

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE RESEARCH FORM

Appendix B

PEARLAND ISD

NYLA WATSON, Ed.D.
Assistant Superintendent
of Instructional Programs

July 10, 2012

Kristin Rochford, MPH, CIP, CPIA
Director of Research Compliance
The University of Houston, Division of Research
316 E. Cullen Building
Houston, Tx, 77204-2015
713-743-9204, fax 713-743-9577

Dear Ms. Rochford,

Pearland Independent School District recognizes the purpose of Mr. Jimmy Nowell's study, "The Transition from Elementary to Middle School; Implications for Student Discipline" will be to gather raw data reflective of discipline events recorded for the 2009/2010 4th grade class of three elementary schools in our school district as well as the discipline events recorded for the same class as 5th graders at their feeder middle school during the 2010/2011 school year.

Mr. Nowell has stated that he will use descriptive statistics, frequencies, and variations of percentages to analyze changes in data compared between the two academic years with the same cohort of students.

The data is being obtained from the Technology Department, with permission from the Assistant Superintendent of Instructional Programs, Dr. Nyla Watson, of the Pearland Independent School District, 1928 N. Main, Pearland, Texas 77581 ~ 281.485.3203.

It is our understanding that at no time any personal student information, or campus / district identification will be revealed during the course of this study.

Mr. Jimmy Nowell has permission from Pearland I.S.D. to use the aforementioned data in his study entitled: "The Transition from Elementary to Middle School; Implications for Student Discipline".

Sincerely,

Dr. Nyla Watson
Asst. Supt. Of Instructional Programs
Pearland ISD

POST OFFICE BOX 7 • PEARLAND, TEXAS 77588-0007 • 281-485-3203 • FAX 281-412-1238

APPENDIX C

AMENDMENTS TO APPROVAL FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF

HOUSTON HUMAN SUBJECTS RESEARCH COMMITTEE

Appendix C

Subject: CPHS 12535-EX The Transition from Elementary to Middle School: Implications for Student Discipline

From: Vargas, Alicia (avargas5@Central.UH.EDU)
To: jimmynowell@sbcglobal.net;
Cc: AMacNeil@Central.UH.EDU;
Date: Thursday, January 3, 2013 4:36 PM

Mr. Nowell,

Your amendment to revise the following has been approved. The renewal date remains June 1, 2017. You may begin to implement this amendment.

➢ The primary researcher would like to revise the three research questions posed by the study:

   o Do the number and type of discipline infractions referred to the office change when fourth grade elementary school students transition to fifth grade in a middle school configuration?

   o What discipline events occur most frequently?

   o What trends or issues can be identified for administrators to consider concerning discipline infractions that will improve future classes' discipline performance as fifth grade students?

Please remember that no change in this research protocol can be initiated without prior review by the CPHS. You are obligated to report any unanticipated problems involving risks to participants, complications, and/or any adverse events to the Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects (CPHS) immediately.

We ask that you notify the CPHS when your study is completed or terminated. Please contact us if you have any questions.

Thank you

Alicia Vargas

CPHS Coordinator

Office of Research Policies, Compliance & Committees

Division of Research

University of Houston

avargas5@central.uh.edu

713-743-9215

UNIVERSITY of
HOUSTON
A CARNEGIE-DESIGNATED TIER ONE
PUBLIC RESEARCH UNIVERSITY

APPENDIX D

INDIVIDUAL DESCRIPTION INFRACTION BY EVENT

Appendix D

Table 4.3

Individual Description Infraction by Event

Individual Student Identification	Fourth Grade Discipline Events	% of Fourth Grade Discipline Events	Fifth Grade Discipline Events	% of Fifth Grade Discipline Events	Total Discipline Events
0053	0	0.00%	1	0.76%	1
0259	4	5.26%	2	1.53%	6
0407	1	1.32%	0	0.00%	1
0543	0	0.00%	1	0.76%	1
0689	0	0.00%	7	5.34%	7
1034	4	5.26%	0	0.00%	4
1214	1	1.32%	3	2.29%	4
1493	1	1.32%	0	0.00%	1
1916	0	0.00%	1	0.76%	1
1993	0	0.00%	1	0.76%	1
2187	0	0.00%	1	0.76%	1
2797	5	6.58%	0	0.00%	5
2989	0	0.00%	3	2.29%	3
3243	1	1.32%	2	1.53%	3
3392	1	1.32%	0	0.00%	1
3421	1	1.32%	3	2.29%	4
3423	1	1.32%	0	0.00%	1
3514	2	2.63%	2	1.53%	4
3536	1	1.32%	0	0.00%	1
3599	1	1.32%	0	0.00%	1
3680	0	0.00%	1	0.76%	1
3870	1	1.32%	2	1.53%	3
3989	11	14.47%	16	12.21%	27
3994	0	0.00%	2	1.53%	2
4060	0	0.00%	2	1.53%	2
4106	2	2.63%	1	0.76%	3
4112	1	1.32%	0	0.00%	1
4252	0	0.00%	6	4.58%	6
4455	1	1.32%	0	0.00%	1
4590	4	5.26%	3	2.29%	7
4727	1	1.32%	0	0.00%	1
4805	1	1.32%	2	1.53%	3
4868	0	0.00%	14	10.69%	14

4966	0	0.00%	2	1.53%	2
5082	0	0.00%	2	1.53%	2
5229	0	0.00%	1	0.76%	1
5378	0	0.00%	2	1.53%	2
5383	0	0.00%	4	3.05%	4
5431	1	1.32%	0	0.00%	1
5474	0	0.00%	1	0.76%	1
5511	1	1.32%	0	0.00%	1
5969	1	1.32%	0	0.00%	1
5970	1	1.32%	0	0.00%	1
6400	0	0.00%	1	0.76%	1
6906	0	0.00%	1	0.76%	1
6963	0	0.00%	1	0.76%	1
6969	0	0.00%	1	0.76%	1
7187	0	0.00%	1	0.76%	1
7209	2	2.63%	0	0.00%	2
7316	0	0.00%	1	0.76%	1
7348	2	2.63%	2	1.53%	4
7429	1	1.32%	0	0.00%	1
7435	0	0.00%	1	0.76%	1
7466	0	0.00%	3	2.29%	3
7542	1	1.32%	0	0.00%	1
7759	8	10.53%	8	6.11%	16
7777	0	0.00%	1	0.76%	1
7901	1	1.32%	1	0.76%	2
8072	1	1.32%	0	0.00%	1
8088	0	0.00%	9	6.87%	9
8431	0	0.00%	5	3.82%	5
8505	4	5.26%	1	0.76%	5
8572	0	0.00%	1	0.76%	1
8592	1	1.32%	0	0.00%	1
9099	1	1.32%	0	0.00%	1
9310	0	0.00%	1	0.76%	1
9313	2	2.63%	1	0.76%	3
9676	2	2.63%	2	1.53%	4
9715	0	0.00%	1	0.76%	1
TOTAL	76	100.00%	131	100.00%	207