

**SCHOOL-WIDE POSITIVE BEHAVIOR SUPPORT IMPLEMENTATION AS IT
RELATES TO REFERRAL REDUCTION AMONG STUDENTS OF COLOR IN
AN IN-SCHOOL SUSPENSION PROGRAM: PERCEPTIONS OF KEY
STAKEHOLDERS**

A Record of Study

by

ROBERT LEWIS LONG, III

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

May 2012

Major Subject: Educational Administration

School-Wide Positive Behavior Support Implementation as it relates to Referral
Reduction among Students of Color in an In-School Suspension Program: Perceptions of
Key Stakeholders

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Approved by:

Chair of Committee,	Gwendolyn Webb-Johnson
Committee Members,	Norvella Carter
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	Jim Scheurich
Head of Department,	Fred Nafukho

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ABSTRACT

School-Wide Positive Behavior Support Implementation as it Relates to Referral Reduction among Students of Color in an In-school Suspension Program: Perceptions of Key Stakeholders. (May 2012)

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The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine a problem of practice present in an actual school district. The study examined School-Wide Positive Behavior Support Implementation as it relates to the recidivism rates of students of color in the in-school suspension setting. Over the course of one school year, the perceptions of seven middle school teachers, three parents, and two administrators were explored in a suburban middle school in Southeast Texas.

Although In-school suspension programs exist in every American public school to some degree, little research has been done in regards to the academic outcomes associated with those who are frequently placed in this campus based disciplinary alternative educational placement. In many of these “placements” many of the students assigned are not afforded access to instructional materials, supplies, or a certified teacher. Since the enactment of the federal No Child Left Behind Act (2001), the

achievement gap has been discussed and studied. However, few studies have been done to understand how the current practices in in-school suspension contribute to the achievement gap specifically among students of color.

This study examined key stakeholder's perceptions of School-Wide Positive Behavior Supports, and In-school suspension as a vehicle for referral reduction and removal of middle school students from their academic setting. The participants were "key-stakeholder" parents, teachers, and administrators who educate students at Caden Middle School. Findings from this problem of practice indicated that not only was the campus not imploring consistent practices and interventions related to and promoted by the SWPBS system in the in-school suspension setting, many of the staff members teachers and administrators alike did not adhere to the philosophical tenants of the SWPBS within the general classroom setting. The research presented in the record of study, identified gaps in both perceptions and understanding among key stakeholders in regards both in-school suspension and the school-wide positive behavior support systems at Caden Middle School. Results of this from this problem of practice found a severe disconnect in understanding the purpose and rationale of SWPBS among the administrators, teachers, and parents that participated in this study. Furthermore, the variance in the "self-sense making" done by each of the stakeholder groups after campus leadership failed to communicate, support, and sustain district expectations for program implementation with fidelity. Initiatives implemented through the investigation of the questions related to this problem of practice assisted in providing relevant professional development to re-solicit teacher and staff buy-in, prioritization of organization goals,

and engaging teacher leadership to re-implement SWPBS to countermand system practices that were contrary to the district's original expectations.

DEDICATION

“For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope”... (Jeremiah 29:11).

This body of work is dedicated to my future, and my legacy...my family.

First to my son, Robert Kaden Long, IV, he is the fourth person with this name. He is the motivation for my self-efficacy. Son, you come from a proud family of educators. Remember, education is freedom. Always seek to know the why.

To the memory of my grandparents, Robert L. Long, Sr. & Janie Boykin Long, who cultivated generations of success despite the obstacles of the segregated South;

To my mother, Florida Long-Harris, thank you for your high expectations, and hard-work ethic. It is my hope that I meet your expectations as a son;

To my wife, Kari Mosca Long; thank you for always loving me for the man that I hope to be, and sacrificing so much to help us get there. Your dedication as my wife and to our family is something that I never dreamed possible. Your love is my life.

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“Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another”.

(Proverbs 27:17)

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My committee chair, Dr. Gwendolyn Webb-Johnson, my ambassador of “Qwan” has served as a mentor and my personal “Dumbledore,” coaching me and guiding me throughout this process. My first experience with this extraordinary professor of color was one that forced me to re-evaluate and challenge my cultural identity. The knowledge, perspective, and general goodness of Dr. Jim Scheurich instantaneously made me respect and admire him as a man of great intellect. How blessed I am to have received instruction from him. Dr. Virginia Collier is who I call a “trail-blazer”, is awe-inspiring as one of the first female superintendents in the State of Texas. Her knowledge of the superintendency, as well as her effectiveness as a networker, politician, and “access-grantor,” provided me with opportunities that assisted me in “closing the achievement gap”. To Dr. Norvella Carter, where can I begin...I have long admired your work, as well as your commitment to students at both of the universities to which my experience has known of you. Your students, much like your research speaks for itself, I am honored to have experienced your wisdom, guidance, and support.

To the Executive Leadership Program, CoHort-I: I would like you to know that the man I am today is because each and every one of you supported and loved me to the best

of your ability and comfort level. Some, I know better than others, but it was my hope to continue to take advantage of the opportunity to connect with, and develop relationships with each of you, despite the inevitable cliques that form due to social reproduction, and personal ontological issues.

I want you to know that I love and support the following persons: Dr. Cheryl T. Henry, Dr. Jan Nell, Dr. Wanda Baker, Jim Russell, Mindy Peper, Sylinda Howard, Mary Ellen Edge, Karen Rodriguez, Karee Gregg, Patty Mooney and Robin McGlohn, Dwayne Ostrova McGary, and Kim Rhodes Monette. Thank you all for helping me learn and grow as a professional and a person.

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“A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity”.

(Proverbs 17:17)

Jason Michael Burdine 02’: You have served as my council and confidant, listening while always uplifted me and my family with positivity, support, and honesty. You taught me the power of forgiveness, and what that means for life. I have always respected and admired your dedication to your family, and the effort and purpose that you place on making the most of every experience. It is in that spirit that I call you my brother.

Joshua Bryan Daniels 03': An unlikely brotherhood at first, now you are family. I am honored to count you as an ally. Josh, you have taught me the importance and value of loyalty and "giving your word", and what that looks like when carried to fruition. Your dedication to my family and mutual respect for our friendship warrants this acknowledgement. As I watch you daily, it makes me proud to be an Aggie as your actions exemplify what an Aggie should be. You do the Corp of Cadets proud. All I can say is, "BOOM" bubba.

Miguel Sebastian Perez, III: We led a school from a TEA rating of academically acceptable, to a recognized rating, the first time in the school's history. The district gained national recognition for instructional initiatives to reduce the achievement gap, as we consumed many boxes of "Popeye's" chicken. I am proud to now call you brother. Your life story is a truly the purpose of our great country. You are an inspiration and teach me daily. One of the most important lessons you have taught is the value and importance of never underestimating your self-worth, believing in yourself, and working to make yourself better with every opportunity.

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“Her children rise up and call her blessed”

(Proverbs 31:2)

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Scenario-Sentencing to In-School Suspension

DiVonte is an eighth grader at Caden Middle School, who has expended more time receiving consequences for subjective behavior than participating in the technical core of instruction this school as a result of his behavioral infractions, he is often sentenced to ISS. As other administrators and teachers will testify, DiVonte is considered a disruptive element in the classroom. Like many African American male students in America, he is perceived as unmanageable and insolent. He objects to all authority, rejects the notion of following clear instructions, and “acts out” in class on a consistent basis. Subsequently, over the past eight months, DiVonte has served 70% or 123 total days of his instructional school days assigned to in-school suspension (ISS). He is allowed to come to school with his peers, nonetheless, because of his “objectionable” classroom performance; he spends his days in ISS with other peers who have also been discharged from their classrooms. Even though he has not physically been in his appropriate instructional setting for weeks, his yearly attendance record only shows two absences and no unexcused absences.

In the ISS or (DMC) classroom, DiVonte is provided with a folder each day that may or may not contain classroom assignments from his teachers. Although he can do

This Record of Study follows the style of *The Journal of Negro Education*.

class worksheets and math assignments, he is not allowed to partake in class activities, including workshop or laboratory assignments for his science and technology classes.

A full-time aide or (paraprofessional) is assigned to the school's assistant principal's office to act in the role of the educator for the students in the ISS classroom.

The students interestingly enough refer to this adult as "The DMC Lady." The DMC Lady keeps the ISS students quiet, but for the most part, this aide is not qualified to answer fundamental questions the students may have about their assignments. When exams come around, DiVonte and the other students in ISS will take the same tests as their classmates. All students will be held to the same standard, and DiVonte is expected to do just as well as his classmates who were not in ISS. Understandably, the passing rate of students in ISS is much lower than that of their classmates. In the case of Divonte, he failed both the state assessment test in both the areas for Reading and Mathematics. Students who receive ISS discipline are typically perceived as rebellious children who defy authority at a minor level. They are the students who constantly interrupt the teacher, who use inappropriate language in class, and who choose not to follow what teachers call "basic" instructions. To maintain authority in the classroom, teachers duly remove these students from class. But because the students are not as dangerous or destructive as to warrant total removal from school, they are given the lighter sanction of in-school suspension for a day or two. In the case of a one-time offender, this punishment is often all that is required to reprimand a student and correct the misbehavior. But for the other students who display behaviors that are perceived as "rebellious" on a consistent basis, ISS becomes a "typical" part of their school days.

Misbehaving students warrant intervention, but when this sanction is imposed repeatedly and for prolonged periods of time, those students suffer from the same imposed learning handicap as a student who spends a large segment of the school term sick at home. The difference is that in theory, students in ISS are receiving the same education as their classmates. They are expected to perform as well as their classmates, both behaviorally and academically, and are treated as though they have been in class and equitable. But in practice, these students appear to be only receiving a mere shadow of an equal education. They may be the students who need instruction the most. To the extent that students are repeatedly sentenced to ISS without interventions that can model and reinforce appropriate behavior that the school culture will embrace and to the extent that they do not receive substantive and meaningful instruction in their core classes during the “ISS sentence”, their right to a free and appropriate education is impacted. This sentence is too, too long. When a school has granted a fundamental right to a basic education, as many do, and then deprives a student of that right when less restrictive alternatives are available, the school has impermissibly infringed on the rights of that student to not only an appropriate education, but also to a culturally responsive and equitable education.

In chapter one, we will discuss briefly the history of Bring-Together ISD, become familiar with the research site, Caden Middle School, introduce the statement of problem, discuss the overall purpose of this problem of practice, discuss discipline and the right to an education, and zero tolerance practices as it relates to the reduction of repeated placements in the in-school suspension program at Caden Middle School.

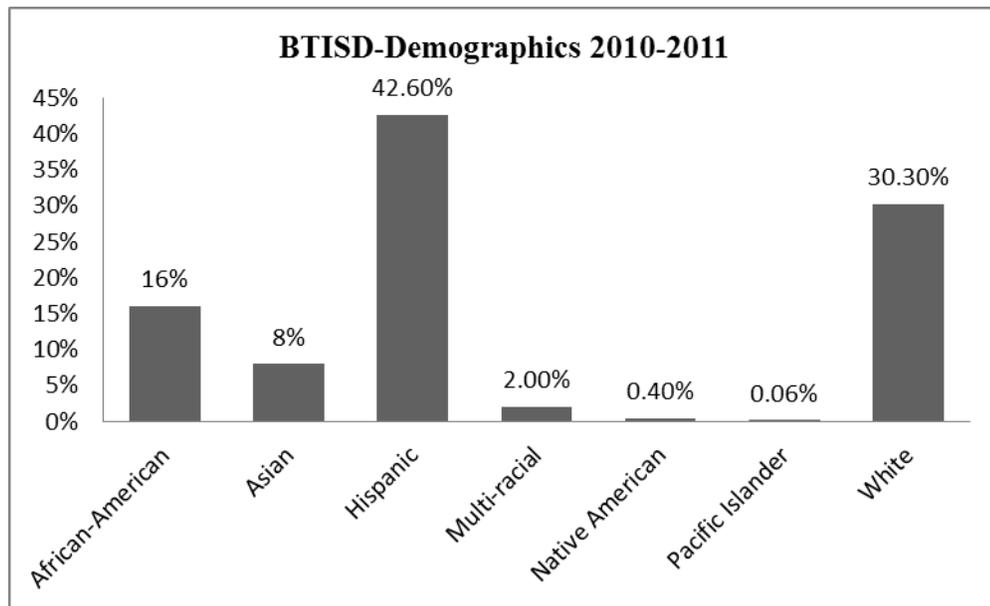


Figure 1. BTISD-Demographics 2010-2011

Context of the Study

Out of the 84 total campuses, fifty-two campuses are school-wide positive behavior campuses (implementing what BTISD calls Positive Behavior Intervention and Support - PBIS), with systems in place to define and establish guiding principles for behavior within the school. These principles guide expected behaviors for all locations within the building, with specific focus on the classroom, common areas (cafeteria, commons, playgrounds, gym, etc.), hallways, and restrooms. Need a brief statement about the history and efficacy of PBIS. The district's mission statement for PBIS is as follows: "To create and maintain an effective learning environment, establishing behavioral supports and a social culture needed for all students in a school to achieve social, emotional, and academic success."

Caden Middle School

Caden Middle School is a secondary school serving students at the sixth, seventh and eighth grade levels. The campus opened in 1978 as a predominately European American campus, which reflected the overall demographics of the Bring-Together Independent School District (BTISD). As demographics began to shift in BTISD, Caden Middle School became one of the first campuses in the district to experience the clientele shift from being a predominately European American campus to a campus that most of the African American and Hispanic students in the district attended.

Today, Caden Middle School is a suburban middle school in a still suburban district with an urban population in regards to student population. According to the student demographic data from BTISD, Caden Middle School services a total of 1,226 students. The campus demographics are as follows: 538 Hispanics, 345 African Americans, 208 European Americans, 135 Asian Americans, and 30 multi-racial students. According to the Texas Education Agency's 2009–2010 Academic Excellence Indicator System School Report Card for Caden Middle School, the student demographics broken down into percentages were as follows: 42.9% Latino or Hispanic, 23% African American, 20.9% European American, 12.7% Asian, and 0.4% Native Americans in the student population (see Figure 2).

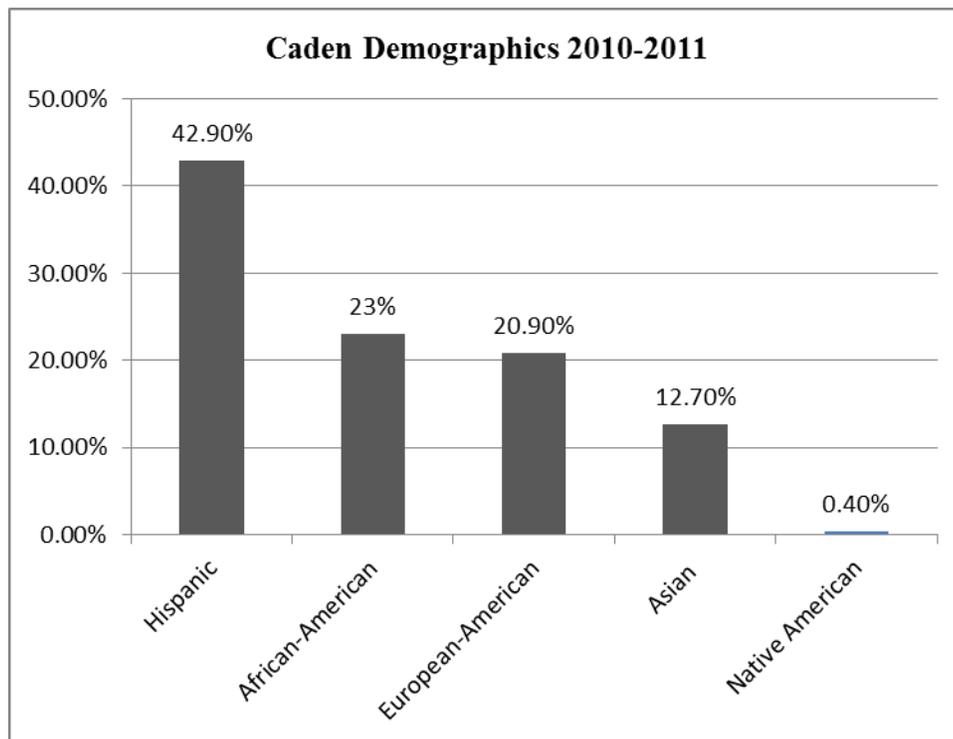


Figure 2. Caden Demographics 2010-2011

The organizational health of the faculty and staff is currently in recovery, from what Martin Chemer (2007) regards as “organizational trauma.” The campus principal since 2006—an African American male who was out of the building due to illness last year, the lack of his leadership and vision caused a disruption in leadership that impacted the organizational goals as well as hindered the continued implementation and benchmarking of the school-wide positive behavioral support (SWPBS) initiative pushed by the district. The campus was placed in charge of a first-year African-American administrator who was serving in her first year as Director of Instruction. It was quickly realized that she was not equipped to carry the behavioral, political, cultural, nor the academic demands of such a diverse campus. The organizational disruption was further

compounded when the district placed a female European American as interim principal. Although experienced, she focused her energies on school-wide discipline management through the means of carrying out consequences that reflected the ideals of zero tolerance need reference policies.

According to conversations with members of the faculty and staff, this interim principal focused on “locking down” the students through “tardy-sweeps”, “automatic suspension”, and mandatory DMC placements without consideration of preventive systems. Another issue that created barriers and obstacles in regard to effective implementation and sustainment of the SWPBS system is that the building was undergoing a massive construction re-model. This campus at twenty-eight years old had not been renovated or updated in sometime, therefore Caden was included in a district bond election to increase building capacity and update classrooms while making the campus aesthetically comparable to other BTISD schools.

In late August of 2010, the BTISD appointed an African American female to the post as principal for the 2010–2011 academic school year. The district charged her with several objectives—one of them being the complete integration of school-wide positive behavior support systems (SWPBS) into the established culture of the school and district’s organizational climate. Shortly, after taking the helm of Caden Middle School, the newest principal had to start her first year as principal delivering sad news to her disconnected staff. The former principal, the African American male, lost his battle with his illness, sending ripples of intensified trauma throughout the organization.

At the conclusion of the 2010-2011 school years, Caden Middle School earned the label as a campus that was “Academically Acceptable” due to both African American and Economically Disadvantaged students scoring below the 2011 state set standard which is 75% passing on the state-wide assessment in all sub-groups. This resulted in the federal government placing another label on Caden Middle School, making it a school that was not in compliance with federal regulations associated with Adequate Yearly Progress or (AYP).

Statement of the Problem

Caden Middle School is a school that is currently experiencing incomplete success as it relates to discipline referrals, specifically in the area of in-school suspensions. Campus data reflects a five year pattern is indicative of an over-representation of students of color, primarily for African American and Hispanic students of color, were placed in this alternative educational disciplinary placement. Furthermore, during the 2010-2011 school year Caden Middle School failed to meet adequate yearly progress (AYP) standards in mathematics among the subgroup of African-American students. In correlating the academic data along with discipline data the principal investigator found that some of the same students who were repeatedly placed in the in-school suspension setting were not successful on the state assessment which is what the federal government utilizes to determine AYP. Statewide, the raw data totals from the Texas Education Agency 2009–2010 show middle school students of color being over-represented in ISS placements (TEA, 2010). African American and

