THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GROUND GROUPS ON STUDENT BEHAVIOR IN A SOUTHEAST TENNESSEE SCHOOL DISTRICT

by

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Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this quantitative study was to determine the effectiveness of ground groups on office discipline referrals in a southeast Tennessee school district. Ground groups are meetings that students attended once a week in an effort to find the "middle ground" through modeling and observing particular behaviors. The primary hypothesis examined four schools from two separate districts over the course of two academic school years. The first group included schools from southeast Tennessee that incorporated ground groups and was classified as the treatment group. The second group included comparable schools from southeast Tennessee that did not incorporate ground groups and was classified as the control group. The researcher compared the number of students that received office discipline referrals for both groups. The study also examined individual students that met in the ground groups for two consecutive school years from three elementary schools, one middle school, and two high schools. The researcher compared the number of office discipline referrals to determine if there was a statistically significant difference between students that attended ground groups as compared to the same students who previously did not attend. Lastly, students' attendance over the three consecutive years was analyzed using Pearson's product-moment correlation to determine if the number of office discipline referrals could predict student attendance rates. The school wide results indicated ground groups did not have an effect on behavior. The results, however, did indicate students who participated fully in ground groups showed improvement in behavior when comparing office discipline referrals.

Descriptors: behavior, office discipline referrals, social learning theory, LoHi, ground groups, school attendance

Dedications

I would like to dedicate this work to my family, especially my wife, Jawana. Without her unconditional support and love throughout my educational endeavors, this would not be possible. To my grandparents Jack and Eleanor, whose strong Christian beliefs and values have been the foundation of my continued success. And to my mother, who survived raising three young boys and always managed to put us ahead of herself.

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I would like to thank Dr. Joy for her encouragement, understanding, and guidance throughout the dissertation process. I would also like to thank my dissertation committee members, Dr. Bigham and Dr. Conley, for their continued support and advice till the very end.

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List of Abbreviations

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

Check-in/Check-out (CICO)

Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgendered, and Questioning (GLBTQ)

In School Suspension (ISS)

No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

Office Discipline Referrals (ODRs)

Out of School Suspension (OSS)

Positive Behavior Supports (PBS)

Response to Intervention (RTI)

School Resource Officer (SRO)

Schools Against Violence In Education Act (SAVE)

Statewide Student Management System (SSMS)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The mandates of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001(NCLB) require higher standards for all public schools across the nation to maintain adequate yearly progress (AYP). Schools are required to attain set achievement levels in several areas to determine student success. One of the primary challenges for educators in meeting this demand is managing student behavior. The challenge has school personnel searching for strategies that create success for all students, especially those that are susceptible to behavioral issues.

The number of students with varying abilities has risen dramatically over the last two decades, and teachers agree they are ineffective in meeting students' needs (Markow & Cooper, 2008). Many different approaches to meet achievement, such as Positive Behavior Supports (PBS) have been implemented over the years to help schools create an environment conducive to learning. Positive Behavior Supports is a well established approach with positive results, but one drawback is the amount of time educators must put into the approach to make it successful. Educators are already strapped for time trying to meet other obligatory requirements. The approach in this study is focused on meeting the needs of all students through the use of group therapy that creates a domino effect within the school.

The specific approach, LoHi, is designed to help students recognize and overcome barriers that impede their academic progress through ground groups. This approach was implemented in a southeast Tennessee school district during the 2010 - 2011 and 2011 - 2012 school years. The focus of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of ground

groups on student behavior for the Tennessee school district. Behavior is one factor that affects school and student achievement. The LoHi approach, utilizing ground groups, employs characteristics associated with the social learning theory. Students observe and model particular behaviors that are specific to them based on their background and interests in a group format.

The learning process is comprised of many different activities that engage students, such as games, art and play therapy, and rewards. Once students find the middle ground through the ground groups, they apply what they have learned outside of the ground group. Students outside of the ground groups recognize the behaviors through the same process as those in the groups: observation and modeling. Four components are built into the ground groups that help shape the curriculum. The four components are learn, obey, help, and interact. Learn focuses on academics, obey focuses on behavior, help focuses on character, and interact focuses on teaching. Once implemented, the components provide direction and balance in a student's life.

Problem Statement

School districts need to explore approaches that have serviced students to find out if they have a positive impact in reducing school-wide discipline. Schools will continually have issues dealing with student behavior that produce ineffective teaching environments. Finding approaches that assist in improving student discipline may lead to more effective and productive schools. Disruptive behaviors negatively impact the learning environment and are a main factor in job dissatisfaction and turnover for educators (Lee, 2012). There is a need to improve student behavior and in turn, strengthen the academic environment in helping schools achieve success.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to determine the effectiveness of ground groups on student behavior for a southeast Tennessee school district. School districts continue to implement programs and strategies to meet requirements of NCLB (2001) and create an environment conducive to learning. Students have varying abilities that teachers cannot meet, and it is important to determine if ground groups can close the gap by providing effective strategies for the most challenging students in an effort to improve student behavior. In Tennessee, the State Department of Education (2011) expects schools to build a positive school climate, use programs designed to teach respectful behavior, and model respectful behaviors.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it may provide school personnel with a different approach to improve school discipline through the use of a group behavioral therapy. This study may show that ground groups have a direct influence on student behavior creating a successful school environment for both educators and students.

Research Questions

The study will attempt to answer the following questions:

1. Is there a significant difference in the number of students that receive office discipline referrals for schools that were exposed to ground groups during the 2010 – 2011 and 2011 – 2012 school years as compared to schools that were not exposed?
2. Is there a significant difference in the average number of office discipline referrals for students that attended ground group meetings during the 2010 -

2011 and 2011 - 2012 school years as compared to the same students who did not attend during the 2009 - 2010 school year?

3. Is there a significant difference in the average number of office discipline referrals between middle and high school students after implementation of ground groups?
4. Is there a significant difference in the average number of office discipline referrals between male and female students after implementation of ground groups?
5. Is there a significant difference in the average number of office discipline referrals between students with low socioeconomic status and students with high socioeconomic status after implementation of ground groups?
6. Is there a significant correlation between the number of office discipline referrals and attendance rates for students?

In addressing the research questions, the following null hypotheses will be retained or rejected:

1. There is no significant difference in the number of students that received office discipline referrals for schools that were exposed to ground groups during the 2010 – 2011 and 2011 – 2012 school years as compared to schools that were not exposed.
2. There is no statistically significant difference in the average number of office discipline referrals for students that attended ground group meetings as compared to the same students previously not attending ground groups.

3. There is no statistically significant difference in the average number of office discipline referrals between middle school and high school students after implementation of ground groups.
4. There is no statistically significant difference in the average number of office discipline referrals between male and female students after implementation of ground groups.
5. There is no statistically significant difference in the average number of office discipline referrals between students with a low socioeconomic status and a high socioeconomic status after implementation of ground groups.
6. There is no correlation between the number of office discipline referrals and attendance rates for students.

Identification of Variables

This study was quantitative in nature and used a combination of causal comparative and correlation methodologies. These designs were utilized because LoHi was in place during the 2010 - 2011 and 2011 - 2012 school years and comparisons between two groups are being measured. LoHi employs ground groups as a primary preventive measure to student behavior. The dependent variable tested in this study was office discipline referrals. Office discipline referrals are efficient, reliable, and valid indicators of student behavior (Irvin, Tobin, Sprague, Sugai, & Vincent, 2004; Pas, Bradshaw, & Mitchell, 2011; McIntosh, Frank, & Spaulding, 2010). The approach of ground groups was the independent variable for the purpose of this study.

The first research question was answered by comparing the number of students that received office discipline referrals in four schools from two separate school districts

that have similar demographics. Two schools that were exposed from School District A were classified as the treatment group and two schools from School District B was not exposed and classified as the control group. The number of students that received office discipline referrals was examined over the course of two school years, 2010 – 2011 and 2011 - 2012.

The second research question was answered by comparing students in six schools within School District A over three consecutive school years. The first group, students from the 2009 - 2010 school year, was not exposed to the ground groups and classified as the control group. The second group, students from the 2010 - 2011 and 2011 - 2012 school years, was exposed to ground groups and classified as the treatment group. Office discipline referrals were collected and analyzed for both groups to determine if a statistically significant difference exists. In answering the third research question, office discipline referrals were collected from middle and high school students from the treatment groups to determine effectiveness between those two groups. Research questions four and five determined if ground groups are more beneficial for certain students based on demographics. Finally, in answering the sixth research question, office discipline referrals and attendance records were collected and analyzed to determine if a correlation exists between the number of office discipline referrals and a student's attendance rate.

Definition of Key Terms

Attendance Rate: The rate a student is present for class during the school year. The rate is determined by dividing the number of days present by the number of days possible.

Corporal Punishment: The affliction of painful physical force as a means of discipline (The United Nations Children's Fund, 2012).

Detention: Confining a student for a certain amount of time in an assigned area for the purpose of taking away the student's freedom.

Economically Disadvantaged Students: Students that receive a free or reduced lunch.

Ground Groups: A group of students that meet in an effort to help them find the middle/healthy "ground" in between life's extremes through observation and modeling expected behaviors.

In-School Suspension: A reactive disciplinary measure for a student that breaks school expectations and includes isolation from peers during the school day.

LoHi: A school-wide proactive behavior approach that utilizes ground groups through social learning to help students manage life's highs and lows in an effort to increase expected behavior in students.

Office Discipline Referrals: A document that school personnel complete for student behavioral offenses. For this study, office discipline referrals will be placed into three categories. The categories are minor, major, and overall referrals. The minor referrals include warnings, detention, and corporal punishment. The major referrals include ISS and OSS. Overall referrals include a combination of minor and major referrals.

Out-of-School Suspension: A reactive disciplinary measure for a student that breaks school expectations and includes removing the student from school for a set number of days based on the severity of the infraction.

Positive Behavior Supports: A school-wide proactive behavior approach used to increase expected behavior in students. The approach contains three phases to intervention: primary, secondary, and tertiary.

Response to Intervention: A school-wide proactive academic approach used to increase expected achievement in students.

Socioeconomic Status: A category students are placed in based on the income level of the student's caregiver to provide school support. The categories used for this study were determined by the amount a student pays for school lunches. A low socioeconomic status is categorized by free and reduced lunch, and a high socioeconomic status is categorized by a student's ability to pay full price for lunch.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Educators have been faced with greater student accountability over the past decade. The authorization of No Child Left Behind (2001) is the focal driving force behind this accountability for higher student achievement. Although NCLB revamped the educational sector, accountability surfaced with the report by President Ronald Reagan's National Commission on Excellence. The report, A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform (1983), brought attention to the inadequate progress of schooling in America. Since this report, educational reform on all levels has been a priority. Yet, the nation is still dealing with inadequate progress today, specifically in school achievement and discipline. All forms of discipline in schools are ultimately because of student behavior. Behavior has continually been assessed to determine its relationship with achievement. Student behavior and academic achievement are two vital elements that determine student success. Students should be provided behavior instruction to avoid classroom distractions, thus allowing school personnel to teach more effectively (McIntosh, Flannery, Sugai, Braun, & Cochrane, 2008).

The initial section of this chapter discusses the theoretical framework used for the study and different types of discipline used in today's society. Next, several reasons for adverse student behaviors are provided to explain the need for school intervention. As the chapter progresses, the use of office discipline referrals as a measurement of student behavior will be addressed as well as the importance of attendance. Finally, at the end of the chapter approaches will be discussed that have been implemented, including the approach being studied, LoHi.

Conceptual or Theoretical Framework

Behavior is associated with many different learning theorists and approaches throughout history (Miller, 2011). One such approach, which states that the environment influences behavior, was first derived by John Watson. His approach was illustrated through classical conditioning and began with "an innate connection between a stimulus and a response" (Miller, 2011, p. 226). Watson believed that behavior stemmed from habit, not from some sort of hypothetical phenomenon from mental life (Moore, 2011). He demonstrated that external factors can elicit a conditioned response through reflex. Watson did face problems with inconsistency in his theory:

> Despite the importance of Watson's contributions, two problems remained. One was the apparent spontaneity of behavior: Some responses seemed to develop without a characteristic stimulus evoking them. A second problem was the variability of behavior. Even when a characteristic stimulus preceded responses, the topography and frequency of the responses often differed significantly. As a result of such problems, by 1930 many researchers and theorists began to seek ways to modify classical S-R behaviorism. (Moore, 2011, p. 451)

In developing another approach, learning theorist B. F. Skinner modified Watson's work and concluded "the environment changes not only the frequency of behavior but also its form – through shaping" (Miller, 2011, p.228). This approach is well known as operant conditioning in which learning occurs because of a change in behavior. The change in behavior happens because of a certain response to the environment (Kearsley, 2011). The fundamental component to operant conditioning is reinforcement. When a behavior is reinforced, it is an element of conditioning.

Individual behavior is influenced by examining other individuals and, therefore, reinforces the behavior.

Learning theories eventually shifted to social learning, and the belief that personality is learned. Imitation shaped the beginnings of the social learning theory. As a result, the evolution of observing and modeling behaviors became a staple within behaviorism. The social learning theory encompasses both the cognitive and behavioral patterns of others. Behavior patterns can change through the use of observations. Albert Bandura is recognized for improving upon the social learning theory through observational learning. The observations are likely to become practice if the results of the outcome are valued (Kearsley, 2011).

Self-efficacy and Agency are two components embedded in social learning. The school-wide approach of incorporating ground groups is derived from these components. Miller (2011) explains "if children perceive themselves as similar to a model who succeeds, their self-efficacy is enhanced. In addition, children can acquire new coping strategies by observing successful others" (p.244). LoHi embeds the core components of social learning in ground groups in an effort to make the learning meaningful.

Expectations of self-efficacy determines what choices people make, how much effort they put into it, and how long the effort will be sustained (Bayer & Gollwitzer, 2007). In addition, "By affecting people's acceptance of challenges, persistence despite setbacks, execution of complex cognitive strategies, and calmness versus anxiety in the face of threat, higher self-efficacy perceptions generally promote superior performance" (Bayer & Gollwitzer, 2007, p. 1). Ground groups test the preceding statement by challenging students' acceptance to particular behaviors. Failure often leads to low self-

efficacy; providing students with correct responses to behavior will improve a student's self-efficacy. Acknowledgement and acceptance of correcting negative behavior will transition students to self-discipline. The effects of self-discipline can be defined through Mischel's widely known "marshmallow studies." In this experiment, Mischel, Shoda, and Rodriguez (1989) determined preschool students that had self-discipline and could wait on a larger treat as opposed to receiving a smaller treat immediately predicted better coping skills in adolescents.

Once students recognize they can make positive choices, they become agents of their actions. The school-wide behavior approach is built upon agency. Students acquire a sense of agency and take ownership of their behavior. Several schools try to use extrinsic rewards to motivate students and it works for some, but not all. Some extrinsic rewards that may work for students are fake tokens or cash that can be exchanged for prizes. Other extrinsic rewards may include receiving extra time at recess or lunch. However, Agency is more meaningful to the students because it infuses intrinsic motivation and also teaches students values and beliefs. Students internalize long-term positive behavior with Agency as opposed to short-lived extrinsic reward.

History of Discipline Measures

When public schools originated, they were governed by the ideas set forth by the Puritan religion. According to Hart and Lordon (1978), three concepts that structured school discipline during the Puritan era epitomized that:

- human nature is influenced by evil; rigid standards must be developed to reinforce good behavior and punishment must immediately follow negative behaviors.

- based on biblical principles, adult authority must be followed without question. Failure to do so would result in immediate punishment.

- authority figures can discipline students with any means available as a means to correct the evil within human nature.

The most common form of punishment leading up to the 1970's was corporal punishment. Corporal punishment is defined as the affliction of painful physical force as a means of discipline (The United Nations Children's Fund, 2012). The majority of corporal punishment used in schools is in the form of paddling. Other forms may include some sort of hitting or spanking. During the 1970's educators were becoming more hesitant toward corporal punishment and its effectiveness as a disciplinary action against students. During this time, research on the consequences corporal punishment had on students was diminishing its effectiveness as a discipline measure (Hyman, 1995). The controversial topic has led 24 countries to ban corporal punishment since the 1970's (Center for Effective Discipline, 2010). Research has shown that corporal punishment among children led to more aggressive and delinquent behaviors (Morris and Gibson, 2011). Since the dissention regarding corporal punishment, alternatives have been established. A shift to suspension and alternative settings resulted from the inconsistency of administering corporal punishment (Elrod, 1991).

Two types of suspension, In-School (ISS) and Out-of-School (OSS) are widely used today. In-School suspension places students in isolation from the general student population for causing disruptive behavioral problems. Students in ISS are given their academic assignments along with more stringent rules. Morris and Howard (2003) clarify ISS as an isolated place with restricted privileges where students complete academic work provided by their teachers. Additionally, lunch is completed in isolation

away from the other students. In-School suspension is more widely used in middle and high school settings. Some elementary schools incorporate ISS; a majority use it specifically with the upper grades.

Out-of-School suspension removes the student from school for an extended amount of time. This type of suspension negatively impacts the student's academic achievement because in most cases the student cannot make up the assignments missed while serving the suspension. The key rationale for a suspension is to give the student a cooling off period. Some reasons for OSS are because of "real and perceived immediate threats to a student's own safety or to the safety of others" (Taras, Frankowski, McGrath, Mears, Murray, & Young, 2003, p. 1206). Many students are suspended from school for other reasons, such as truancy or skipping school, defeating the purpose. The OSS is also a notice to the parents that the student's behavior is unacceptable. Out-of-School suspension is necessary in some instances, but far too many times it is more detrimental to the student's educational progress than its intended purposes.

Modern schools use suspension and alternative settings, such as in-school suspension as primary sources of disciplinary action. Suspensions lead to a reduction in educational access and an increase in aggressive student behavior (Morrissey, Bohanon, & Fenning, 2010; Skiba, 2002). The cycle of disciplinary actions is self-defeating; to be effective it must be spare (Goodman, 2007). Furthermore, what educators believe is punishment transitions into reinforcement for many students referred for chronic negative behavior. This is a way for the student to receive more peer and adult attention (Bogen, 2009). Many students want to be placed in an alternative setting because the coursework may not be as rigorous as their current coursework. Also, suspensions may have more to

do with administration problems than with student behavior (Cameron, 2006). A high number of suspensions may prove that a school is in disarray and the educational leaders are losing control. It is easy to see that the benefits of suspension do not outweigh the harmful consequences.

One reactive measure also involves sending a student to serve detention. Detention involves confining a student for a certain amount of time in an assigned area for the purpose of taking away the student's freedom. Many school districts opt for students to serve detention instead of receiving corporal punishment. This alternative reduces the liability on a school district when compared to corporal punishment. Then again, it is still a reactive measure that is often overused and lessens its credibility as a disciplinary action. The use of detention is harmful and ineffective for students (Ashworth, Van Bockern, Ailts, Donnelly, Erickson, & Woltermann, 2008). However, students that have incomplete work or missing assignments may benefit from this type of punishment. The purpose would be to complete the assignment during the allotted time for detention. Beyond that, the benefits are minimal.

Extreme negative behaviors may warrant a student to attend an alternative school. An alternative school houses students that are not able to function normally in a traditional school setting. The quality of education in an alternative school is low as evidenced by academic achievement (D'Angelo & Zemanick, 2009). Rivkin, Hanushek, and Kain (2005) report that because of the low academic achievement students tend to display inappropriate behaviors.

Today, educators are exploring different disciplinary systems that will be beneficial to both school personnel and students. Bogen (2009) also asserts that schools

have a formal commitment in trying to create a positive atmosphere, but in reality they actually spend more time reacting to negative behaviors. Joan Goodman (2007, p. 11) states "the backbone to a well-functioning disciplinary system is authority premised on and sustained by collectively endorsed values, rules that directly express those values and teachers who are conduits of them." Educators are taking a proactive stance toward discipline as opposed to the typical reactive position. The primary goal of this study is to offer an alternative to reactive discipline techniques with a minimal amount of invasion on the teacher in an effort to improve school success. Minimal invasion on the teachers allow for acceptance and cooperation in the approach. Acceptance or buy-in of a proactive discipline approach must be delicately balanced with willingness and effectiveness.

By design, school discipline was originally established on reactive measures because of the biblical principles that were instilled in the home. The rules were to be valued and respected. Otherwise, the student faced the consequence of punishment. Reactive measures were a simple solution to problem behavior. Corporal punishment took very little time to administer and it was valued. Reactive measures are no longer a one size fits all. In fact, Varnham (2005) explains reactive measures have little effect and may actually be creating more harm than good in the educational setting.

As new cultures evolved, so did the resistance to reactive measures. At the same time, biblical principles were becoming less valued leading to a variety of worldviews. A review by Firmin and Castle (2008) concluded that during the 19th century "many English-speaking countries shifted from a predominately corporal punishment view of child rearing to one of providing loving, moral rebukes. Reasons for this shift include the

lessening of religious influence on day-to-day life" (p. 107). Schaeffer (2005) depicted societal values as personal peace and affluence. Values such as work ethic and education were distorted to benefit personal gain. As time passed, young people wanted more than personal peace and affluence. Schaeffer (2005) also rationalized the more a society pulls itself further from God the more irrational it becomes in making decisions. In turn, a decline in Christianity began to unfold.

Since students share many different worldviews, values that were once instilled in the home are less existent. Thus, teaching the students at school how to behave and act are imperative to having a successful school culture. To do so, schools need to immerse in a proactive measure of discipline. Alternatives to punishment-based school discipline are necessary for the development of a safe and effective school and should be based on citizenship and democracy in which students are enabled to take a greater responsibility for their education environment (Varnham, 2005).

Parental Involvement

Parental involvement can affect a student's behavior in a positive or negative way. In today's society, many students are living in an atypical situation. An increasing amount of students are finding themselves in a broken home. Two factors that many students are confronted with are living in a single parent home or with the grandparents. Currently, finding a student that lives in a traditional home life is a rarity.

Divorce rates are at an all-time high and custody issues are not easily determined and can be overwhelming and complex. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) 2010 marriage and divorce rate trends per 1,000 total US populations (2012) reported a marriage rate of 6.8 and a divorce rate of 3.6, with the exclusion of Louisiana.

These rates would indicate that roughly one out of every two marriages end in divorce. Students benefit in several ways when the parents are married. Students that are being raised by married parents have greater emotional, social, and economic benefits than students that are raised by divorced parents (McGuinness, 2006). Children living with parents that have separated display an increase in emotional and behavioral issues compared to their counterpart (Strohschein, 2005; Zinsmeister, 1997).

Another sector of students are living with grandparents for reasons such as substance abuse, neglect, incarceration, death, domestic violence, and other tribulations (Jackson, 2011). For example, according to the U.S. Census Bureau (2009) 61.9 percent of children under the age of 18 live with their grandparents in the southeast Tennessee school district being studied. As Hayslip and Kaminski (2005) point out, many current parenting skills provided by grandparents are a rarity. They also share three skill areas that many grandparents may lack when caring for their grandchildren:

> (1) parenting practices (e.g., communication, discipline, modeling respect, conflict resolution, problem solving), (2) normal developmental changes in their grandchildren's physical, cognitive, psychosocial, and emotional development, and (3) abnormal childhood disorders such as depression, ADHD, drug use, aggression/acting out behavior, grief at the loss of a parent, self-destructive behaviors, or alcoholism (p. 158).

Of the remaining 38.1 percent of children under the age of 18, only 17.1 percent live in a typical household consisting of both parents. Depending on the student's situation, he or she may or may not be receiving proper discipline. These alarming statistics illustrate the need for behavior intervention within the school system. Schools

are the student's only true source of discipline, and they should teach proper behavior because many students are just not taught how to behave.

Least Restrictive Environment

Not only do students share many different worldviews, they also have diverse learning abilities that impede their academic success. Through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004) students are no longer secluded from the regular education classroom. The term inclusion is widely used by educators to refer to special education students that are placed into the regular education classroom. Inclusion has been around for the past few decades, but has really implanted its trademark since the later Bush administration. It is easy to assess that the more students a teacher has the percentage of behavioral problems will rise. Also, the ability level of students is extremely diverse when inclusion is implemented in the classroom.

Inclusion has provided many legal ramifications since its inception. In many cases, the courts have ruled against the placement of students if the disruptive behavior has been proven to interfere with the education of others (Boyd and Parich, 1996). The problem with this is it takes a great deal of time before the situation is resolved. Implementing supportive services with the students may help ease the transition of special education students in the general education classroom. The problem still exists in the classroom; multiple personalities and learning styles that can slow and disrupt the learning environment. Difficulty exists not only for the teacher, but also for the whole class.

According to Adams (2006), overcoming the challenges of inclusion should include "a school-wide emphasis on positive discipline, proper training, adequate

funding, support in the classroom, and strong communication. Above all, shaping the behavior of all children rather than policing misdeeds can set the groundwork for successful inclusion" (p. 50). The benefits provided by ground groups could help all students progress successfully. Learning to display proper behavior and academic achievement in an inclusion setting is a must if school personnel are to perform their duties effectively. Teachers and administrators should display and model appropriate behaviors throughout the school year.

Bullying and Cyber Bullying

Columbine: the word itself creates a chilling effect to those who hear it. This massacre established a link between bullying and school violence, and to this day the thoughts of another Columbine run through the minds of educators worldwide. That violent act generated other carnages over the past decade. Bullying is a frequent concern in the mainstream media. In fact, its presence is widely known specifically for the unexpected deaths that have occurred around the country. Most of these horrific events could have been avoided through correcting bully behavior.

Bullying is defined as repetitive negative actions exerted against a student who is unable to defend himself or herself (Olweus Bullying Prevention Program, 2011). This commonly involves an imbalance of power between the bully and the victim. In many classes, an inclusion of students creates this imbalance of power. Bullying affects the behavior of all students involved. Studies show that 30 percent of school students are involved in bullying (Alessi, 2011). With the growing population of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, and questioning (GLBTQ) students, the need for behavior intervention is even more evident. According to the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight

Education Network (GLSEN) survey (2010), 9 out of 10 GLBTQ students reported harassment at school in the past year. One-third of these students skipped school at least one day because of being victims of bullying (GLSEN, 2010). In any situation, both the bully and the victim need behavior intervention. Victims of bullying "tend to be highly emotional and hot-tempered (Safran, 2007, p.59)."

Bullying is also carried out in many different forms and, therefore, makes anyone an easier target. Two common forms of bullying exist and are classified as direct and indirect methods. Direct methods include physical aggressive acts on another individual. This could include repeated hitting or kicking. The indirect method is usually in the form of gossip and rumors that are created to harm another individual. An increase of indirect bullying has occurred over the past couple of years because of the easy access to technology.

Today, educators depend on technology as a means of classroom instruction. At the same time, students have rapidly been using technology to communicate with one another and at times use the cyber world as an avenue for bullying. Social websites, such as Facebook and Myspace are prime targets for cyber bullying. Cyber bullying refers to bullying that involves the use of technological tools, such as email, chat, web blogs, etc. (Kowalski, R., Limber S., & Agatston, P., 2007). When used in this manner, many of the bullying issues are carried over into the school and create an unsafe learning environment. Cyber bullying includes one distinct difference than traditional bullying; it is permanent and can be spread quicker. Research on cyber bullying is relatively new. Since a majority of cyber bullying happens outside of school, it is much more difficult to control. One strategy in reducing cyber bullying includes educating the students about

the issue through prevention programs (Kowalski, R., Limber S., & Agatston, P., 2007). This is one area of research that has recently been proven effective. "Anywhere from one-third to one-half of youths have been targeted by cyberbullies. And those experiences produce damaging consequences - from a decline in academic performance to suicide" (Holladay, 2011, p. 5).

Regardless of the reasons for bullying, resources need to be available to help students cope and deal with the issue. Teachers cannot be everywhere at the same time and students know where the 'hotspots' are within a school. Reducing these negative behaviors can positively increase a school's learning environment. Ground groups is an approach that students can use to learn the coping and managing skills needed to overcome issues such as bullying. Some students that are reluctant and afraid to speak up about being bullied may be more willing to discuss the issue in a ground group setting with their peers. By educating students about bullying and why it is not tolerated, students are likely to change the way they think about the issue.

Programs and Services

The Tennessee Department of Education complies with the Safe Schools Act and the Schools Against Violence in Education Act (SAVE). The department also puts forth many initiatives to help educators keep school safe, such as the school resource officer (SRO) program and the unsafe school choice policy. Additionally, the department uses funds from several different areas to reduce negative behavior in schools.

The Safe Schools Act, which was implemented in 1998, provides funding for educational programs that will aid schools in the reduction of violent or disruptive situations. Some of the programs included within the grant funding are: violence

prevention programs, improved school security, peer mediation, School Resource Officers, and school-related violence training programs for employees (Tennessee Department of Education, 2012).

The Schools Against Violence in Education Act (SAVE Act), passed in 2007, ensures that all school districts have a plan with safeguards against violent or disruptive behavior and an emergency action plan in the event that such behavior takes place. Each school district is required to have both a district-wide plan and a building-level plan for each school within the district. The plans must include: emergency response information, including the designation of an emergency response team; compliance with law enforcement procedures; a communication plan for parents and law enforcement officials; a detailed plan of security features, such as video equipment and availability of school resource officers; local mental health establishment information; floor plan access information for local law enforcement; detailed plans of violence prevention or intervention strategies implemented by the school; annual school safety training; and an appropriate school evacuation plan. State level safety teams appointed by the commissioner are responsible for ensuring that each school district is in compliance (Tennessee Department of Education, 2012).

School Resource Officers are sworn officers of a law enforcement agency who are assigned uphold law and ensure safety in a school setting. These officers work in conjunction with the Director of Schools, providing a united front against violent or disruptive behavior. While discipline decisions are still made by school administration, School Resource Officers are responsible for intervening in any criminal acts committed within the school (Tennessee Department of Education, 2012).

The unsafe school choice policy provides students with the choice of changing schools within the assigned district if the school is deemed persistently dangerous or if a child is the victim of a violent crime within the school or en route to or from the school via school-provided transportation. A school is considered persistently dangerous when "the cited incidents exceed 3% of enrollment for three consecutive years". Violent crimes are defined in accordance with state law. To be considered a victim of a violent crime, evidence that a crime was committed or attempted should be present; however, criminal charges do not have to be filed. The policy provides communication and duration components as well. Parents must be notified in a timely manner as stated in the policy when a school is labeled persistently dangerous by the state Board of Education and/or when a violent crime has been committed. Any student moved to another school under this policy shall be permitted to remain at the new school until the end of the current school year, or until the previous school's persistently dangerous status has been lifted (Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools, 2010).

The purpose of the Safe and Supportive Schools Grant is to allow schools to develop a way to collect and analyze data about a school's environment. Collecting this data will allow administrators to maintain a safe and supportive environment for students, thus increasing student performance. Tennessee currently collects data of the following indicators: reported incidents of physical threat or violence, reported incidents of drug use on school property, suicide consideration, low daily physical activity, and student nutrition. The data collected is used to determine areas of need for at-risk students and develop training establishments to support those needs. Tennessee currently has four specialized centers established to create programs under this grant: The Center for

Extended Learning; The Center for Dropout Prevention; The Center for School Climate; and The Tennessee School Safety Center (Safe and Supportive Schools, 2012).

The Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities Act was implemented in 2002 as a component of the No Child Left Behind law. Its purpose is to create a school and community environment that is academically supportive and drug and violence free. Through numerous state-issued grants, schools can provide educational programs for students and members of the community to combat drug and violence issues. Tennessee offers many programs, including Drug and Violence Prevention, Mental and Physical Health, Character and Civic Education, and Emergency Response (US Department of Education, 2012).

Office Discipline Referrals

Measuring student behavior is one way in taking a proactive stance. The concern most educators have is in how to measure student behavior. Several studies support the idea that office discipline referrals are a valid tool to measure student behavior. McIntosh, Campbell, Carter, and Zumbo (2009) affirm "the most commonly used type of extant data to assess student behavior is office discipline referrals (ODR's)" (p. 101). Office discipline referrals are efficient, reliable, and valid indicators of student behavior (Irvin, Tobin, Sprague, Sugai, & Vincent, 2004; Pas, Bradshaw, & Mitchell, 2011; McIntosh, Frank, & Spaulding, 2010). In addition, Irvin et al. (2004) constructed validity and reliability of office discipline referrals by applying Messick's framework to several past studies.

Office discipline referrals capture many different aspects of student behavior. The referrals help school officials determine if students have multiple infractions and if

the infractions are consider major. In essence, the office discipline referrals will inform administrators what particular behaviors need to be addressed within the school. They can help administrators change the logistics within a school by determining the increased 'hotspots' by including the location where the offense took place. The referrals also will indicate if progress is being made in reference to the response to intervention (McIntosh, Frank, & Spaulding, 2010).

A few drawbacks do exist with using office discipline referrals. Although faculty members are trained in implementing and using office discipline referrals, gray areas do exist. Teachers perceive behaviors differently and the referral may not be handled in the same way. The teachers may intentionally provide higher rates of ODR's if they feel more support will be provided. Also, if teachers feel an administrator views an increase of ODR's as a lack of instruction on the teacher's behalf, fewer ODR's may be issued (McIntosh, Campbell, Carter, & Zumbo, 2009). Tidwell, Flannery, and Lewis-Palmer (2003), suggested through research that although ODR's contain variability across individual schools, stability existed when groups of schools were studied.

The referrals do more than just define the school's progress. The referrals can be created in many different ways. This allows for custom reports specifically designed for a school. They can serve as a catalyst and add motivation to faculty members by providing factual data (Colvin, 2007). In addition, the referrals can indicate which teachers may need further training, such as professional development in a particular discipline area. The data will allow schools and school districts to set goals and take the 'proactive stance' to issues that are detrimental to progress.

Attendance

School attendance is an essential ingredient to the success of students. One reason attendance is an important dynamic relates to the fact the more a student is in school the more instruction time he or she receives. Roby (2004) conducted a study across the state of Ohio to determine if a relationship existed between attendance and academic achievement. Attendance reports from grades four, six, nine, and twelve were compared to student achievement. The type of achievement was determined through state mandated tests by the respective grade levels. The results concluded that a statistically significant relationship exists between attendance and academic achievement. While it was possible to find studies on the relationship between attendance and academic achievement, finding the same for a relationship between attendance and student discipline was sparse.

School leaders are held accountable for student attendance through adequate yearly progress (AYP). Schools have to develop approaches and strategies that meet the goals set forth by AYP. According to the Tennessee Department of Education (2011), to achieve AYP elementary and middle schools must meet a 93% attendance rate; high schools must achieve a 90% graduation rate. Meeting these requirements can be difficult, especially if the school has low parental involvement and minimal avenues for transportation to and from school. School districts could impose tougher mandates against truancy and absenteeism as a way of increasing attendance. The problem with this creation of tougher mandates does little to increase attendance and often may produce more attendance problems (Reeves, 2008).

Positive Behavior Supports

Positive Behavior Supports (PBS) is a school-wide discipline approach that employs three phases of proactive strategies. The three phases are known as tiers and students are assisted based on their tier level. According to Morrissey, Bohanon, and Fenning (2010) tier one uses strategies that accommodate nearly 80% of the student body. Tier two is a rigid approach that accommodates virtually 15 % of the student body. Tier two is implemented for those students that do not respond in a proper manner to tier one. This is usually determined by the number and severity of discipline referrals. Tier three, the most rigorous approach, reaches students that continually display extreme behavior and are unresponsive to tier two. The most common form of student classification into a tier is based on cut points. Each type of discipline infraction has a certain number of points assigned. When an office discipline referral is processed, it includes points that add to the students report. Periodically, the points are checked and students are placed in the tiers based on the ODR's.

One example of a student's progression through each tier can be explained by the student's behavior. A student is in tier one for minor disruptions, such as horseplay in the school hallway or failure to maintain a clean and orderly lunch area. Once a student receives the allotted number referral determined by the school he or she will be referred to level two and receive individual intervention. If the student continues inappropriate behaviors and they become more extreme, such as fighting, the student will progress to tier three. Tier three is the last intervention strategy implemented for problem behavior students. In this tier students receive intervention from a case manager and/or attend judicial hearings to determine the amount of interventions and resources available. The

approach from school to school will be different and the progression used here is only provided as an explanation to the phases of PBS.

The PBS tiers are portrayed in the form of a triangle (shown in Figure 2.1) to illustrate the intervention approach. Positive Behavior Supports is of interest in this study because it employs a school-wide discipline approach containing well-established research that is analogous to LoHi. A wealth of information on PBS is available and much of the research for its effectiveness is favorable. One particular aspect of the LoHi approach is that it is not as invasive and time consuming as Positive Behavior Supports.

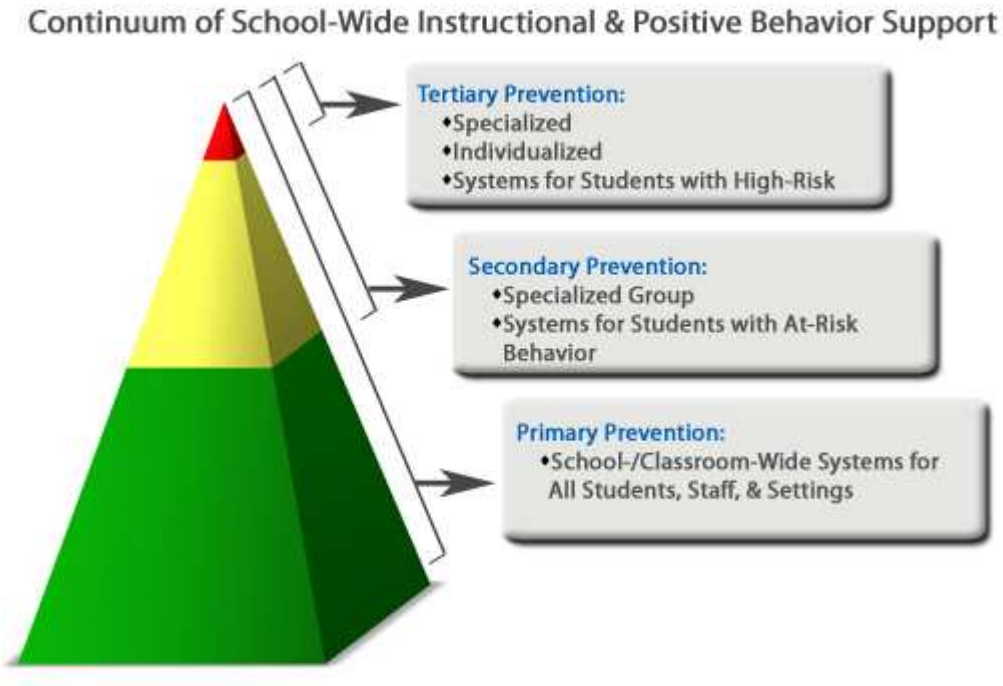


Figure 2.1. The three tiers of PBS are depicted in a pyramid to illustrate the level of support. This figure was reprinted from the Office of Special Education Programs Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports, 2011.

Several research studies on Positive Behavior Supports consistently review procedures and analysis regarding implementation. Establishing PBS involves creating a team that consists of teachers, administrators, and other stakeholders (Warren, Bohanon-

Edmonson, Turnbull, Sailor, Wickham, Griggs, & Beech, 2006; Morrisey, Bohanon, & Fenning, 2010; Clonan, McDougal, Clark, & Davison, 2007). The other stakeholders can include nurses, school resource officers, counselors, other staff members, and parents. Clonan, McDougal, Clark, and Davison (2007) performed a case study that included six teachers, a vice principal, a social worker, a school nurse, a school psychologist, and a member from a local college to complete their PBS team. The Office of Special Education Programs Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (2007) suggest teams meet once a month at a minimum. They also note a 3-5 year commitment is required to fully implement the approach. These requirements make it difficult for teacher buy-in. Warren et al. (2006) addressed the concern in their study, "although the school agreed to participate in the project, many teachers, overwhelmed with the challenges they faced on a day-to-day basis, resisted having 'one more thing' added to their responsibilities" (p.194).

The second phase of PBS is of particular importance because it has some of the same characteristics as the ground groups. The second phase of PBS called check-in/check-out (CICO) requires frequent instruction regarding expectations for behavior between a coordinator and student (Campbell and Anderson, 2011). The intervention is applied if a student does not respond to the first less intrusive first phase. Ground groups use the same strategy except in a group format instead of a one-on-one technique. In CICO the student learns the expectations from the coordinator. Conversely, with ground groups the students learn from one another in addition to the coordinator. Also, the admittance to ground groups is determined by referral at anytime by any stakeholder

instead of a timely process determined by phase intervention. This allows educators to focus more time on other responsibilities.

Response to Intervention

Positive Behavior Supports entails concepts for dealing with behavioral issues. Response to Intervention (RTI) is built on the same premise as PBS and supports the academic issues within a school. In recent years, RTI has been implemented to conform to the needs of all students. RTI is defined as evidence-based high quality intervention instruction (National Center on Response to Intervention, 2012). The RTI process allows for the intervention on three levels as shown in figure 2.2 below; the same as PBS.

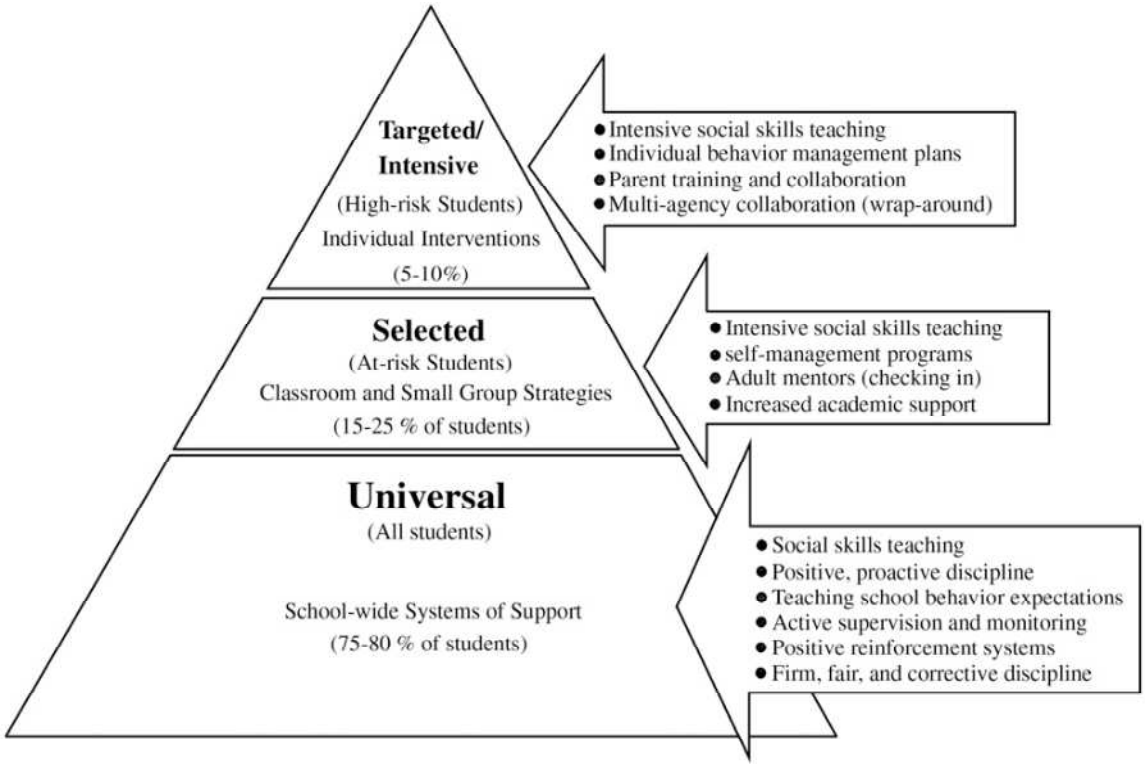


Figure 2.2. The three tiers of RTI are depicted in a pyramid to illustrate the level of support. This figure was reprinted from "Proactive early screening to detect behaviorally at-risk students: Issues, approaches, emerging innovations, and professional practices," by H. H. Severson, H. M. Walker, J. Hope-Dolittle, T. R. Kratochwill, and F. M. Greasham, 2007, *Journal of School Psychology, 45,* p. 215.

Educators provide superior instruction to general education students in tier one. A continuation of more intense intervention is utilized in tiers two and three. Tier three, the most intense intervention level, supports the learning of students in the school whom display extreme academic difficulties (Martinez, 2011). Those students, if not already identified as special education, may be recommended for services.

In a research study performed by Martinez (2011) ninety-nine educators from Southeastern Texas provided a snapshot of their perceptions regarding RTI. Overall, educators perceived RTI as beneficial to students. When asked if the RTI process takes up too much time, 37% agreed to the statement and 46% disagreed. One limitation educators noted was the difficulty in collecting data. Many educators responded that they already included many aspects of RTI before implementation. Research reviews performed by Harlacher and Siler (2011) disseminated that RTI is a favorable approach, but one downside was frustration among educators when buy-in and belief was compromised.

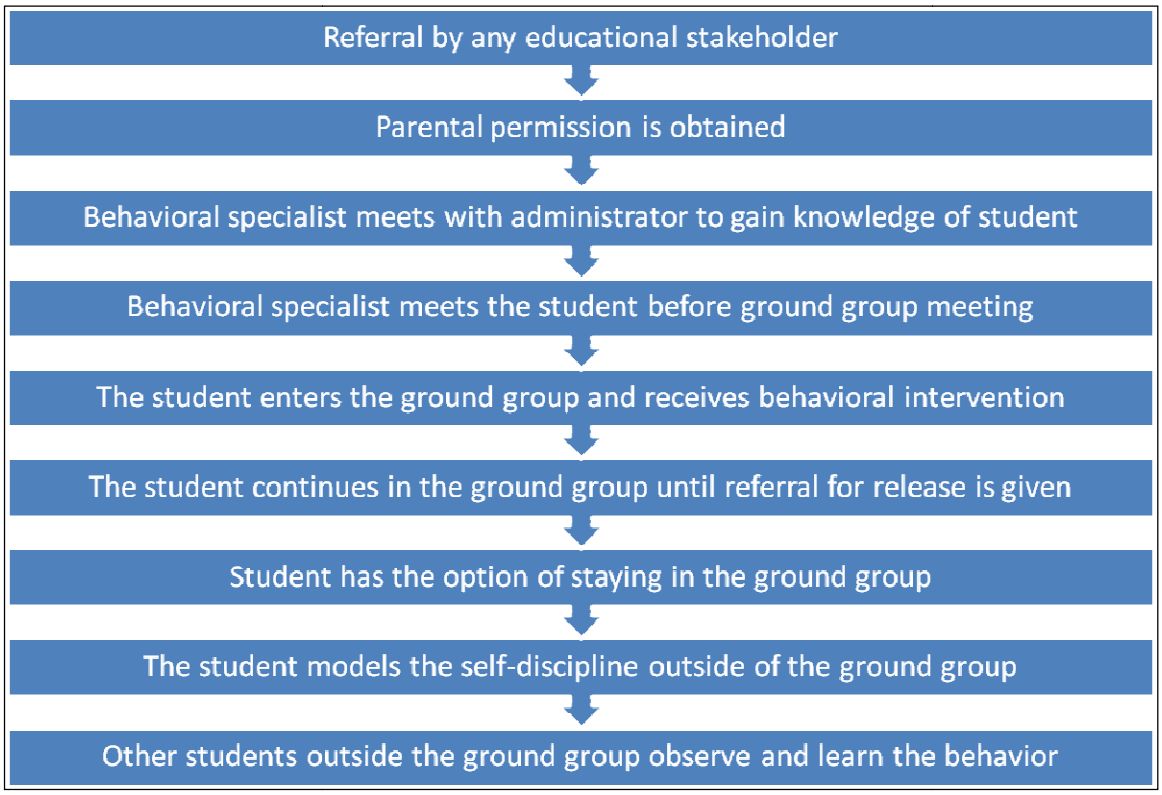
The implementation of RTI is considerably intense and appropriate for schools nationwide. The value of time does play a part in the amount of intervention. RTI is deeply rooted in academic achievement and can be more beneficial than LoHi if implementation is easily accepted. On the other hand, if buy-in is an issue then LoHi may be an alternative.

LoHi

LoHi provides social learning ground group therapy for students in need of behavioral and academic intervention. LoHi ground groups are held in the school setting and may consist of 2-10 group members of either gender. Group members may be

referred for any number of behavioral or academic reasons; however, all reasons ultimately connect to increased discipline problems, decreased school attendance, and academic difficulties. The process of referring and enrolling a student into a ground group is almost seamless. Figure 2.3 illustrates the progression a student undertakes when being referred to a ground group.

Figure 2.3 Ground Group Progressions



Group therapy has been proven an effective treatment and management intervention for adolescents and their problems. David Brook (2001) reviewed three studies that involved adolescent group therapy and determined in each case that the method was an effective treatment for adolescent problem behaviors. The LoHi ground groups provide this effective group therapy to help student cope and overcome behavioral problems.

Ground groups focus on issues that include strength identification, skill building, taking responsibility for self and your own actions, self-respect/respect for others, managing emotions in a positive way, seeing others' perspectives, problem-solving and conflict resolution, and finding solid ground when confronting the reality of life's highs and lows. The goal of LoHi ground groups is to equip students with the behavioral and academic skills necessary to make and employ more positive, healthy life choices not only at school, but also at home and in the community (K.D. Ballard, personal communication, September 2, 2011).

Many students may benefit from positive life changes, yet may lack the basic skills required to recognize and create options for wiser, healthier life choices. LoHi ground groups motivate students to discover their individual strengths while developing fundamental problem-solving methods, such as learning, obeying, helping, and interacting, necessary to recognize and overcome present barriers that may inhibit behavioral or academic growth (K.D. Ballard, personal communication September 2, 2011). These barriers include issues such as underlying anger, aggression, or violent tendencies, defiance of authority figures, low self-esteem, social awkwardness, drug use and/or abuse, familial stressors such as verbal, physical, or sexual abuse, neglect, divorce, and sibling rivalry.

LoHi ground groups encourage students to be proactive and confront behavioral and academic challenges. This is accomplished through close examination of each student's behavioral and academic standing by consulting teachers, administrators, and parents to establish need and recommendations for intervention from a collaborative approach. The goal of LoHi ground groups for behavior and academic intervention is to

inspire children, adolescents, and families to choose positive change and find solid ground to stand on amid life's highs and lows (K.D. Ballard, personal communication September 2, 2011). Furthermore, the elements of self-efficacy and agency within social learning are embedded into the approach allowing students to model for others.

One behavior students learn is controlling anger. Hammond and Wyatt (2005) describe a situation where a student is encountered with an accusation and becomes frustrated. The student is wrongfully accused of stealing and becomes upset. His upset aggressive behavior is inappropriate and he faces the consequences of suspension. By reducing the student's behavior, the consequences would not have been necessary. Replacing the aggression with a problem-solving response that is modeled in the group therapy, such as changing the aggression to assertion relieves the student from further consequences.

Each student within the ground group will have their own differentiated skills that can be attributed to the groups. For example, one student that participated in ground groups had a difficult time with social behavior and tended to display aggression and frustration when confronted about academic or discipline issues. After the ground group coordinator consulted with the student's teacher, the coordinator established that the student was a visual learner. The coordinator had the student create a visual flip chart that developed steps for the student to follow when confronted with his academic or behavior issues. The beginning of the flip chart displayed the title "Please read when angry or frustrated." When problems arise, the student reaches for his flip chart and follows the steps. This procedure also allowed teachers to realize that students were

learning how to deal with issues in a more extensive process than what they would be able to correct in the classroom.

The ground groups target four components: learn, obey, help, and interact. A motto is listed within each component. The learn component is "I don't have to be perfect. I just have to do my best." The obey component is "First time, only time!" The help component is "Treat others the way I want to be treated." Finally, the interact component motto is "To have friends, I must be a friend." They learn these components through a variety of activities. These activities include art therapy, play therapy, ticket reward system, Gimme 5 (problem solving technique), highs and lows question game, SMART goals, Life Pack (personalized such as the example used in the previous paragraph), and incorporating behavior contracts.

When comparing Positive Behavior Supports and Response to Intevention to LoHi, a crucial difference is the amount of time stakeholders are involved. As previously mentioned, PBS includes many stakeholders and regular team meetings that interfere with day-to-day obligations. Response to Intervention was perceived as beneficial, but the data was difficult to process. LoHi consists primarily of an administrator and behavioral specialist. Teachers' responsibility is to refer students to ground groups, but all data collection procedures, planning, and activities for the ground groups are developed by the behavioral specialist. The behavioral specialist at times will collaborate with the teachers to find out about the students, as described in the previous example. Utilizing ground groups minimizes teacher obligations and resistance to the approach.

Teacher Morale

Teachers indeed have increased pressure to improve academic achievement. In 2010, Tennessee received a grant from the federal government to implement an initiative for school reform. The national grant was called Race to the Top – Tennessee redubbed their grant as First to the Top. Two major changes to education were executed in the first year of the grant, teacher evaluations and modifying union collective bargaining. The new statewide teacher evaluation system that was adopted requires apprentice teachers to be evaluated at least six times during the school year. Professional teachers must be evaluated at least four times. The evaluation model is called the Tennessee Educator Accelerator Model and requires lesson plans that are much more time consuming than previous evaluations. This affected the moral of both administrators and teachers throughout the state.

A survey conducted by the Public Agenda Learning Point and Associates concluded that 40 percent of teachers are dishearten with the profession (State Legislators, 2010). The survey included 890 teachers from across the United States. Teachers are taking on more than they can handle and it is leading to dissatisfaction and burnout. Eklund (2009) depicted teaching as a calling. This calling instilled intrinsic motivation for the teacher, but in the same token it is also what causes burnout among educators. Teachers have a duty to make a difference in students when they enter the profession. Many of them find out that making the difference is more difficult than previously thought. When the teacher enters this state of mind and is also confronted with more responsibilities, he or she feels ineffective and that goals are unattainable.

Teachers could benefit from approaches that require less on their part. The lessened work load could revive the calling and instill a sense of satisfaction. A new approach could provide much needed support for all stakeholders of the school or school district. Reducing negative student behaviors can only improve the calling of teaching. Teachers want to know that they are special, because it takes a special person to provide students with multiple needs.

Summary

Reactive measures no longer maintain discipline in schools. The use of ISS, OSS, detention and corporal punishment is losing its value to more proactive measures. Research has proven these measures can have a negative effect on student behavior. Relief may be in the form of a proactive measure instead of the reactive trends that keep failing.

The student body is made up of many different individuals with their own ideology. When combining the diverse population and worldviews with unlikely custodial situations, behavior will always need to be reinforced. Through all the changes a student may encounter, the one consistent element is attending a school. Student behavior will continue to be a persistent problem for educators. This negative behavior is detrimental to both the student and the school's learning environment.

Schools must achieve success following federal requirements and create an environment conducive to learning. To combat the problem, school personnel must find research-based strategies and approaches that reach students that are not achieving on a satisfactory level. Schools also need to develop strategies that allow teachers to perform their essentials duties without increasing their workload. Teachers are already plagued

with responsibilities beyond their core obligations.

LoHi is a new approach specifically designed to apply social learning in ground groups. Implanting social learning through ground groups may help students overcome barriers that impede student learning. Furthermore, students take the skills learned in the ground groups and apply them in the educational setting for others to observe. The purpose of this study is to determine if LoHi ground group therapy has an effect on behavior to give educators an innovative approach in creating a productive school environment.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This chapter explains the methodology used to perform the study. Items covered in this section include an overview of the study, subjects and setting within the study, instrumentation, procedures, and analysis conducted. The instrumentation included office discipline referrals and attendance records from the Statewide Student Management System (SSMS). The purpose of this study was to determine if ground groups had a significant effect on student behavior in a southeast Tennessee school district.

School districts continually evaluate and assess every aspect of the educational process. An evaluation and assessment exists in regards to legislation and the NCLB Act of 2001. Schools across the country must stay on target so all students can achieve academic success. One specific area school personnel examine is behavior. Any student with academic deficiencies, such as low grades and behavior issues, is recommended to attend the ground groups. Over the years an increase of students with varying abilities has overwhelmed educators to the point that they cannot teach effectively (Markow & Cooper, 2008). For this reason, school districts are implementing new approaches or strategies to help students become successful in hopes of improving the school environment and meeting the demands of NCLB Act of 2001. One specific strategy is using an approach, such as LoHi, that focuses on helping individual students overcome barriers that impede the educational process.

Examining the possibility of implementing ground groups in a school setting could decrease discipline and may allow educators to properly and effectively perform

their duties. Past studies have researched other approaches, such as Positive Behavior Supports, but a LoHi ground group is a new approach and has never been studied.

Design

This study employed a quantitative design using a combination of causal comparative and correlation methodologies. The design was chosen because the school district being studied has already been exposed to the treatment. In a causal comparative design, groups of individuals are formed based on whether the independent variable is present or absent and then determine if a difference exists on the dependent variables (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). The study is determining if ground groups had an effect on students that received office discipline referrals in a southeast Tennessee school district. The study also determined if a difference existed between the effectiveness for middle and high school students as well as students with varying demographics. Furthermore, the study compared the number of office discipline referrals and attendance rates for students that attended ground groups to determine if a correlation exists between the two. In other words, did a decrease in office discipline referrals correlate to an increase in student attendance?

This quantitative study was designed to measure the effectiveness of ground groups on office discipline referrals for a southeast Tennessee school district. For the primary hypothesis, students that received office discipline referrals from four schools over two consecutive school years were compared to determine the possible effectiveness. LoHi was implemented in a southeast Tennessee school district during the 2010 - 2011 and 2011 - 2012 school year and was classified as the treatment group. A comparable school district was selected for the study that did not incorporate LoHi and

was classified as the control group. The study also examined students in School District A over three consecutive academic school years. The first year, the 2009 - 2010 school year, students were not exposed to ground groups and was classified as the control group. During the 2010 - 2011 and 2011 - 2012 school years, students were exposed to ground groups. Students that attended ground groups during those two years were classified as the treatment group.

The office discipline referrals that students received were separated into three categories. The categories were minor, major, and overall. The minor category is the office discipline referrals that resulted in warnings, corporal punishment, and detention. The major category is the office discipline referrals that resulted in ISS or OSS.

Subjects

Since LoHi was a relatively new approach the treatment group was limited to students from a southeast Tennessee school district. For the first research question, a school district located within the same region with similar demographics was selected to determine if a significant difference exists. The first school district, labeled as School District A was exposed to the treatment and had 1,025 students enrolled in the two schools analyzed during the 2010 – 2011 school year in grades 6-12, with 97% white, 1% Hispanic, 1% African American, and 1% from other ethnicity. Sixty-eight percent of the students were economically disadvantaged. During the second year, 2011 – 2012, School District A had 1,030 students enrolled with no change in demographics. Sixty-nine percent of the students were economically disadvantaged. The second school district, labeled as School District B was not exposed to the treatment and had 889 students enrolled in grades 6-12 in the two schools analyzed during 2010 - 2011, with 96% white,

2% Hispanic, and 2% African American. Seventy-one percent of the students were economically disadvantaged. During the second year, 2011 – 2012, School District B had 890 students enrolled with 97% white, 2% Hispanic, and 1% African American.

The school districts are considered matching or "similar" school districts according to Tennessee State Collaborative on Reforming Education (SCORE). The schools were matched based on the following data: limited English proficiency, economically disadvantaged, and student racial makeup (Tennessee SCORE, 2009). According to Gall et al. (2007), extraneous variables can confound a study unless the variables are matched to equate the groups.

For the remaining research questions, individual students from six schools in School District A were analyzed. In the 2009 - 2010 school year, before implementation of ground groups, 2632 students enrolled in grades PreK-12, with 98% white, 1% Hispanic, and 1% from other ethnicity. Seventy percent of the students were economically disadvantaged. During the 2010 - 2011 school year, the first year of implementation, 2619 students were enrolled in grades PreK-12. During the 2011 - 2012 school year, the second year of implementation, 2512 students were enrolled in grades PreK-12. Ethnicity percentages during the three year span did not change. Seventy-three and seventy-five percent of the students were economically disadvantaged, respectively. The district is comprised of three elementary schools, one middle school, and two high schools. The students that were enrolled in the school district during the three consecutive years and also participated fully in ground groups during the 2010 - 2011 and 2011 - 2012 school years are the participants for this study. A total of 63 students that

attended ground groups during the two years of implementation and were also enrolled the previous year before implementation are included in this study.

For this study, the primary instrument used was the number of office discipline referrals. The principal research question was making a comparison between two school districts over the course of two years. School District A was classified as the treatment group and School District B was classified as the control group. The second research question was comparing office discipline referrals for the same group of students over a three year period. Students from the first year were classified as the control group and the same students that were exposed to ground groups during the second and third years were classified as the treatment group. In answering the third research question, office discipline referrals from students in grades 6 – 8 and grades 9 - 12 were extracted from the Statewide Student Management System and analyzed during the treatment years to determine the effectiveness of ground groups between these grade levels. For questions four and five, student sex and socio-economic status was extracted to determine if differences exists between group members. The sixth question analyzed office discipline referrals and attendance for the students that attended ground groups to determine if a correlation exists.

Students that participated in ground groups met once a week during the school day. The meetings consisted of two to ten students observing and modeling certain behaviors in a ground group. This format is aligned with the social learning theory that emphasizes behavior can be modified and meaningful through the use of modeling and observing. Once students have developed skills learned in the ground groups and

perceive themselves as successful, others can observe these new coping strategies by observing.

The behavior coordinator is an integral part of the ground groups and, therefore, a description of the coordinator is presented. The coordinator was thirty two years old and had two degrees. She obtained a Bachelor's degree in Psychology and Social Services and a Master's degree in Mental Health Counseling. Degrees were earned in 2003 and 2006, respectively.

Setting

The district selected for this study is located in a rural area of southeast Tennessee. Presently, it was the only school district to implement the LoHi approach. Teachers and administrators at the respective schools are given a handbook at the beginning of each school year that categorizes student offenses followed by the type of disposition that will occur for each offense. During the extent of this study, there were no changes as to the type of disposition a student received based on student offenses.

The office discipline referrals within the district are all recorded in the SMSS database. School District A opted to use the state recommended online database system for discipline maintenance and collecting data. The systematic approach will ensure consistency between all schools in the district. School District B also used SMSS, the state recommended database to record office discipline referrals and categories for infractions are the same in the online database.

Instrumentation

The office discipline referrals are the primary instrument utilized for this study and was retrieved from SSMS. "The Statewide Student Management System is a

comprehensive, state provided, web- based, electronic student information system for school districts to facilitate local, state and federal reporting requirements as well as to handle daily local functions" (Tennessee Department of Education, 2011). The SSMS collects and maintains records for every student in the school district and is comprised of grades, disciplinary action, demographics, scheduling, and attendance. The system tracks and maintains the students' records from pre kindergarten to 12th grade.

The number of office discipline referrals was examined to measure student behavior for two comparable groups to determine if a difference exists between the groups. The office discipline referrals were extracted for each school used in this study from SSMS. Office discipline referrals are efficient and valid indicators of student behavior (Pas, Bradshaw, & Mitchell, 2011). Attendance rates were also collected and analyzed to answer question six. All data entered into SSMS was recorded by district administrators for reliability, the principal and assistant principals at the respective schools being studied. They have been specifically trained to evaluate ODR's to ensure they are accurately recorded. In School District A, nine school administrators from six schools were authorized to record the data. In School District B, six school administrators from four schools were authorized to record the data.

Procedures

The first step in the procedure was to submit and gain approval through IRB. Next, the researcher asked for written permission by the districts to collect the data. Once the study was approved through IRB and by the school districts, the researcher began extracting student office discipline referrals and attendance records from both school districts selected for the study by a third party.

Since this is a causal comparative study, the treatment had already been implemented and pre-existing data was collected to determine if a difference exists. For the primary research question, the first group consisted of students enrolled in School District A during the two years LoHi was incorporated and classified as the treatment group. The second group consisted of students that were enrolled in School District B and classified as the control group. For all other research questions, the first group was students that did not attend ground groups during the 2009 - 2010 school year and the second group was the same students that did attend ground groups during the 2010 - 2011 and 2011 - 2012 school years. The number of office discipline referrals for each student as well as their attendance reports and demographics was collected.

Research Questions and Hypothesis

Research Question 1: Is there a significant difference in the number of students that received office discipline referrals for schools that were exposed to ground groups during the 2010 – 2011 and 2011 – 2012 school years as compared to schools that were not exposed?

Hypothesis 1: There is a statistically significant difference in the number of students that received office discipline referrals for schools that were exposed to ground groups during the 2010 – 2011 and 2011 – 2012 school years as compared to schools that were not exposed.

Research Question 2: Is there a significant difference in the average number of office discipline referrals for students that attended ground group meetings during the 2010 - 2011 and 2011 - 2012 school years as compared to the same students who did not attend during the 2009 - 2010 school year?

Hypothesis 2: There is a statistically significant difference in the average number of office discipline referrals for students that attended ground group meetings as compared to the same students previously not attending ground groups.

Question 3: Is there a significant difference in the average number of office discipline referrals between middle and high school students after implementation of ground groups?

Hypothesis 3: There is a statistically significant difference in the average number of office discipline referrals between middle school and high school students after implementation of ground groups.

Question 4: Is there a statistically significant difference in the average number of office discipline referrals between male and female students after implementation of ground groups?

Hypothesis 4: There is a statistically significant difference in the average number of office discipline referrals between male and female students after implementation of ground groups.

Question 5: Is there a statistically significant difference in the average number of office discipline referrals between students with a low and a high socioeconomic status after implementation of ground groups?

Hypothesis 5: There is a statistically significant difference in the average number of office discipline referrals between students with a low and a high socioeconomic status after implementation of ground groups.

Question 6: Is there a significant correlation between the number of office discipline referrals and attendance rates for students?

Hypothesis 6: There is a correlation between the number of office discipline referrals and attendance rates for students.

Data Analysis

The data collected through SSMS on office discipline referrals was analyzed using SPSS. The first research question consisted of two groups. The first group was students from a school district where LoHi was implemented. The second group was students from a school district where LoHi was not implemented. Office discipline referrals from four schools were extracted and placed into three categories. These categories were minor, major, and total. A 2X6 chi-square analysis was performed to determine if ground groups were effective school wide.

The remaining research questions consisted of individual students from three consecutive school years. The first group was the students from the 2009 - 2010 school year before LoHi was implemented. The second group was the students from the 2010 - 2011 and 2011 - 2012 school years, the years of implementation. The dependent variable for this study was office discipline referrals. The ground group therapy that LoHi implemented in the school district was the independent variable.

Office discipline referrals were used to assess the effectiveness of ground groups on schools, as well as the students that were exposed to treatment. They were also used to determine the effectiveness between middle and high school students. In addition, student sex and socioeconomic status differences were extracted to determine effectiveness. Furthermore, office discipline referrals were used in question number six to determine if they can be a predictor for student attendance rates. Pearson's product-moment correlation was employed to answer question six. In a causal comparative study,

the means of two groups will be assessed to determine if they are statistically different from each other. Research question one was analyzed by using a chi-square analysis. Research questions two through five will be analyzed by conducting a paired t-test. Using SPSS, a t-test compared the means of both groups to determine if there was a statistically significant difference for office discipline referrals**.**

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

This quantitative study examined the effectiveness of a behavioral approach for students that attended ground groups in a southeast public school district based on the number of office discipline referrals received. This chapter is organized into three sections according to each research question. The demographics of the students that participated in ground groups are discussed. The results for the six research questions are displayed and a summary of the findings are provided after each research question.

Demographics and Results

A rural school system in southeast Tennessee implemented ground groups during the 2010 - 2011 and 2011 - 2012 school years. For hypothesis one, four schools from two school districts were compared over the two years. Two schools that were exposed to the treatment were classified as the treatment group and the other two schools were classified as the control group.

For the remaining hypotheses, the two years were identified as the treatment groups and the previous year, the 2009 - 2010 school year was identified as the control group. Students that were exposed to the treatment for both years and were also enrolled the year previous to treatment were the participants. Any student that did not have three years of data in their school level (elementary, middle, and high) was excluded. This provided a total of 63 students that participated in the study. There were 41 (65.1%) males and 22 (34.9%) females. A total of 17 (27.0%) students were in elementary school, 19 (30.2%) were in middle school, and 27 (42.9%) were in high school. There were 27 (42.9%) students on the free lunch program, 22 (34.9%) were on reduced lunch, and 14 (22.2%) were on the standard lunch program.

Research Question One

The first research question asked if there was a significant difference in the number of students that received office discipline referrals in the 2010 – 2011 and 2011 – 212 school years for schools that were exposed to ground groups as compared to schools that were not exposed. The null hypothesis stated there was not a statistically significant difference in the number of students that received office discipline referrals for schools that were exposed as compared to schools that were not exposed.

Referrals were measured three different ways, minor, major, and total. A 2X6 chi-square analysis was conducted to determine if a difference existed. Table 4.1 displays the minor referrals. A value of "0" in the minor category represents the number of students that did not receive an office discipline referral in the four schools and a value of "1" indicates the number of students that did receive an office discipline referral.

Table 4.1

Observed Counts of Minor Student Office Discipline Referrals

School District * Minor Crosstabulation

			Minor		
			0	1	Total
School District	1	Count	1464	591	2055
		% within School	71.2%	28.8%	100.0%
	2	Count	1229	550	1779
		% within School	69.1%	30.9%	100.0%
Total		Count	2693	1141	3834
		% within School	70.2%	29.8%	100.0%

Table 4.2 displays the chi-square test results for minor referrals and does not show any evidence of a difference between schools that were exposed to ground groups and school that were not exposed.

Table 4.2

Chi-Square Test for Minor Office Discipline Referrals

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	Df	p-value
Pearson Chi-Square	2.123[a]	1	.145

Table 4.3 displays the descriptive statistics for major office discipline referrals for both schools districts over the course of two years.

Table 4.3

Observed Counts of Major Student Office Discipline Referrals

School District* Major Crosstabulation

			Major		
			0	1	Total
School District	1	Count	1812	243	2055
		% within School	88.2%	11.8%	100.0%
	2	Count	1531	248	1779
		% within School	86.1%	13.9%	100.0%
Total		Count	3343	491	3834
		% within School	87.2%	12.8%	100.0%

Table 4.4 displays the chi-square test results for major referrals and does not show any evidence of a difference between schools that were exposed to ground groups and school that were not exposed.

Table 4.4

Chi-Square Test for Major Office Discipline Referrals

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	Df	p-value
Pearson Chi-Square	3.822[a]	1	.051

Table 4.5 displays the descriptive statistics for total office discipline referrals for both schools districts over the course of two years.

Table 4.5

Observed Counts of Total Student Office Discipline Referrals

School District* Total Crosstabulation

			Total		
			0	1	Total
School District	1	Count	1339	656	1995
		% within School	67.1%	32.9%	100.0%
	2	Count	1142	637	1779
		% within School	64.2%	35.8%	100.0%
Total		Count	2481	1293	3774
		% within School	65.7%	34.3%	100.0%

Table 4.6 displays the chi-square test results for total referrals and does not show any evidence of a difference between schools that were exposed to ground groups and school that were not exposed.

Table 4.6

Chi-Square Test for Total Office Discipline Referrals

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	p-value
Pearson Chi-Square	3.571[a]	1	.059

Three chi-square tests were conducted for hypothesis 1. The results indicated that no significant difference existed. Although a slight difference did exist with major and total office discipline referrals, it was not statistically significant. Therefore, null hypothesis one was not rejected. Ground groups did not have an effect on school wide student behavior.

Research Question Two

The second research question asked if there was a significant difference in the average number of office discipline referrals for students that attended ground group meetings during the 2010 - 2011 and 2011 - 2012 school years as compared to the same students who did not attend during the 2009 - 2010 school year. The null hypothesis stated there is not a statistically significant difference in the average number of office discipline referrals between students that attended ground group meetings as compared to the same students previously not attending ground groups.

Office discipline referrals were measured three different ways, minor, major, and total. In addition, the treatment group was measured twice, 2010 - 2011, and 2011 - 2012. Therefore, in order to test hypothesis two it was necessary to perform six paired t-tests, one for each of the three types of office discipline referrals to compare the control group with treatment group 1, and one for each of the three types of office discipline referrals to compare the control group with treatment group 2.

The average number of minor office discipline referrals and the 95% confidence interval for the control and treatment 1 groups displayed little evidence of a difference between the two groups.

Tables 4.7 and 4.8 show there was not a statistically significant difference between the two groups, $t(62) = .81$; $p = .42$.

Table 4.7

Descriptive Statistics for Minor ODRs: Control and Treatment 1 Groups

	N					
	Valid	Missing	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Minor Office Discipline Referral - Control Group	63	0	4.6667	2.90717	.00	16.00
Minor Office Discipline Referral - Treatment Group 1	63	0	4.4286	2.13053	.00	10.00

Table 4.8

Paired t-test to Compare the Average Number of Minor ODRs Between the Control and Treatment 1 Groups

	T	Df	p-value
Minor Office Discipline Referrals	.805	62	.424

The average number of major office discipline referrals and the 95% confidence interval for the control and treatment 1 groups displayed a strong evidence of a difference between the two groups.

Tables 4.9 and 4.10 show there was a statistically significant difference between the two groups. The average (and standard deviation) number of major office discipline referrals was 2.38 (2.07) versus 1.68 (1.63) for the control and treatment 1 groups respectively, $t(62) = 3.28$; $p = .002$.

Table 4.9

Descriptive Statistics for Major ODRs: Control and Treatment 1 Groups

	N					
	Valid	Missing	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Major Office Discipline Referral - Control Group	63	0	2.3810	2.07464	.00	9.00
Major Office Discipline Referral - Treatment Group 1	63	0	1.6825	1.63456	.00	10.00

Table 4.10

Paired t-test to Compare the Average Number of Major ODRs Between the Control and Treatment 1 Groups

	T	Df	p-value
Major Office Discipline Referrals	3.278	62	.002

The average number of total office discipline referrals and the 95% confidence interval for the control and treatment 1 groups displayed some evidence of a difference between the two groups.

Tables 4.11 and 4.12 show there was a statistically significant difference between the two groups. The average (and standard deviation) number of total office discipline referrals was 7.05 (4.44) versus 6.11 (3.39) for the control and treatment 1 groups respectively, $t(62) = 2.54$; $p = .014$.

Table 4.11

Descriptive Statistics for Total ODRs: Control and Treatment 1 Groups

	N					
	Valid	Missing	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Total - Control Group	63	0	7.05	4.441	1	23
Total - Treatment Group 1	63	0	6.11	3.389	0	19

Table 4.12

Paired t-test to Compare the Average Number of Total ODRs Between the Control and Treatment 1 Groups

	T	Df	p-value
Total Office Discipline Referrals	2.538	62	.014

The average number of minor office discipline referrals and the 95% confidence interval for the control and treatment 2 groups displayed some evidence of a difference between the two groups.

Although some evidence of a difference between the two groups existed, Tables 4.13 and 4.14 show there was not a statistically significant difference between them, $t(62) = 1.85$; $p = .070$.

Table 4.13

Descriptive Statistics for Minor ODRs: Control and Treatment 2 Groups

	N					
	Valid	Missing	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Minor Office Discipline Referral - Control Group	63	0	4.6667	2.90717	.00	16.00
Minor Office Discipline Referral - Treatment Group 2	63	0	4.0635	1.77685	.00	8.00

Table 4.14

Paired t-test to Compare the Average Number of Minor ODRs Between the Control and Treatment 2 Groups

	t	Df	p-value
Minor Office Discipline Referrals	1.846	62	.070

The average number of major office discipline referrals and the 95% confidence interval for the control and treatment 2 groups displayed some evidence of a difference between the two groups.

Tables 4.15 and 4.16 show there was a statistically significant difference between the two groups. The average (and standard deviation) number of major office discipline referrals was 2.38 (2.07) versus 1.76 (1.44) for the control and treatment 2 groups respectively, $t(62) = 2.68$; $p = .009$

Table 4.15

Descriptive Statistics for Major ODRs: Control and Treatment 2 Groups

	N					
	Valid	Missing	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Major Office Discipline Referral - Control Group	63	0	2.3810	2.07464	.00	9.00
Major Office Discipline Referral - Treatment Group 2	63	0	1.7619	1.44484	.00	5.00

Table 4.16

Paired t-test to Compare the Average Number of Major ODRs Between the Control and Treatment 2 Groups

	T	Df	p-value
Major Office Discipline Referrals	2.677	62	.009

The average number of total office discipline referrals and the 95% confidence interval for the control and treatment 2 groups displayed some evidence of a difference between the two groups.

Tables 4.17 and 4.18 show there was a statistically significant difference between the two groups. The average (and standard deviation) number of total office discipline referrals was 7.05 (4.44) versus 5.83 (2.81) for the control and treatment 2 groups respectively, $t(62) = 2.69$; $p = .009$.

Table 4.17

Descriptive Statistics for Total ODRs: Control and Treatment 2 Groups

	N					
	Valid	Missing	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Total - Control Group	63	0	7.05	4.441	1	23
Total - Treatment Group 2	63	0	5.83	2.814	0	13

Table 4.18

Paired t-test to Compare the Average Number of Total ODRs Between the Control and Treatment 2 Groups

	t	Df	p-value
Total Office Discipline Referrals	2.686	62	.009

Six paired t-tests were performed for hypothesis 2. The results showed that the group of students that attended ground group meetings during both 2010-2011 (treatment group 1), and 2011-2012 (treatment group 2) had a statistically fewer number of major and total office discipline referrals compared to the same group of students previously not attending ground groups (control group). Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected and it was concluded that on average, students that attend ground groups tend to have fewer major and total office discipline referrals compared to when they previously did not attend ground groups. However, there was insufficient evidence to suggest there is a

difference in the number of minor office discipline referrals after students attend ground groups compared to before they attended ground groups.

Research Question Three

This question asked if there was a difference in the average number of office discipline referrals between middle and high school students after implementation of ground groups. The null hypothesis states there is not a statistically significant difference in the average number of office discipline referrals between middle and high school students after implementation of ground groups.

Office discipline referrals were measured three different ways, minor, major, and total. In addition, the treatment group was measured twice, 2010-2011, and 2011-2012. Therefore, in order to test hypothesis 3 it was necessary to perform six two sample t-tests, one for each of the three types of office discipline referrals to compare middle and high school students in treatment group 1, and one for each of the three types of office discipline referrals to compare middle and high school students in treatment group 2.

The average number of minor office discipline referrals and the 95% confidence interval for middle and high school students within treatment group 1 displayed strong evidence of a smaller average number of minor office discipline referrals in the high school group compared to the middle school group.

Tables 4.19 and 4.20 show there was a statistically significantly smaller average number of minor office discipline referrals in the high school group compared to the middle school group. The average (and standard deviation) number of minor office discipline referrals was 5.95 (2.55) versus 4.15 (1.32) for the middle, and high school groups respectively, $t(44) = 3.13$; $p = .003$.

Table 4.19

Descriptive Statistics for Minor ODRs: Middle and High School Students Within Treatment Group 1

	N					
School	Valid	Missing	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Middle	19	0	5.9474	2.54894	2.00	10.00
High	27	0	4.1481	1.32153	2.00	7.00

Table 4.20

Two Sample t-test to Compare Minor ODRs Between Middle and High School Students Within Treatment Group 1

	t-test for Equality of Means		
	T	Df	p-value
Minor Office Discipline Referrals - Treatment Group 1	3.128	44	.003

The average number of major office discipline referrals and the 95% confidence interval for middle and high school students within treatment group 1 displayed some evidence of a smaller average number of major office discipline referrals in the high school group compared to the middle school group.

Although some evidence displayed a smaller average number of major office discipline referrals in the high school group compared to the middle school group, Tables 4.21 and 4.22 show there was not a statistically significant difference between the two groups, $t(44) = 1.61$; $p = .12$.

Table 4.21

Descriptive Statistics for Major ODRs: Middle and High School Students Within Treatment Group 1

	N					
School	Valid	Missing	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Middle	19	0	2.3684	2.31446	.00	10.00
High	27	0	1.5185	1.25178	.00	5.00

Table 4.22

Two Sample t-test to Compare Major ODRs Between Middle and High School Students Within Treatment Group 1

	t-test for Equality of Means		
	T	Df	p-value
Major Office Discipline Referrals	1.608	44	.115

The average number of total office discipline referrals and the 95% confidence interval for middle and high school students within treatment group 1 displayed some evidence of a smaller average number of total office discipline referrals in the high school group compared to the middle school group.

Tables 4.23 and 4.24 show there was a statistically significantly smaller average number of total office discipline referrals in the high school group compared to the middle school group. The average (and standard deviation) number of total office discipline referrals was 8.32 (4.45) versus 5.67 (2.17) for the middle, and high school groups respectively, $t(44) = 2.68$; $p = .010$.

Table 4.23

Descriptive Statistics for Total ODRs: Middle and High School Students Within Treatment Group 1

	N					
School	Valid	Missing	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Middle	19	0	8.32	4.448	2	19
High	27	0	5.67	2.166	2	10

Table 4.24

Two Sample t-test to Compare the Total ODRs Between Middle and High School Students Within Treatment Group 1

	t-test for Equality of Means		
	T	Df	p-value
Total Office Discipline Referrals	2.684	44	.010

The average number of minor office discipline referrals and the 95% confidence interval for middle and high school students within treatment group 2 displayed little evidence of a difference between the two groups.

Tables 4.25 and 4.26 show there was not a statistically significant difference between the two groups, $t(44) = 0.57$; $p = .57$.

Table 4.25

Descriptive Statistics for Minor ODRs for Middle and High School Students Within Treatment Group 2

	N					
School	Valid	Missing	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Middle	19	0	4.3684	2.21637	.00	8.00
High	27	0	4.0370	1.74271	2.00	8.00

Table 4.26

Two Sample t-test to Compare Minor ODRs Between Middle and High School Students Within Treatment Group 2

	t-test for Equality of Means		
	T	Df	p-value
Minor Office Discipline Referrals	.567	44	.573

The average number of major office discipline referrals and the 95% confidence interval for middle and high school students within treatment group 2 displayed little evidence of a difference between the two groups.

Tables 4.27 and 4.28 show there was not a statistically significant difference between the two groups, $t(44) = 1.20$; $p = .24$.

Table 4.27

Descriptive Statistics for Major ODRs: Middle and High School Students Within Treatment Group 2

	N					
School	Valid	Missing	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Middle	19	0	2.2105	1.65257	.00	5.00
High	27	0	1.6667	1.41421	.00	4.00

Table 4.28

Two Sample t-test to Compare Major ODRs Between Middle and High School Students Within Treatment Group 2

	t-test for Equality of Means		
	T	Df	p-value
Major Office Discipline Referrals	1.198	44	.237

The average number of total office discipline referrals and the 95% confidence interval for middle and high school students within treatment group 2 displayed little evidence of a difference between the two groups.

Tables 4.29 and 4.30 show there was not a statistically significant difference between the two groups, $t(44) = .97$; $p = .34$.

Table 4.29

Descriptive Statistics for the Total ODRs: Middle and High School Students Within Treatment Group 2

	N					
School	Valid	Missing	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Middle	19	0	6.58	3.405	0	13
High	27	0	5.70	2.729	2	12

Table 4.30

Two Sample t-test to Compare the Total ODRs Between Middle and High School Students Within Treatment Group 2

	t-test for Equality of Means		
	T	Df	p-value
Total Office Discipline Referrals	.967	44	.339

The results for testing hypothesis 3 determined that on average, high school students displayed a smaller number of minor and total office discipline referrals compared to middle school students in the first year of attending ground group meetings (treatment group 1). Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected and it was concluded that on average, high school students that attend ground groups tend to have fewer minor and total office discipline referrals compared to middle school students that attended ground groups.

Research Question Four

This question asked if there was significant difference in the average number of office discipline referrals between male and female students after implementation of ground groups. The null hypothesis stated there is not a statistically significant difference in the average number of office discipline referrals between male and female students after implementation of ground groups.

The testing procedures were the same as those conducted in research question 3. Office discipline referrals were measured three different ways, minor, major, and total. In addition, the treatment group was measured twice, 2010 - 2011, and 2011 - 2012. Therefore, in order to test hypothesis 4 it was necessary to perform six two sample t-tests, one for each of the three types of office discipline referrals to compare male and female students in treatment group 1 and one for each of the three types of office discipline referrals to compare male and female students in treatment group 2.

The average number of minor office discipline referrals and the 95% confidence interval for male and female students within treatment group 1 displayed little evidence of a difference between the two groups.

Tables 4.31 and 4.32 show there was not a statistically significant difference between the two groups, $t(61) = .053$; $p = .96$.

Table 4.31

Descriptive Statistics for Minor ODRs: Male and Female Students Within Treatment Group 1

	N					
Gender	Valid	Missing	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Male	41	0	4.4390	2.19145	.00	10.00
Female	22	0	4.4091	2.06234	2.00	9.00

Table 4.32

Two Sample t-test to Compare the Average Number of Minor Office Discipline Referrals Between Male and Female Students Within Treatment Group 1

	t-test for Equality of Means		
	T	Df	p-value
Minor Office Discipline Referrals	.053	61	.958

The average number of major office discipline referrals and the 95% confidence interval for male and female students within treatment group 1 displayed some evidence of a difference between the two groups.

Although some evidence of a difference between the two groups existed, Tables 4.33 and 4.34 show there was not a statistically significant difference between the two, $t(61) = 1.47$; $p = .15$.

Table 4.33

Descriptive Statistics for Major ODRs: Male and Female Students Within Treatment Group 1

	N					
Gender	Valid	Missing	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Male	41	0	1.9024	1.77207	.00	10.00
Female	22	0	1.2727	1.27920	.00	4.00

Table 4.34

Two Sample t-test to Compare Major ODRs Between Male and Female Students Within Treatment Group 1

	t-test for Equality of Means		
	T	Df	p-value
Major Office Discipline Referral s	1.471	61	.146

The average number of total office discipline referrals and the 95% confidence interval for male and female students within treatment group 1 displayed little evidence of a difference between the two groups.

Tables 4.35 and 4.36 show there was not a statistically significant difference between the two groups, $t(61) = .73$; $p = .47$.

Table 4.35

Descriptive Statistics for Total ODRs: Male and Female Students Within Treatment Group 1

	N					
Gender	Valid	Missing	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Male	41	0	6.34	3.575	0	19
Female	22	0	5.68	3.045	2	13

Table 4.36

Two Sample t-test to Compare Total ODRs Between Male and Female Students Within Treatment Group 1

	t-test for Equality of Means		
	T	Df	p-value
Total Office Discipline Referrals	.734	61	.466

The average number of minor office discipline referrals and the 95% confidence interval for male and female students within treatment group 2 displayed little evidence of a difference between the two groups.

Tables 4.37 and 4.38 show there was not a statistically significant difference between the two groups, $t(61) = 1.26$; $p = .21$.

Table 4.37

Descriptive Statistics for Minor ODRs: Male and Female Students Within Treatment Group 2

	N					
Gender	Valid	Missing	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Male	41	0	4.2683	1.68856	1.00	8.00
Female	22	0	3.6818	1.91203	.00	7.00

Table 4.38

Two Sample t-test to Compare Minor ODRs Between Male and Female Students Within Treatment Group 2

	t-test for Equality of Means		
	T	Df	p-value
Minor Office Discipline Referrals	1.255	61	.214

The average number of major office discipline referrals and the 95% confidence interval for male and female students within treatment group 2 displayed little evidence of a difference between the two groups.

Tables 4.39 and 4.40 show there was not a statistically significant difference between the two groups, $t(61) = .32$; $p = .75$.

Table 4.39

Descriptive Statistics for Major ODRs: Male and Female Students Within Treatment Group 2

	N					
Gender	Valid	Missing	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Male	41	0	1.8049	1.34572	.00	5.00
Female	22	0	1.6818	1.64422	.00	5.00

Table 4.40

Two Sample t-test to Compare Major ODRs Between Male and Female Students Within Treatment Group 2

	t-test for Equality of Means		
	T	Df	p-value
Major Office Discipline Referral s	.320	61	.750

The average number of total office discipline referrals and the 95% confidence interval for male and female students within treatment group 2 displayed little evidence of a difference between the two groups.

Tables 4.41 and 4.42 show there was not a statistically significant difference between the two groups, $t(61) = .95$; $p = .34$.

Table 4.41

Descriptive Statistics for Total ODRs: Male and Female Students Within Treatment Group 2

	N					
Gender	Valid	Missing	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Male	41	0	6.07	2.524	2	13
Female	22	0	5.36	3.303	0	11

Table 4.42

Two Sample t-test to Compare Total ODRs Between Male and Female Students Within Treatment Group 2

	t-test for Equality of Means		
	T	Df	p-value
Total Office Referrals	.953	61	.344

The results for testing hypothesis 4 showed no evidence of a difference in the number of office discipline referrals between males and females. Therefore, the null hypothesis was not rejected and it was concluded that there is no difference in the number of office discipline referrals between males and females that attended ground groups.

Research Question Five

Question five asked if there was a significant difference in the average number of office discipline referrals between students with low socioeconomic status and students with high socioeconomic status after implementation of ground groups. The null hypothesis stated there is not a statistically significant difference in the average number of office discipline referrals between students with a low and a high socioeconomic status after implementation of ground groups.

The procedures to test question five were the same as in question two and three. Office discipline referrals were measured three different ways, minor, major, and total. In addition, the treatment group was measured twice, 2010 - 2011 and 2011 - 2012. Therefore, in order to test hypothesis 5, it was necessary to perform six two sample t-tests, one for each of the three types of office discipline referrals to compare low and high socioeconomic students in treatment group 1 and one for each of the three types of office discipline referrals to compare low and high socioeconomic students in treatment group 2.

The average number of minor office discipline referrals and the 95% confidence interval for low and high socioeconomic students within treatment group 1 displayed little evidence of a difference between the two groups.

Tables 4.43 and 4.44 show there was not a statistically significant difference between the two groups, $t(61) = 1.58$; $p = .12$.

Table 4.43

Descriptive Statistics for Minor ODRs: Low and High Socioeconomic Students Within Treatment Group 1

	N					
Socioeconomic Status	Valid	Missing	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Low	49	0	4.6531	2.22253	.00	10.00
High	14	0	3.6429	1.59842	2.00	8.00

Table 4.44

Two Sample t-test to Compare Minor ODRs Between Low and High Socioeconomic Students Within Treatment Group 1

	t-test for Equality of Means		
	T	Df	p-value
Minor Office Discipline Referrals	1.584	61	.118

The average number of major office discipline referrals and the 95% confidence interval for low and high socioeconomic students within treatment group 1 displayed little evidence of a difference between the two groups.

Tables 4.45 and 4.46 show there was not a statistically significant difference between the two groups, $t(61) = .66$; $p = .51$.

Table 4.45

Descriptive Statistics for Major ODRs: Low and High Socioeconomic Students Within Treatment Group 1

	N					
Socioeconomic Status	Valid	Missing	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Low	49	0	1.7551	1.76223	.00	10.00
High	14	0	1.4286	1.08941	.00	4.00

Table 4.46

Two Sample t-test to Compare Major ODRs Between Low and High Socioeconomic Students Within Treatment Group 1

	t-test for Equality of Means		
	T	Df	p-value
Major Office Discipline Referrals	.656	61	.514

The average number of total office discipline referrals and the 95% confidence interval for low and high socioeconomic students within treatment group 1 displayed some evidence of a difference between the two groups.

Although some evidence of a difference existed between the two groups, Tables 4.47 and 4.48 show there was not a statistically significant difference between the two groups, $t(61) = 1.31$; $p = .20$.

Table 4.47

Descriptive Statistics for Total ODRs for Low and High Socioeconomic Students Within Treatment Group 1

	N					
Socioeconomic Status	Valid	Missing	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Low	49	0	6.41	3.576	0	19
High	14	0	5.07	2.464	2	12

Table 4.48

Two Sample t-test to Compare Total ODRs Between Low and High Socioeconomic Students Within Treatment Group 1

	t-test for Equality of Means		
	T	Df	p-value
Total Office Discipline Referrals	1.309	61	.195

The average number of minor office discipline referrals and the 95% confidence interval for low and high socioeconomic students within treatment group 2 displayed little evidence of a difference between the two groups.

Tables 4.49 and 4.50 show there was not a statistically significant difference between the two groups, $t(61) = -.70$; $p = .49$.

Table 4.49

Descriptive Statistics for Minor ODRs: Low and High Socioeconomic Students Within Treatment Group 2

	N					
Socioeconomic Status	Valid	Missing	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Low	49	0	3.9796	1.79687	.00	8.00
High	14	0	4.3571	1.73680	2.00	7.00

Table 4.50

Two Sample t-test to Compare Minor ODRs Between Low and High Socioeconomic Students Within Treatment Group 2

	t-test for Equality of Means		
	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Minor Office Discipline Referral - Treatment Group 2	-.698	61	.488

The average number of major office discipline referrals and the 95% confidence interval for low and high socioeconomic students within treatment group 2 displayed no evidence of a difference between the two groups.

Tables 4.51 and 4.52 show there was not a statistically significant difference between the two groups, $t(61) = .14$; $p = .89$.

Table 4.51

Descriptive Statistics for Major ODRs: Low and High Socioeconomic Students Within Treatment Group 2

	N					
Socioeconomic Status	Valid	Missing	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Low	49	0	1.7755	1.50368	.00	5.00
High	14	0	1.7143	1.26665	.00	4.00

Table 4.52

Two Sample t-test to Compare Major ODRs Between Low and High Socioeconomic Students Within Treatment Group 2

	t-test for Equality of Means		
	T	Df	p-value
Major Office Discipline Referrals	.139	61	.890

The average number of total office discipline referrals and the 95% confidence interval for low and high socioeconomic students within treatment group 2 displayed no evidence of a difference between the two groups.

Tables 4.53 and 4.54 show there was not a statistically significant difference between the two groups, $t(61) = -.37$; $p = .71$.

Table 4.53

Descriptive Statistics for Total ODRs: Low and High Socioeconomic Students Within Treatment Group 2

	N					
Socioeconomic Status	Valid	Missing	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Low	49	0	5.76	2.876	0	13
High	14	0	6.07	2.674	2	10

Table 4.54

Two Sample t-test to Compare Total ODRs Between Low and High Socioeconomic Students Within Treatment Group 2

	t-test for Equality of Means		
	T	Df	p-value
Total Office Discipline Referrals	-.368	61	.714

The results for testing hypothesis 5 showed no evidence of a difference in the number of office discipline referrals between low and high socioeconomic students. Therefore, the null hypothesis was not rejected and it was concluded that there is no difference in the number of office discipline referrals between low and high socioeconomic students that attended ground groups.

Research Question Six

Research question six asked if a correlation existed between office discipline referrals and attendance rates for student. The null hypothesis stated there is not a statistically significant correlation between the number of office discipline referrals and attendance rates for students.

Office discipline referrals were measured three different ways, minor, major, and total. In addition, students were measured prior to grounded groups (control) group, one year after (treatment group 1), and 2 years after (treatment group 2). Therefore, in order to test hypothesis 6 it was necessary to perform a separate Pearson correlation analysis for each type of office discipline referral, and each of the three groups (control, treatment group 1, and treatment group 2).

Table 4.55 is a correlation matrix that shows the correlation between attendance rates and each of the three types of office discipline referrals within the control group. The table shows there was a statistically significant, negative correlation between attendance rates and each of the three types of office discipline referrals. The p-values were all less than .001 and the correlations ranged from -.58 to -.47.

Table 4.55

Pearson's Correlation Analysis of Attendance Rates Versus Minor, Major, and Total ODRs Within the Control Group

		Attendance Rate
Minor Office Discipline Referrals	Pearson Correlation	-.542
	p-value	<.001
	N	63
Major Office Discipline Referrals	Pearson Correlation	-.473
	p-value	<.001
	N	63
Total Office Discipline Referrals	Pearson Correlation	-.575
	p-value	<.001
	N	63

Table 4.56 is a correlation matrix that shows the correlation between attendance rates and each of the three types of office discipline referrals within the treatment 1

group. The table shows there was a statistically significant, negative correlation between attendance rates and minor and total discipline referrals.

Table 4.56

Pearson's Correlation Analysis of Attendance Rates Versus Minor, Major, and Total ODRs Within the Treatment 1 Group

		Attendance Rate - Treatment Group 1
Minor Office Discipline Referrals	Pearson Correlation	-.460
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001
	N	63
Major Office Discipline Referrals	Pearson Correlation	-.211
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.097
	N	63
Total Discipline Referrals	Pearson Correlation	-.391
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.002
	N	63

Table 4.57 is a correlation matrix that shows the correlation between attendance rates and each of the three types of office discipline referrals within the treatment 2 group. The table shows there was a statistically significant, negative correlation between attendance rates and each of the three types of office discipline referrals. The p-values ranged from <.001 to .011 and the correlations ranged from -.58 to -.32.

Table 4.57

Pearson's Correlation Analysis of Attendance Rates Versus Minor, Major, and Total ODRs Within the Treatment 2 Group

		Attendance Rate - Treatment Group 2
Minor Office Discipline Referral - Treatment Group 2	Pearson Correlation	-.319
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.011
	N	63
Major Office Discipline Referral - Treatment Group 2	Pearson Correlation	-.584
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001
	N	63
Total - Treatment Group 2	Pearson Correlation	-.501
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001
	N	63

The results for hypothesis 6 determined there were statistically significant correlations between attendance rates and office discipline referrals. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected and it was concluded that there is a correlation between attendance rates and the number of office discipline referrals.

Summary

After performing the statistical analysis for the six research questions, three null hypotheses were retained and three were rejected. A summary of each question is described below.

When determining if office discipline referrals were effective for school student behavior, null hypothesis one was retained. This indicated that a difference did not exist between schools that were exposed to office discipline referrals and schools that were not exposed.

The findings concluded that a significant difference existed in both the major and total number of office discipline referrals between the control group and the two treatment groups. A difference also existed in minor office discipline referrals for both groups, but it was not significant; therefore, the second null hypothesis was rejected.

When performing the statistical analysis for a significant difference between middle and high school treatment groups, the results were mixed. For the 2010 - 2011 school year, high school students on average had significantly fewer minor and total office discipline referrals. Major office discipline referrals were slightly fewer for high school students also but not enough to be considered significant. For the 2011 - 2012 school year, little difference was noted between the high school and middle school when comparing office discipline referrals. Based on the findings from treatment year one, null hypothesis three was rejected.

Both null hypotheses four and five were retained. Null hypothesis three determined that a significant difference did not exist between male and female students during the two years of treatment. Null hypothesis four determined that a significant difference did not exist between low socioeconomic and high socioeconomic students during the two years of treatment.

A Pearson's correlation revealed a strong negative correlation between office discipline referrals and a student's attendance rate. The correlation was statistically significant for the control group and also treatment groups one and two. Even when the office discipline referrals were broken into minor, major, and total, a strong negative correlation existed. This indicated that as the number of office discipline referrals increased the attendance rate decreased. Therefore, null hypothesis six was rejected.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

Summary of Findings

Educating students today has become an ever increasing challenge for teachers. Several reasons exist for this challenge. Teachers are accountable for the students academically, but so much more plays into the academic process. One aspect in particular involves student discipline. As mentioned in the literature review, students are more diverse than ever before and need the support of schools because it may be the only place they receive a structured environment. Recent research suggests students should be provided behavior instruction to avoid classroom distractions, thus allowing school personnel to teach more effectively (McIntosh, Flannery, Sugai, Braun, & Cochrane, 2008). The problem is identifying the needs of each individual student and developing new approaches to meet those needs, especially with the extraneous duties teachers are already performing. Admittedly, several other approaches receive quite a bit of attention and are supported with research as being successful. As with any approach, advantages and disadvantages do exists. Other approaches should be consistently studied, such as Positive Behavior Supports, to provide alternative options.

A rural school district in southeast Tennessee is trying to combat this problem by implementing ground groups. The approach of implementing ground groups is new and has never been studied. The purpose of this study was to determine the effectiveness of ground groups on student behavior. Six research questions were presented to investigate the effectiveness of ground groups and if the ground groups were more effective for particular groups of students. To better understand the findings of the study, the research questions and hypotheses are provided.

Research Question One and Hypothesis

Research Question One: Is there a significant difference in the number of students that received office discipline referrals for schools that were exposed to ground groups during the 2010 - 2011 and 2011 - 2012 school years as compared to schools that were not exposed?

Hypothesis One: There is a significant difference in the number of students that received office discipline referrals for schools that were exposed to ground groups during the 2010 - 2011 and 2011 - 2012 school years as compared to schools that were not exposed.

Findings for Research Question One

Three chi-square tests were performed and determined that the treatment groups did not show a statistically significant difference in minor, major and total office discipline referrals compared to the control group. Null hypothesis one was not rejected.

Research Question Two and Hypothesis

Research Question Two: Is there a significant difference in the average number of office discipline referrals for students that attended ground group meetings during the 2010 - 2011 and 2011 - 2012 school years as compared to the same students who did not attend during the 2009 - 2010 school year?

Hypothesis Two: There is a statistically significant difference in the average number of office discipline referrals for students that attended ground group meetings as compared to the same students previously not attending ground groups.

Findings for Research Question Two

Six paired t-tests were performed and determined that both treatment groups displayed a statistically significant difference in major and total office discipline referrals

compared to the control group. The control group had a statistically higher number of office discipline referrals as compared to the treatment groups. Null hypothesis two was rejected.

Research Question Three and Hypothesis

Research Question Three: Is there a significant difference in the average number of office discipline referrals between middle and high school students after implementation of ground groups?

Hypothesis Three: There is a statistically significant difference in the average number of office discipline referrals between middle school and high school students after implementation of ground groups.

Findings for Research Question Three

Six two sample t-tests were performed and determined that on average, students attending ground groups in high school had a statistically smaller number of minor and total office discipline referrals than middle school students during year one of treatment. The second year of treatment did not yield any significant differences between high school and middle school students who attended ground groups. Null hypothesis three was rejected based on treatment results from year one.

Research Question Four and Hypothesis

Research Question Four: Is there a significant difference in the average number of office discipline referrals between male and female students after implementation of ground groups?

Hypothesis Four: There is a statistically significant difference in the average number of office discipline referrals between male and female students after implementation of ground groups.

Findings for Research Question Four

Six two sample t-tests were performed and determined than no statistically significant difference existed between male and female students who attended ground groups during both years of treatment. Null hypothesis four was retained.

Research Question Five and Hypothesis

Research Question Five: Is there a significant difference in the average number of office discipline referrals between students with low socioeconomic status and students with high socioeconomic status after implementation of ground groups?

Hypothesis Five: There is a statistically significant difference in the average number of office discipline referrals between students with a low socioeconomic status and a high socioeconomic status after implementation of ground groups.

Findings for Research Question Five

Six two sample t-tests were performed and determined than no statistically significant difference existed between students with a low and high socioeconomic status who attended ground groups during both years of treatment. Null hypothesis five was retained.

Research Question Six and Hypothesis

Research Question Six: Is there a significant correlation between the number of office discipline referrals and attendance rates for students?

Hypothesis Six: There is a correlation between the number of office discipline referrals and attendance rates for students.

Findings for Research Question Six

Pearson's correlation analysis was performed and determined that a strong negative correlation existed between office discipline referrals and a student's attendance rate. The correlation suggests students with a high number of office discipline referrals tend to have a low attendance rate.

Discussion of Findings

For hypothesis one, it was determined that ground groups did not have an effect on office discipline referrals when comparing schools. This may indicate that the only students possibly benefiting from the ground groups are those that continue to stay in the groups because a school wide effect was rejected.

The following data is for hypothesis two through six. Before the year of treatment the average number of minor discipline referrals was 4.67. During treatment years one and two, the average was 4.43 and 4.06, respectively. The number of major office discipline referrals was 2.38 before the year of treatment. During treatment years one and two the average was 1.68 and 1.76, respectively. A slight decrease of 5% and 13% existed for the minor office discipline referrals during treatment years one and two compared to the year before implementation. A larger decrease of 29% and 26% existed for the major office discipline referrals during treatment years one and two compared to the year before implementation. When accounting for all office discipline referrals, the first year of implementation indicated a decrease of 13% and the second year indicated a decrease of 17% compared to the year before treatment. These numbers deemed the

ground group approach as statistically significant and effective in reducing office discipline referrals. The approach also seemed to be equally effective among the different subgroups, male and female and socioeconomic status. However, one exception existed within the effectiveness of middle and high school students. High school students averaged 31% fewer office discipline referrals during year one of implementation and 13% fewer during year two of implementation. This indicated a significant difference during year one of treatment. Comparisons between attendance rates and office discipline referrals were conducted to determine if the two were correlated. The correlations ranged from -.32 to -.58, indicating that a moderate correlation exists between attendance rates and the number of office discipline referrals. The results of the correlation indicate that a decrease in student behavior is followed by an increase in attendance rates. Thus, emphasizing the importance of providing an approach to improve student behavior such as ground groups.

Results from this study indicate ground groups can be an effective approach to improving individual student discipline. Ground groups embed the social learning theory through modeling and observing as a means to reduce negative student behaviors. This supports the relevant literature that new coping strategies can be developed by observing others (Miller, 2011). The more successful one becomes at overcoming negative behaviors after observing others, the more confidence he or she obtains. This confidence becomes more of an intrinsic motivation instead of extrinsic, thereby providing stability.

Other approaches, such as Positive Behavior Supports, have provided promising results when comparing office discipline referrals (Irvin, Tobin, Sprague, Sugai, and Vincent, 2004). Solomon, Klein, Hintze, Cressey, & Peller (2012) conducted a meta-

analysis of 20 experimental studies on Positive Behavior Supports and its effectiveness on student behavior. The results indicated the approach was effective in reducing problem behavior in schools. This provides more support for developing approaches that infuse the social learning theory. Solomon et al. (2012) also reiterated the validity and reliability of office discipline referrals being a robust measurement of student behavior. Schools can use the referrals when making decisions and have confidence the referrals are an accurate instrument to analyze.

The implications of this study could provide educators with support to implement proactive behavior approaches that reduce student discipline problems. The correlation between attendance and office discipline referrals can be used by schools to increase student attendance through behavior approaches and improve their AYP. It also provides school personnel an avenue of implementing an approach without placing an extra duty on teachers.

Limitations

Several limitations to the study existed.

1. The study was limited to students in southeast Tennessee with 97% being Caucasian. Thus, the study was not able to provide subgroup data among different ethnicity groups.
2. The treatment was conducted in only one rural school district. The approach was unique to this school district.
3. The researcher was not able to conduct a true experimental study and control variables because the approach had already been implemented. Therefore, other

factors could have influenced the study, such as teacher perceptions and student circumstances.

4. The study was performed over a short period of time.

Implications

This research challenged the effectiveness of ground groups on student behavior. Students in schools today are much different than in the past and educators goals should always include searching ways to improve their school and students. Providing students with an environment conducive to learning is a fundamental element in reaching that goal. Managing student behavior has continually been an issue in school. The quantitative data from this research study provides evidence that behavior instruction can be beneficial for individual students. Also, providing the behavior instruction will help school personnel teach more effectively (McIntosh, Flannery, Sugai, Braun, & Cochrane, 2008).

Although the data provided stronger evidence for effectiveness in high school, the implementation was successful from elementary through high school. Educators can use this data as a measuring stick while assessing a behavior implementation plan. An educator can also take into consideration the effectiveness among student socioeconomic status and male/female. Effectiveness was consistent among these groups and did not provide evidence the approach was favorable for one group over the other.

The current study did confirm that a correlation exists between attendance and office discipline referrals. As a student's office discipline referrals increased, their attendance decreased. This is important for educators because the implementation of a student behavior approach may also improve student attendance. To further the

correlation, Roby (2004) determine a relationship existed between attendance and academic achievement by gathering student attendance reports and Ohio state mandated tests. Attendance reports from grades four, six, nine, and twelve were compared to student achievement. This information suggests that academic achievement can be raised by improved attendance. The current study verified that attendance can be increased by implementing a grounded group behavior approach. For an educator, the thought of improving both attendance and achievement through the implementation of a behavior approach is invaluable.

Recommendations for Future Research

Recommendations for this study need to be discussed for the exploration of future research. One recommendation would be to compare schools implementing this approach to schools implementing a different behavior approach. Comparing different approaches may provide the effectiveness between each. Another recommendation would include studying a more diverse group. The current study included a high percentage of Caucasian students. A more diverse group would provide evidence of effectiveness among different ethnicity groups.

The current study also determined that a correlation between behavior and attendance existed. Although other research established a correlation between academic achievement and attendance, another study could determine if a correlation exists between academic achievement and ground groups to strengthen the validity. Finally, developing a true experiment over the course of several years to control for variables would help provide more concise results.

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APPENDIX A: IRB Approval

March 30, 2012

Ryan Goodman

IRB Exemption 1293.033012: The Effectiveness of Ground Groups on Student Behavior in a Southeast Tennessee School District

Dear Ryan,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and that no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under exemption category 46.101 (b)(4), which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:

(4) Research involving the collection or study of existing data, documents, records, pathological specimens, or diagnostic specimens, if these sources are publicly available or if the information is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that subjects cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and that any changes to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by submitting a new application to the IRB and referencing the above IRB Exemption number.

If you have any questions about this exemption, or need assistance in determining whether possible changes to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

Fernando Garzon, Psy.D.
IRB Chair, Associate Professor
Center for Counseling & Family Studies
(434) 592-5054

40 Years of Training Champions for Christ: 1971-2011

APPENDIX B: Frequency Tables and Descriptive Statistics for all Measured Variables

Gender

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	41	65.1	65.1	65.1
	Female	22	34.9	34.9	100.0
	Total	63	100.0	100.0	

School

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Elementary	17	27.0	27.0	27.0
	Middle	19	30.2	30.2	57.1
	High	27	42.9	42.9	100.0
	Total	63	100.0	100.0	

Socioeconomic Status

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Free	27	42.9	42.9	42.9
	Reduced	22	34.9	34.9	77.8
	Full	14	22.2	22.2	100.0
	Total	63	100.0	100.0	

Statistics

	N					
	Valid	Missing	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Attendance Rate - Control Group	63	0	93.6838	3.85970	76.54	98.80
Warning - Control Group	63	0	1.44	.996	0	4
Detention - Control Group	63	0	2.52	2.669	0	12
Paddle - Control Group	63	0	.70	1.131	0	4
ISS - Control Group	63	0	2.00	1.675	0	6
OSS - Control Group	63	0	.38	.682	0	3
Attendance Rate - Treatment Group 1	63	0	93.9171	3.39631	74.85	98.20
Warning - Treatment Group 1	63	0	1.65	.676	0	3
Detention - Treatment Group 1	63	0	2.30	2.204	0	8
Paddle - Treatment Group 1	63	0	.48	1.014	0	5
ISS - Treatment Group 1	63	0	1.54	1.330	0	7
OSS - Treatment Group 1	63	0	.14	.470	0	3
Attendance Rate - Treatment Group 2	63	0	94.1827	2.81115	86.36	99.43
Warning - Treatment Group 2	63	0	1.65	.699	0	4
Detention - Treatment Group 2	63	0	1.94	1.712	0	6
Paddle - Treatment Group 2	63	0	.48	.998	0	4
ISS - Treatment Group 2	63	0	1.49	1.268	0	5
OSS - Treatment Group 2	63	0	.27	.482	0	2