

EDUCATORS' PERCEPTIONS OF EXCLUSIONARY DISCIPLINE FOR STUDENTS WITH  
DISABILITIES IN A MANIFESTATION DETERMINATION REVIEW: A CASE STUDY

by

Jenell R. Huska

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Liberty University

2024

EDUCATORS' PERCEPTIONS OF EXCLUSIONARY DISCIPLINE FOR STUDENTS WITH  
DISABILITIES IN A MANIFESTATION DETERMINATION REVIEW: A CASE STUDY

by Jenell R. Huska

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Philosophy

Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA

2024

APPROVED BY:

Breck L. Perry, Ph.D., Committee Chair

Susan Stanley, Ed.D., Committee Member

### **Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to understand K-12 educators' knowledge of the characteristics of students with disabilities and how their ability to implement evidence-based practices shaped their perceptions of their role in making decisions regarding exclusionary discipline in a Manifestation Determination Review (MDR). The central research question included: How do K-12 educators' perceptions regarding organizational support affect the decisions they make concerning exclusionary discipline for students with disabilities in a Manifestation Determination Review? Eisenberger et al.'s (1986) Organizational Support Theory (OST) guided this study. OST relates to educators' perceptions regarding how their organization supports them in making decisions regarding exclusionary discipline for students with disabilities in an MDR. Additionally, this theory provided information regarding how educators utilized evidence-based practices to implement tiered programs that supported positive behaviors. Purposeful sampling was used to assemble focus groups and individual interviews of administrators, educators, and staff. Data was analyzed to develop themes, and results were reported using qualitative techniques. The findings contribute to current research surrounding organizational support and fill the gap in research regarding educators' views and perceptions on their readiness to make decisions regarding exclusionary discipline and how they implement positive behavioral supports using evidence-based practices with fidelity.

*Keywords:* perceived organizational support, manifestation determination, exclusionary discipline, disabilities, evidence-based practices

**Copyright Page**

© 2024, Jenell Huska

### **Dedication**

I dedicate this dissertation to my incredibly loving and supportive husband, Jason, and our two sons, Nolan and Benjamin. Your faith has been instrumental in reaching this milestone. I love you always and forever.

To my family, thank you for your constant love and encouragement. Your belief in me has led me to persevere.

## **Acknowledgments**

I want to acknowledge Dr. Breck Perry and Dr. Susan Stanley for your commitment to supporting me in each milestone of this dissertation. Your guidance, support, and mentorship gave me the tools to realize my goal.

I also wish to acknowledge those who gave me the time and support to complete this dissertation. Your impact on my educational journey was paramount in reaching every milestone.

## Table of Contents

Abstract .....	3
Copyright Page.....	4
Dedication .....	5
Acknowledgments.....	6
List of Tables .....	14
List of Figures .....	15
List of Abbreviations .....	16
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	17
Overview .....	17
Background .....	17
Historical Context .....	18
Social Context.....	19
Theoretical Context.....	20
Problem Statement .....	21
Purpose Statement.....	22
Significance of the Study .....	23
Theoretical .....	23
Empirical.....	23
Practical.....	24
Research Questions .....	24
Central Research Question.....	24
Sub-Question One.....	25

Sub-Question Two .....	25
Sub-Question Three .....	25
Definitions.....	25
Summary.....	26
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	27
Overview.....	27
Theoretical Framework.....	27
Related Literature.....	29
The Role of Perceived Organizational Support .....	29
Educators Roles in an MDR .....	31
Defining Exclusionary Discipline.....	32
Restraint and Seclusion.....	33
Zero Tolerance Policies .....	34
Effects of Exclusionary Practices .....	35
Effects of Exclusionary Practices .....	40
Exclusionary Outcomes for SWD.....	42
Inclusive Practices for SWD.....	44
Educational Setting vs. Student Outcomes .....	45
Roles and Responsibilities of Educators.....	47
Professional Development for Educators.....	50
Schoolwide Positive Behavior Support .....	53
Evidence-Based Interventions .....	55
Restorative Practices.....	56



Outcomes of Schoolwide Programs.....	57
Summary.....	60
CHAPTER THREE: METHODS.....	62
Overview.....	62
Research Design.....	62
Research Questions.....	63
Central Research Question.....	64
Sub-Question One.....	64
Sub-Question Two.....	64
Sub-Question Three.....	64
Setting and Participants.....	64
Site.....	65
Participants.....	66
Recruitment Plan.....	66
Researcher’s Positionality.....	67
Interpretive Framework.....	67
Philosophical Assumptions.....	68
Ontological Assumption.....	68
Epistemological Assumption.....	69
Axiological Assumption.....	69
Researcher’s Role.....	69
Procedures.....	70
Data Collection Plan.....	71

	10
Individual Interviews .....	73
Focus Groups .....	76
Protocol Writing.....	79
Data Analysis .....	80
Trustworthiness.....	83
Credibility .....	83
Transferability.....	84
Dependability .....	84
Confirmability.....	84
Ethical Considerations .....	85
Permissions .....	85
Other Participant Protections .....	86
Summary .....	86
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS .....	88
Overview.....	88
Participants.....	88
Allie.....	89
Avery.....	89
Candace.....	89
Drew.....	89
Evelyn .....	90
Felicia.....	90
George.....	90

	11
Grace .....	90
Hailey .....	90
Isabel .....	91
Jordon.....	91
Marcus.....	91
Marissa.....	91
Mia .....	91
Nora.....	92
Sophia .....	92
Results.....	93
Experience and Background Knowledge.....	94
Professional Development and Training.....	96
Procedures and Protocols .....	97
Data Collection and Review of Records.....	98
Leadership Functions .....	99
Clear Expectations .....	101
Roles and Responsibilities .....	102
Support.....	104
Collaboration and Communication.....	106
Making Connections .....	107
Building Relationships.....	108
Time .....	110
Outlier Data and Findings.....	112

	12
Views Regarding Essential Members .....	112
Prior Knowledge of a Student and the Infraction .....	112
Legal Counsel for MDR Members .....	113
Research Question Responses.....	113
Central Research Question.....	114
Sub-Question One.....	115
Sub-Question Two .....	116
Sub-Question Three .....	117
Summary.....	117
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION.....	119
Overview.....	119
Discussion.....	119
Summary of Thematic Findings.....	120
Interpretation of Findings .....	121
Communication and Collaboration Build Connections .....	121
Experience and Background Knowledge Increase Confidence .....	123
Clear Expectations Reduce Barriers .....	124
Implications for Policy or Practice .....	125
Implications for Policy.....	125
Implications for Practice .....	126
Empirical and Theoretical Implications.....	127
Empirical Implications.....	127
Theoretical Implications .....	128

Limitations and Delimitations.....	129
Limitations .....	130
Delimitations.....	130
Recommendations for Future Research .....	131
Conclusion .....	131
References.....	133
Appendix A.....	151
Appendix B .....	152
Appendix C.....	153
Appendix D.....	154
Appendix E .....	157
Appendix F.....	159
Appendix G.....	160
Appendix H.....	161

**List of Tables**

Table 1. Individual Interview Questions.....	73
Table 2. Focus Group Questions.....	77
Table 3. Protocol Questions.....	80
Table 4. Participants.....	92

**List of Figures**

Figure 1. Theme and Subthemes.....	94
------------------------------------	----

### **List of Abbreviations**

Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP)

Evidence-Based Practices (EBPs)

Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA)

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Manifestation Determination Review (MDR)

Organizational Support Theory (OST)

Perceived Organizational Support (POS)

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)

Students with Disabilities (SWDs)



## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

### **Overview**

Students with disabilities are warranted rights under the provisions of Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (United States Department of Education, 2023). Students with disabilities may require an intensive and multi-tiered level of support to increase positive behaviors and reduce the need for disciplinary measures when students engage in behaviors that require discipline (Hannigan & Hannigan, 2020). When students with disabilities exhibit negative behaviors, educators must make decisions regarding exclusionary discipline for these students. Educators' knowledge of the students, characteristics, and disabilities is crucial when deciding discipline needs. Furthermore, teachers' ability to implement evidence-based practices depends on the programs implemented in the school and the amount of professional development they receive to successfully carry out positive behavioral programs with fidelity (Grasley-Boy et al., 2019; Kervick et al., 2020).

The information presented in Chapter One of this dissertation introduces the research principles incorporated for this study. This study provides relevant historical, social, and theoretical information and statements defining my focus and rationale for exploring this topic. The problem and purpose statements identify the objectives of the study. The study's significance, key terms, and definitions clarify the themes presented throughout.

### **Background**

Researchers have stated that students with disabilities are two times as likely to be referred to the principal or recipients of exclusionary discipline than their peers without disabilities (Hurwitz et al., 2021). When a student with a disability commits an infraction, a Manifestation Determination Review (MDR) is in place to review the infraction and the student's

records to determine if discipline is required or if the student's behavior was a manifestation of the disability (Allen & Roberts, 2024; Knudsen & Bethune, 2018; Trapp et al., 2022). Although MDR procedures and mandates are in place according to federal law, students with disabilities receive discipline more than their non-disabled peers (Raj, 2018; Richard & Hardin, 2018; Simonsen et al., 2022).

School systems that implement positive behavioral programs and support seek to increase positive behaviors and reduce unwanted behaviors so that students in the public school setting receive educational opportunities under their entitled rights under IDEA and FAPE (United States Department of Education, 2023). Additionally, school systems are required to follow the regulations regarding MDRs so that there are appropriate evaluations for students with disabilities to ensure that they are not receiving exclusionary discipline on behaviors caused by the characteristics of students' disabilities. Developing and implementing positive behavior support programs through tiered interventions aims to promote positive behaviors and deter students from exhibiting unwanted behaviors that require exclusionary discipline (Corcoran & Edward Thomas, 2021; Meyer et al., 2021).

### **Historical Context**

Blatt and Kaplan (1966) exposed the inhumane living conditions for individuals with disabilities in their essay, *Christmas in Purgatory*, and a call to action was proposed to ensure the rights of those exiled to institutions where they were abused and excluded from the outside world. With the spark of this controversy, lawmakers asserted that public schools conduct hearings before suspending students (Ellis, 1976, as cited in Nese et al., 2021). The court case of *Ingraham v. Wright* determined that corporal punishment was permitted if students' behaviors were deemed inappropriate in the educational setting as long as the punishment was not extreme;

however, some states argued that corporal punishment should not exist and constituted a ban against the practice (McDaniel, 2020). School districts began to progress towards reducing exclusionary discipline for SWDs when infractions manifested from the disability. In the court decision of *Doe v. Maher*, school districts prohibited excluding SWDs solely on the belief that the student understands the difference between right and wrong (Kauffman et al., 2017). Furthermore, *Honig v. Doe* ruled that schools cannot discipline SWDs for incidents related to students' disabilities (Kauffman et al., 2017).

When a student's behavior is not a manifestation of the student's disability and exclusion is required for more than 10 days, the IEP team must be involved in the decision-making process (Kauffman et al., 2017). Policies were set in place to ensure the safety of all students, indicating that students must be removed from school if they possess a firearm, use violent force, or carry harmful substances such as drugs or alcohol (Jacobsen et al., 2019). Later in 1997, IDEA specified that students with disabilities should not receive a pattern of removal from their educational placement for ten days or more due to behavioral misconduct (Anderson, 2021). In 2004, a reauthorization of IDEA stated that in order to remove a student from his or her educational program for an extended period of a length greater than 10 days, an MDR must take place to determine if the behavior was the manifestation of the characteristics of the disability of the student (Anderson, 2021).

### **Social Context**

Educators view their worth in an organization from how it makes them feel valued, and perceptions often determine employees' attitudes, productiveness, and overall satisfaction with their occupation (Zafar et al., 2019). Perceived organizational support (POS) is an essential factor in determining how members of an organization respond to their authorities' requests, and

support offered by the organization determines how employees engage in the decision-making process and make ethical decisions (Jino & Dyaram, 2019; Khanipour & Fathi, 2020). Educators' perceived stress affects their performance outcomes and organizational engagement, but job satisfaction rates increase when employees experience positive POS (Canboy et al., 2023; Eisenberger et al., 2020; Kachchhap & Horo, 2021). Therefore, research surrounding organizational support will help employers increase productivity and efficacy in employee decision-making.

Employees' sense of status and belonging within an organization strengthens when authoritative members acknowledge and validate their efforts with factors that enhance their basic needs (Kachchhap & Horo, 2021; Zafar et al., 2019). In return, employees reciprocate those efforts and work to realize the goals and obligations assigned (Canboy et al., 2023; Jino & Dyaram, 2019; Kachchhap & Horo, 2021). In contrast, stressful work environments reduce productivity and meaning, while increased job demands and a lack of resources play a role in realizing adverse outcomes for an organization (Canboy et al., 2023). Therefore, additional employee support produces positive perceptions of job satisfaction and engagement (Kachchhap & Horo, 2021; Zafar et al., 2019).

### **Theoretical Context**

Early organizational theories such as Homans's (1958) social exchange theory, Locke's (1976) range of affect theory, and Graham's (1982) contribution to job satisfaction evaluate the perceptions of what a job can provide to the individuals within the organization. Job satisfaction plays a pivotal role in understanding the feelings and perceptions of the individuals who carry out the goals and expectations of an organization and is known to increase job satisfaction (Zafar et al., 2019). Furthermore, experience leads to creativity, higher performance, greater

satisfaction, and stronger self-efficacy (Aldabbas et al., 2023; Kachchhap & Horo, 2021; Zafar et al., 2019). Employees who express their opinions freely and are given the luxury of control in their position communicate often and build relationships with colleagues and employers (Zafar et al., 2019).

Research in Perceived Organizational Support (POS) investigates the feelings and perceptions of employee satisfaction within an organization to determine employees' level of effort, engagement, and performance (Ergul & Cetin, 2022; Masoom, 2021; Nair, 2020). This research may add to the current literature by providing insight into educators' perspectives to determine how organizations can support employees through professional development opportunities that will build confidence to make informed decisions regarding exclusionary discipline for SWDs. In addition to building knowledge on best practices in implementing behavioral supports for SWDs, this research intends to prepare administrators, educators, and stakeholders for future involvement in an MDR that will build POS and improve the educational outcomes for SWDs.

### **Problem Statement**

The problem is that K-12 educators make decisions regarding exclusionary discipline for students with disabilities without sufficient background knowledge of how the characteristics of disabilities can affect students' behaviors (Fisher et al., 2021; Hurwitz et al., 2021; Reed et al., 2020; J. D. Walker & Brigham, 2017). Since educators may not have adequate information regarding students and the unique characteristics of their disabilities, their decision-making may result in students with disabilities receiving inappropriate exclusionary discipline (Hurwitz et al., 2021). Without sufficient knowledge of disabilities, students' backgrounds, evidence-based practices, and strategies to prevent unwanted and problematic behaviors, educators find it

challenging to confidently make informed decisions when determining if there is a need for exclusionary discipline for SWDs (Fisher et al., 2021; Hurwitz et al., 2021). Educators' comfort level in making decisions relies on a set of beliefs established over time and contributes to an employee's satisfaction and commitment to their perceived role in an organization (Rizvi et al., 2023).

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this study is to understand K-12 educators' knowledge of the characteristics of students with disabilities and how educators' ability to implement evidence-based practices (EBPs) shapes educators' perceptions of their role in making decisions regarding exclusionary discipline in a Manifestation Determination Review. Additionally, this study aims to discover how educators' knowledge and skills regarding working with SWDs and implementing EBPs shape their perceptions when making decisions regarding exclusionary discipline in a Manifestation Determination Review. At this stage in the research, educators' views on their ability to make decisions regarding exclusionary discipline for students with disabilities will be addressed as their perceived role and satisfaction with an organization (Fisher et al., 2021; Nair, 2020).

The Organizational Support Theory (OST), derived from Eisenberger et al. (1986), predicts how individuals will respond to situations where they make decisions that affect students with disabilities. Organizational support theory tenets prognosticate how individuals will respond to situations and challenges based on antecedents contributing to employees' views and contributions to an organization (Ergul & Cetín, 2022; Masoom, 2021). This theory aids in understanding how social norms contribute to employees' judgments and behaviors regarding their worth and commitment to reaching the established goals set by an organization. The views

and perceptions of the participants in this qualitative study will be analyzed through the lens of Eisenberger et al.'s (1986) Organizational Support Theory.

### **Significance of the Study**

#### **Theoretical**

The theoretical significance of this study will add to Eisenberger et al.'s (1986) Organizational Support Theory (OST). Organizational leaders need to know and understand educators' perceptions regarding their freedom to express their views to determine their readiness to make important decisions about exclusionary discipline for students with disabilities (Masoom, 2021). The support offered to educators may impact morale and efficiency while improving behavioral outcomes for students with disabilities (Nair, 2020; Saeed & Hussain, 2021). Finally, with the feedback from educators regarding educators' preparedness to make decisions based on their knowledge of students, students' disabilities, and related characteristics, school districts will benefit from this information to provide educators with professional development opportunities to ensure that evidence-based practices are implemented with fidelity.

#### **Empirical**

This study aims to contribute to current literature and aid in understanding the feelings and perceptions of educators as they use their knowledge of students and disabilities to make decisions regarding exclusionary discipline. Further, the information will help educators support students using evidence-based practices to reduce problematic behaviors. Administrators, educators, and other stakeholders will benefit from this study because it will provide a depth of information regarding the feelings and perceptions of the experiences faced by current professionals in the field of education who have the responsibility of making important decisions regarding disciplinary procedures and placement of students with disabilities who carry out

harmful behavioral infractions. Additionally, the information received from those who participated in the study provided a clearer picture of the knowledge of students, their disability characteristics, and their level of experience in implementing evidence-based practices that will promote positive behaviors.

### **Practical**

This research intends to understand perceptions of educators' roles in making decisions to implement exclusionary discipline for students with disabilities. There are limited studies specifically detailing the views and roles of educators in examining the support organizations give to provide opportunities for professional development that will prepare educators in making informed decisions for students with disabilities in an MDR. Therefore, this study aims to close the gap in research surrounding educators' ability to understand the characteristics of SWDs, how disabilities affect students' behaviors, and how educators can utilize evidence-based practice to reduce unwanted behaviors and the need for exclusionary discipline for SWDs.

### **Research Questions**

The purpose of this study is to understand K-12 educators' knowledge of the characteristics of students with disabilities and how their ability to implement evidence-based practices shapes their perceptions of their role in making decisions regarding exclusionary discipline in a Manifestation Determination Review. The following central research questions and sub-questions will guide this study.

#### **Central Research Question**

How do K-12 educators' perceptions regarding organizational support affect the decisions they make concerning exclusionary discipline for students with disabilities in a Manifestation Determination Review?



**Sub-Question One**

How do K-12 educators utilize their perceived role within an organization to make decisions regarding exclusionary discipline for students with disabilities in a Manifestation Determination Review?

**Sub-Question Two**

How do educators' perceptions of students with disabilities and their understanding regarding the characteristics of their disabilities affect the decisions they make concerning exclusionary discipline in a Manifestation Determination Review?

**Sub-Question Three**

How do educators' perceptions regarding evidence-based practices impact their decisions regarding exclusionary discipline for students with disabilities in a Manifestation Determination Review?

**Definitions**

1. *Exclusionary Discipline* – A disciplinary act that removes or excludes students from participating in their current educational setting (Nese et al., 2021).
2. *Manifestation Determination Review* – A meeting with a student, parents, educators, and stakeholders is conducted within 10 days following an infraction by a student with a disability to determine if the behavior was a manifestation of a student's disability and if the misbehavior warrants exclusionary discipline (Kauffman et al., 2017).
3. *Perceived Organizational Support* – The feelings and perceptions employees feel regarding how their organizations show appreciation and concern for their employees' well-being (Eisenberger et al., 2020).

## Summary

The amount of support employees receive from their organizations determines their perceptions surrounding job satisfaction and influences how employees behave and make decisions. The problem is that K-12 educators make decisions regarding exclusionary discipline for students with disabilities without sufficient background knowledge of the characteristics of disabilities and how students' disabilities can affect behavior (Fisher et al., 2021; Hurwitz et al., 2021; Reed et al., 2020; J. D. Walker & Brigham, 2017). The purpose of this study is to understand K-12 educators' knowledge of the characteristics of students with disabilities and how educators' ability to implement evidence-based practices shapes the perceptions of their roles in making decisions regarding exclusionary discipline in a Manifestation Determination Review.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Overview**

A systematic review of the literature was conducted to explore the Manifestation Determination Review (MDR) process and educators' views regarding their level of preparedness to make informed decisions on the need for exclusionary discipline for students with disabilities. This chapter offers a review of research on the MDR process. The first section will discuss the Organizational Support Theory (OST), followed by a synthesis of recent literature regarding teachers' knowledge of best practices when conducting and participating in an MDR. Additionally, teachers' knowledge of evidence-based practices and positive behavior support for students with disabilities will be discussed. Finally, a gap in the literature identifies that there needs to be more research concerning educators' background knowledge of students with special needs and educators' ability to make accurate decisions during the MDR, especially when considering exclusionary discipline for students with special needs.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework for this study is the OST (Eisenberger et al., 1986). This theory aids in understanding how social norms contribute to employees' judgments and behaviors regarding their worth and commitment to reaching the established goals set by an organization. Their decision-making processes are formulated from experiences shaped over time. The authoritative entity's support determines how employees perceive their worth and value in an organization (Kachchhap & Horo, 2021). The support contributes to employees' self-esteem and confidence to use their voices to contribute input and drive decisions (Khanipour & Fathi, 2020). Additionally, how employees perceive their role within an organization contributes to the rate and length of absenteeism, attrition, and retention. Organizational support theory will guide this

study with the development of research questions utilizing the characteristics of the main components of OST, developing themes for understanding educators' roles in their organization and educators' preparedness to make decisions and have the freedom to express their opinions when deciding on exclusionary discipline for students with disabilities.

How an organization respects its employees' roles and involvement contributes to the well-being and positive work ethic displayed by its workers. Eisenberger et al. (1986) introduced (OST) as the theory of employees' perceptions regarding how they are valued and supported through validated organizational efforts. The OST addresses how individuals will respond based on antecedents obtained from perceived organizational support. Antecedents contributing to employees' views and contributions to an organization include workload, stress, support, satisfaction, and management styles (Ergul & Cetin, 2022; Masoom, 2021).

Commitment plays a significant role in employees' perceptions of authoritative figures. The amount of commitment an organization delivers to employees supports and validates the belief that an organization cares for its subordinates and their well-being. Commitment does not assuredly correlate with global satisfaction; therefore, determining employee satisfaction depends on several factors unique to an individual's needs and perceptions (Shore & Tetrick, 1991). In addition to feeling valued and invested in, an exchange of monetary or promotional compensation increases confidence in the organization. The empowerment employers give employees contributes to the employees meeting the goals and expectations assigned by the administrative team (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Furthermore, employee interest and satisfaction develop from the appreciation and support employers offer through intrinsic and extrinsic motivators such as expressed validation and health benefits (Kurtessis et al., 2017).

OST is essential in understanding employees' motivation in performing daily tasks at a

high degree of intensity. Employees' perception of their value is delivered through several factors supplied by administrators of organizations. Such factors include employee equality and fairness, an equal balance between rewards and work output, development of self-efficacy and meaning in daily work obligations, prioritization of goals and values among employers and employees, personal and organizational satisfaction, and perceived organizational support (Ergul & Cetin, 2022; Nair, 2020).

### **Related Literature**

Educators' knowledge of students, disabilities, best practices, and policies regarding the proper delivery of a Manifestation Determination Review (MDR) is crucial when considering if there is a need for exclusionary discipline for students with disabilities who execute severe infractions within the educational setting. Literature regarding educators' roles in executing the procedures and best practices relative to MDR for students with disabilities (SWD) is reviewed in this section. Furthermore, literature examining evidence-based practices and positive behavioral supports will also be reviewed. Positive behavioral supports and interventions rooted in evidence-based practices may help reduce the need for exclusionary discipline for SWDs.

### **The Role of Perceived Organizational Support**

The willingness and ability to actively engage and participate in an MDR depend on the efficacy and comfort educators feel when using their voices to actively participate in the decision-making process (Masoom, 2021). Educators who are given a robust support system from their employers and administrators will feel compelled to purposefully give their all when tasked to make crucial decisions (Ergul & Cetin, 2022). Positive organizational support results in active engagement, greater rigor, and increased involvement by educators and staff who have established positive feelings and attitudes around an organization and its leaders (Nair, 2020).

Additionally, staff who feel compelled and empowered to utilize leadership qualities increase their level of confidence and effectiveness when communicating with other educators, staff, and administrators within the school atmosphere (Kılınç et al., 2021).

How educators perceive their assigned role and participation in that role relates to their function and performance will determine how they will behave within the organization (Ajzen, 1991). Behavior is associated with the belief that a person has a certain level of control over themselves or a situation. Furthermore, behavior is influenced by prerequisite skills and knowledge in collaboration and cooperation (Kılınç et al., 2021). These factors aid in understanding the cause of the behavior. When understood, insight regarding which factors affect educators' level of confidence and advocacy during a manifestation determination review meeting is gained (Ajzen, 2020).

Manifestation Determination Reviews involve an in-depth review of educational records. Teachers encounter the challenge of evaluating their feelings, emotions, and beliefs about the student and the behavior of concern. Therefore, if educators cannot freely express their emotions and views regarding the situation or the student, pertinent information will not be obtained or discussed because the level of organizational support may not be evident (Masoom, 2021). Additionally, the given workload and list of responsibilities placed on educators correlate with their ability and willingness to complete tasks at the rate and commitment set by an organization (Abdulaziz et al., 2022).

When a balance of power and support exists in an organization, along with time and effort devoted to improving educators' professional development and well-being, the demands of workload and responsibility increase positive commitment and devotion to tasks and responsibilities assigned to educators (Saeed & Hussain, 2021). If available materials and staff

are limited, educators are less likely to implement behavioral programs with fidelity (Grasley-Boy et al., 2022). Conversely, when adequate support for materials and professional development is in place, educators participate more in new programs and initiatives (Lemons et al., 2019). The literature affirms that school districts and administrators try to empower and build employee confidence to improve educational and behavioral outcomes through a trust-based community (Kılınç et al., 2021).

### **Educators Roles in an MDR**

The Manifestation Determination Review (MDR) process is required for students with disabilities considered for exclusionary discipline due to inappropriate behaviors displayed in the educational setting (Allen & Roberts, 2024). Researchers have stated that essential review team members include parents, educators, school administrators, and relevant stakeholders who can interpret information gleaned from evaluative reports and observations involving the student (Connor & Cavendish, 2018; Knudsen & Bethune, 2018). To ensure an MDR is conducted with fidelity, essential team members carefully review the student's educational records and information regarding a student's disability and identify which factors affect the individual. These factors may manifest from the disability and the behaviors resulting from those factors (Allen, 2022; Trapp et al., 2022). Other factors considered include possible traumatic events in the student's early childhood years to understand the pathway of the student's life that may have led to the infraction (Pierce et al., 2022).

It has been noted in the literature that school districts often assemble a team of members for MDRs based on convenience rather than expertise because of the time restrictions set to observe the student and gather observable data (Fisher et al., 2021). Team members attending the review may not know much background information about the student, the student's disability,

and relevant behavior patterns. Inviting experts to the MDR who are knowledgeable of the student and understand the characteristics of disabilities is best practice when gaining access to input regarding the characteristics and patterns that manifest as a result of the disability.

However, educators or other stakeholders often need more authority in advocating or deciding on appropriate discipline practices for SWDs (Mayworm et al., 2021).

Experts in behaviors and disabilities, such as school psychologists, provide important information from their interpretation of the data and information regarding the student that can support the team in making the most informed decision involving the need for exclusionary discipline (Fisher et al., 2021). Generally, experts in the field of disabilities view that students with disabilities should be exposed to exclusionary discipline only when other practices are deemed ineffective (Mayworm et al., 2021). When there is a determination that the action was not a manifestation of the student's disability and verified that the student's IEP was followed with fidelity, researchers support the decision to enforce discipline as it would for any other student without a disability (Trapp et al., 2022). Without state or national policies addressing procedures for enforcing discipline for students with disabilities, it is up to the local district to determine its policies for addressing and prioritizing how student behavior is assessed and addressed (Grasley-Boy et al., 2019).

### **Defining Exclusionary Discipline**

There is no official definition for exclusionary discipline. However, exclusionary discipline is a term used to describe schools' actions to remove students from their current placement, where separation or seclusion occurs for short-term or lengthy units of time (Gibson & Robles, 2021). This type of removal can result in suspension, expulsion, or removal from the classroom. Depending on the infraction, school districts and administrators determine the best



course of action when students with disabilities engage in problematic behaviors. Students who possess disabilities, such as Emotional and Behavioral Disorders (EBD) and Other Health Impairments (OHI), are subject to more frequent occurrences of infractions that result in exclusionary discipline (Anderson, 2021). Reports indicated that students in rural districts receive more out-of-school suspensions due to limited staff and resources that could support students with disabilities in in-school suspension placements (MacSuga-Gage et al., 2022). Although protections are in place to limit the time students with disabilities are removed from the classroom environment for lengthy periods, students with disabilities continue to receive exclusionary discipline at higher rates than their non-disabled peers (MacSuga-Gage et al., 2021; Welsh, 2022).

### ***Restraint and Seclusion***

Depending on the infraction, school districts construct policies to determine which consequence is appropriate for the behavior of concern. When evaluating how schools respond to the behaviors of students with disabilities, research recommends that school districts evaluate their disciplinary procedures and policies according to building-level concerns, monitoring which populations receive exclusionary discipline the most (Welsh, 2022). Researchers note that practices that include isolation and seclusion cause long-term adverse effects on children and youth diagnosed with disabilities (Gagnon et al., 2022).

Corporal punishment, a form of physical punishment, was used in school districts throughout the United States (MacSuga-Gage et al., 2021). Students who received corporal punishment were removed from the classroom for extended periods due to physical harm from the discipline. Physical, psychological, and social harm occur when students in the juvenile system endure solitary confinement, and reports indicate that students are placed under these

conditions (Gagnon et al., 2022). Reports indicate that both types of responses have been observed during moments of desperation to prevent students from causing immediate or future harm. When policymakers make their expectations known, educators evaluate the need for using restraints and follow mandated procedures (Lake, 2022).

### ***Zero Tolerance Policies***

Zero-tolerance policies are implemented in schools to deter unwanted behaviors by disciplining all students who commit the same infraction to reduce misbehavior and the number of infractions in a school setting (Edber, 2022). Since there is no distinct definition regarding zero-tolerance policies for schools, media outlets often portray disciplinary measures set by schools as zero-tolerance policies for lesser offenses unrelated to drugs, weapons, or violence (Curran, 2019). The vague definition broadcast to the public can produce unfavorable outcomes for students with disabilities. Zero-tolerance policies do not consider students with disabilities; therefore, students with disabilities who commit serious offenses have the right to receive the opportunity to receive an MDR to determine if expulsion or relocation of students is appropriate for the act of concern through the statutes and regulations set by IDEA (United States Department of Education, 2024).

To guarantee the safety of students' emotional, mental, or physical needs, administrators, school boards, and policymakers have attempted to put policies in place to protect all students from harm (O'Neill, 2019). For example, the Zero Tolerance policy indicates that any student should be removed from the educational setting if he or she dramatically disturbs or imposes harm to students in the educational environment. The determination of the amount of time students are excluded from their educational placement depends on the infraction and varies based on codes and policies outlined by school districts. Consistent use of this policy with

students with disabilities negatively impacts these students (Kodelja, 2019; Mayworm et al., 2021). It is considered an inoperative practice that does not reduce the frequency of unwanted behaviors (Reed et al., 2020). Literature has addressed how exclusionary practices have increased problematic behaviors and the number of students who experience post-traumatic stress due to repeated exposure (Gage et al., 2022). Furthermore, schools that adopt zero-tolerance practices do not always publicly state zero-tolerance practices as a form of discipline in their district-wide policies (Curran, 2019)

In a system where schools adhere to strict zero-tolerance policies, students are removed from their current educational setting based on a set of rules that operate for all students who commit a specified infraction, regardless of the specifics surrounding the situation or the circumstances involving the life or background of the student (Curran, 2019). Teachers' roles in implementing exclusionary discipline rely on their views regarding their support of following the views displayed through the school's culture (Huang & Cornell, 2021). Zero-tolerance offenses often involve infractions related to violence, weapons, drugs, and sexual misconduct; however, schools determine their terms and interpretations of how they implement zero-tolerance policies in their district handbooks and school board policies based on the guidance from policies outlined in the state or federal level (Curran, 2019). Some argue that it is unjust to implement a one-size-fits-all solution to disciplining students for various infractions without evaluating the student, circumstance, or outcome of the infraction (Kodelja, 2019).

### ***Effects of Exclusionary Practices***

Researchers have identified the importance of recognizing the stigmatizing factors associated with exclusionary discipline for students with disabilities, especially for students of color and those with emotional and behavioral disorders (Curran, 2019; Fisher et al., 2021;

Gregory & Evans, 2020). A discrepancy of exclusionary discipline has been imposed at higher rates for students of color and those living in low socioeconomic areas (Cruz et al., 2021; Hurwitz et al., 2021). Males are also disciplined with office referrals at higher rates (Zakszeski et al., 2021). Therefore, researchers recommend that schools eliminate the use of metal detectors and security personnel to deter unwanted behaviors since there is minimal, if any evidence that support these factors as practices that prevent or reduce acts of misconduct in schools (Schlesinger & Schmits-Earley, 2021).

Research has indicated that implementing positive behavioral schoolwide programs or interventions reduces the number of suspensions and expulsions, improving the rate of successful outcomes regarding positive behavior, attendance, and increased graduation rates for students with disabilities (Cruz et al., 2021; Fisher et al., 2021). However, behavioral infractions are evaluated differently at elementary, middle, and high school levels, and disciplinary measures may be subjective depending on the district's codes and policies involving exclusionary discipline (Welsh, 2022). Students who received exclusionary discipline in elementary school had repeated aggressive behaviors following the first infraction when there were no attempts to provide behavioral interventions or find the cause of the behavior of concern (Jacobsen et al., 2019).

Schools who regularly implement exclusionary measures produce higher rates of suspensions, expulsions, and negative feelings regarding school culture and safety (Gahungu, 2021; Huang & Cornell, 2021). Interestingly, students who are not included 80% or more of the day in the general education setting are prone to higher rates of absenteeism and exclusionary discipline in the form of out-of-school suspensions, but students who were more likely to receive exclusionary discipline in the form of in-school suspension when they participated in general

education with same-aged peers for 40-79% of the time (Anderson, 2021). Statistics such as these raise questions regarding the support students with disabilities require in inclusive settings and whether the amount of time included in the general education environment affects the behavioral outcomes of students with disabilities.

The perceptions of the effectiveness of exclusionary practices differ between students who receive the discipline and educators who deliver the punishment. In some cases, the delivery of restrictive practices ensures students' and others' safety in the educational setting. Safety measures are outlined and implemented in a student's IEP if this is required. Positive behavior intervention supports are necessary to ensure that restrictive practices are utilized minimally (Hayward et al., 2023). Regular use of disciplinary practices not only does not prevent the same behaviors from returning, but the consistent use of these practices also does not teach appropriate behaviors related to strategies used by the student to cope or adapt to uncomfortable feelings or situations (Mayworm et al., 2021). Additionally, practices that require a teacher to remove students from the classroom who are not the cause of disruption are noted as having adverse effects on these students because when removed, they no longer receive the opportunity to learn in their general education environment (Tzucker, 2022).

Students expelled for an extended time who attempt to return to their home school experience feelings of stigma from the administration and teaching staff (Borrego & Maxwell, 2021). Students feel they do not have a voice and become targets for future discipline due to the stigmatization. Therefore, students avoid connecting and communicating effectively with others (Borrego & Maxwell, 2021). The severity and rate of disciplinary referrals depend on the individual teacher and how often educators collectively report instances of student misconduct (Gahungu, 2021). Unfavorable or undesired behaviors persist when students relate exclusionary

practices to rewards, especially when trying to avoid or escape situations or experiences (Nese et al., 2021).

Although supporters of exclusionary discipline promote the consistent use of policies such as zero-tolerance as a preventative measure of severe infractions in a school system, there is little to no evidence showing that exclusionary disciplinary practices prevent these serious acts from reoccurring (Kodelja, 2019). There is little support through literature that identifies how zero-tolerance policies improve positive behavioral outcomes in schools and increase feelings of safety among students and staff (Huang & Cornell, 2021). Evidence shows that unwanted behaviors are more likely to reoccur due to repeated implementation of exclusionary discipline, producing long-term adverse outcomes for students with disabilities (Kodelja, 2019).

### ***Exclusionary Outcomes for SWD***

MDR procedures and mandates are in place according to federal law, and students with disabilities receive discipline more than their non-disabled peers (Anderson, 2021; Gage et al., 2022; Simonsen et al., 2022; Zeng et al., 2021). Those impacted the most by exclusionary discipline include students of color, students living in areas of high poverty, and students with disabilities (Gregory & Evans, 2020). Male students of color who are diagnosed with a disability are three times more likely to experience disciplinary measures compared to their peers (McDaniel, 2020). More research is needed to determine if students' inability to access health care supports the rise of exclusionary discipline. However, without outside support to provide services to SWDs, the rate of exclusionary discipline is likely to climb for underserved populations (Dembo & LaFleur, 2019).

Students with disabilities are two times as likely to be referred to the principal or recipients of exclusionary discipline than their peers without disabilities (Gibson & Robles,

2021; Hurwitz et al., 2021). Additionally, students with disabilities are subject to higher rates of seclusion and restraint than their non-disabled peers (Gibson & Robles, 2021). Literature addresses that the academic and behavioral progress of students with disabilities stalls when they receive an exclusion from their educational programs, and the likelihood of regression increases (Anderson, 2021). The negative feelings associated with exclusionary practices impact family members and home life, and researchers encourage school districts to examine students' records to identify whether students' backgrounds influence students' behavior (Jacobsen et al., 2019).

At a young age, students are predisposed to exclusionary discipline measures, which are repeated behaviors that call for further discipline in the middle and high school years that follow (Pierce et al., 2022). Beginning in ninth grade, students who receive repeated seclusion or exclusion and shift between their home school and an alternative school setting reduce their chances of graduation and post-school success (Lenderman & Hawkins, 2021). The student may initiate a separation from his academic placement if feelings of anxiety persist due to the enforcement of repeated discipline practices (Fazel & Newby, 2021). Consequently, trauma and mental health concerns impact the behaviors that predict exclusionary outcomes for students with disabilities (Fazel & Newby, 2021; Wahman et al., 2022).

Opposing arguments demonstrate that students with disabilities are protected or immune from disciplinary action because of MDR and other safeguards provided through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). However, enforcing an MDR is needed to support students in receiving individualized support and identifying the cause of the behavior before enforcing segregation or exclusionary discipline (Reed et al., 2020). More importantly, adequate data on behavioral infractions and school systems' procedures for addressing behavioral

concerns in the classroom are essential in addressing the needs of the students and their appropriate placement within the general education setting (Tzucker, 2022).

### *Effects of Exclusionary Practices*

Researchers have identified the importance of recognizing the stigmatizing factors associated with exclusionary discipline for students with disabilities, especially for students of color and those with emotional and behavioral disorders (Curran, 2019; Fisher et al., 2021; Gregory & Evans, 2020). A discrepancy of exclusionary discipline has been imposed at higher rates for students of color and those living in low socioeconomic areas (Cruz et al., 2021; Hurwitz et al., 2021). Males are also disciplined with office referrals at higher rates (Zakszeski et al., 2021). Therefore, researchers recommend that schools eliminate the use of metal detectors and security personnel to deter unwanted behaviors since there is minimal evidence that supports these factors as practices that prevent or reduce acts of misconduct in schools (Schlesinger & Schmits-Earley, 2021).

Research has indicated that implementing positive behavioral schoolwide programs or interventions reduces the number of suspensions and expulsions, improving the rate of successful outcomes regarding positive behavior, attendance, and increased graduation rates for students with disabilities (Cruz et al., 2021; Fisher et al., 2021). However, behavioral infractions are evaluated differently at elementary, middle, and high school levels, and disciplinary measures may be subjective depending on the district's codes and policies involving exclusionary discipline (Welsh, 2022). Students who received exclusionary discipline in elementary school had repeated aggressive behaviors following the first infraction when there were no attempts to provide behavioral interventions or find the cause of the behavior of concern (Jacobsen et al., 2019).



Schools that regularly implement exclusionary measures produce higher rates of suspensions, expulsions, and negative feelings regarding school culture and safety (Gahungu, 2021; Huang & Cornell, 2021). Interestingly, students who are not included 80% or more of the day in the general education setting are prone to higher rates of absenteeism and exclusionary discipline in the form of out-of-school suspensions, but students who were more likely to receive exclusionary discipline in the form of in-school suspension when they participated in general education with same-aged peers for 40-79% of the time (Anderson, 2021). Statistics such as these raise questions regarding the support students with disabilities require in inclusive settings and whether the amount of time included in the general education environment affects the behavioral outcomes of students with disabilities.

The perceptions of the effectiveness of exclusionary practices differ between students who receive the discipline and educators who deliver the punishment. In some cases, the delivery of restrictive practices ensures students' and others' safety in the educational setting. Safety measures are outlined and implemented in a student's IEP if this is required. Positive behavior intervention supports are necessary to ensure that restrictive practices are utilized minimally (Hayward et al., 2023). Regular use of disciplinary practices not only does not prevent the same behaviors from returning, but the consistent use of these practices also does not teach appropriate behaviors related to strategies used by the student to cope or adapt to uncomfortable feelings or situations (Mayworm et al., 2021). Additionally, practices that require a teacher to remove students from the classroom who are not the cause of disruption are noted as having adverse effects on these students because when removed, they no longer receive the opportunity to learn in their general education environment (Tzucker, 2022).

Students expelled for an extended time who attempt to return to their home school experience feelings of stigma from the administration and teaching staff (Borrego & Maxwell, 2021). Students feel they do not have a voice and become targets for future discipline due to the stigmatization. Therefore, they avoid connecting and communicating effectively with others (Borrego & Maxwell, 2021). The severity and rate of disciplinary referrals depend on the individual teacher and how often educators collectively report instances of student misconduct (Gahungu, 2021). Unfavorable or undesired behaviors persist when students relate exclusionary practices to rewards, especially when trying to avoid or escape situations or experiences (Nese et al., 2021).

Although supporters of exclusionary discipline promote the consistent use of policies such as zero-tolerance as a preventative measure of severe infractions in a school system, there is little to no evidence showing that exclusionary disciplinary practices prevent these serious acts from reoccurring (Kodelja, 2019). There is little support through literature that identifies how zero-tolerance policies improve positive behavioral outcomes in schools and increase feelings of safety among students and staff (Huang & Cornell, 2021). Evidence shows that unwanted behaviors are more likely to reoccur due to repeated implementation of exclusionary discipline, producing long-term adverse outcomes for students with disabilities (Kodelja, 2019).

### ***Exclusionary Outcomes for SWD***

MDR procedures and mandates are in place according to federal law, and students with disabilities receive discipline more than their non-disabled peers (Anderson, 2021; Gage et al., 2022; Simonsen et al., 2022; Zeng et al., 2021). Those impacted the most by exclusionary discipline include students of color, students living in areas of high poverty, and students with disabilities (Gregory & Evans, 2020). Male students of color who are diagnosed with a disability

are three times more likely to experience disciplinary measures compared to their peers (McDaniel, 2020). More research is needed to determine if students' inability to access health care supports the rise of exclusionary discipline. However, without outside support to provide services to SWDs, the rate of exclusionary discipline is likely to climb for underserved populations (Dembo & LaFleur, 2019).

Students with disabilities are two times as likely to be referred to the principal or recipients of exclusionary discipline than their peers without disabilities (Gibson & Robles, 2021; Hurwitz et al., 2021). Additionally, students with disabilities are subject to higher rates of seclusion and restraint than their non-disabled peers (Gibson & Robles, 2021). Literature addresses that the academic and behavioral progress of students with disabilities stalls when they receive an exclusion from their educational programs, and the likelihood of regression increases (Anderson, 2021). The negative feelings associated with exclusionary practices impact family members and home life, and researchers encourage school districts to examine students' records to identify whether students' backgrounds influence students' behavior (Jacobsen et al., 2019).

At a young age, students are predisposed to exclusionary discipline measures, which are repeated behaviors that call for further discipline in the middle and high school years that follow (Pierce et al., 2022). Beginning in ninth grade, students who receive repeated seclusion or exclusion and shift between their home school and an alternative school setting reduce their chances of graduation and post-school success (Lenderman & Hawkins, 2021). The student may initiate a separation from his academic placement if feelings of anxiety persist due to the enforcement of repeated discipline practices (Fazel & Newby, 2021). Consequently, trauma and mental health concerns impact the behaviors that predict exclusionary outcomes for students with disabilities (Fazel & Newby, 2021; Wahman et al., 2022).

Opposing arguments demonstrate that students with disabilities are protected or immune from disciplinary action because of MDR and other safeguards provided through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). However, enforcing an MDR is needed to support students in receiving individualized support and identifying the cause of the behavior before enforcing segregation or exclusionary discipline (Reed et al., 2020). More importantly, adequate data on behavioral infractions and school systems' procedures for addressing behavioral concerns in the classroom are essential in addressing the needs of the students and their appropriate placement within the general education setting (Tzucker, 2022).

### ***Inclusive Practices for SWD***

To promote and encourage inclusion for students with disabilities in the general education setting, teachers have emphasized a need for further information regarding students and their individualized educational programs (IEP) (Kozikoğlu & Albayrak, 2022). Continued education conducted using seminars and professional development opportunities that utilize problem-solving practices and focus on developing and delivering IEPs with fidelity has been noted to promote and improve inclusive practices (Al-Shammari & Hornby, 2020; Cruz et al., 2021). With universal practices regarding positive behavioral support and interventions in place, students are informed of the expectations of the intervention, and positive reinforcement strategies are commonly used to promote and improve behaviors schoolwide (Grasley-Boy et al., 2019). Students in more inclusive settings are less likely to receive disciplinary referrals or exclusionary discipline and feel less stigmatized, which produces positive behavioral outcomes (Anderson, 2021).

In cases where the determination states that the infraction was a manifestation of a student's disability, data assists in formulating a Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA).

Following an FBA, a Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP) is developed, implemented, monitored, and reviewed (Knudsen & Bethune, 2018). If educational placement changes occur, all MDR team members must agree with this action, and the student's IEP must be updated and followed with fidelity (Trapp et al., 2022). Researchers support the practice of including parents in the MDR process. Researchers identify how parents can attempt to appeal a decision through the court of law if they disagree with the results presented at the MDR that promote enforcing discipline because members deemed the action made by the student was not a manifestation of the student's disability (Raj, 2018).

Special education teachers play a vital role in executing intensive interventions when they utilize their knowledge and expertise in evidence-based practices to ensure SWDs receive services outlined in their IEPs. To support students in an inclusive setting, special educators can provide consultations with general educators that involve data-driven strategies for students to interact effectively with peers and the curriculum (Chen et al., 2021). When identifying which strategies and tools are most effective with students of varying exceptionalities, educators consider the instructional setting, identify how the factors present within the setting can influence negative behaviors, and decide which behavioral strategies promote a positive learning environment (Beqiraj et al., 2022).

### ***Educational Setting vs. Student Outcomes***

The educational setting plays a role in students' educational outcomes. Researchers have investigated and compared inclusive and segregated student settings related to educational and behavioral outcomes. Research has not proven that segregated settings have improved the outcomes for students with disabilities (Afacan & Wilkerson, 2019; Mansouri et al., 2022).

Although students had exposure to grade level curriculum and less structured time when enrolled

in the general education classroom, students did not necessarily develop meaningful relationships, and reports indicated that students with more profound disabilities were the victims of bias and often left out of critical contextual activities in lessons (Dell'Anna et al., 2022). Students who attended behavior-focused institutions did not show significant improvement in stopping behavioral infractions, and they did not show substantial improvement in their scores on standardized assessments (Afacan & Wilkerson, 2019). Likewise, students placed in segregated classrooms or schools did not show improved academic outcomes compared to peers in the general education setting (Mansouri et al., 2022).

Students with extensive needs who participate within the general education classroom have shown to have increased opportunities for social contact with peers and exposure to grade-level curriculum that incorporates state-level standards and are provided with accommodations and adaptations to permit them to learn in the least restrictive environment (LRE) (Mansouri et al., 2022; Zagona et al., 2022). The purpose of instructing SWDs in segregated environments such as resource rooms and self-contained classrooms is to provide students with more attention and individualized instruction; however, literature shows that students who participate in segregated classrooms do not receive as much individualized attention and support, and they are not receiving instruction on grade-level curriculum through multiple modalities (Zagona et al., 2022). Reports indicate that more highly qualified and experienced teachers instruct in general education classrooms than teachers in segregated or self-contained environments (Afacan & Wilkerson, 2019). Conversely, previous studies have noted that students with more complex needs required additional advocacy support to ensure that sufficient support was made available and implemented with fidelity in the general education classroom (Dell'Anna et al., 2022).

General educators face the challenges of adapting instruction to exceptional learners' needs while managing classroom behavior. Likewise, aides and paraprofessional staff work closely with SWDs and face challenges when they have yet to receive sufficient information regarding the student or adequate training on addressing specific behaviors exhibited by SWDs (V. L. Walker et al., 2021). Students without disabilities also display inappropriate behaviors in the classroom but do not receive the same rights and protections regarding exclusionary discipline as SWDs (Koh, 2022). Likewise, students with autism do not have access to behavioral services in some schools because of district policies regarding how students qualify for academic and behavioral services; therefore, their social and behavioral deficits remain ignored (Stichter et al., 2021). Arguably, students without disabilities who do not receive services receive exclusionary disciplinary measures for acts that include insubordination and classroom disruptions (Koh, 2022). Advocates who call on policymakers to recognize the need for equal opportunities for all students recommend that administrators consider providing teachers with the tools needed to implement behavioral strategies to meet the needs of students (Chen et al., 2021). Pre-service training that prepares future educators with the knowledge and skills to implement evidence-based practices helps prevent unwanted behaviors, while policies that protect all students from experiencing the disparities that come from consistent use of exclusionary discipline support positive post-school outcomes (Husk, 2022; Koh, 2022).

### **Roles and Responsibilities of Educators**

Educators are considered required MDR team members (Knudsen & Bethune, 2018). The roles and responsibilities of educators include prior knowledge of the student, the student's educational and behavioral records, and the MDR methods and procedures (İlik & Er, 2019). Knowledge of the student and the student's educational needs and records supports the team in

making informed decisions regarding discipline for students with disabilities (Allen, 2022). For example, students with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) have difficulty regulating their behavior based on the characteristics of their disability; therefore, without proper knowledge of the characteristics of the effects ADHD has on students and how students regulate their behaviors, higher rates of exclusionary discipline occur, and students experience stigma throughout their educational careers (Ramey & Freelin, 2023). Research indicates that best practices involve an intensive and explicit review of the student's educational records to determine possible causes of the behavior and determine which interventions will support and influence the student to display positive behaviors in the future (Knudsen & Bethune, 2018).

There are demands and expectations for teachers to make accurate and appropriate decisions for students with disabilities at an MDR; however, educators such as school psychologists have stated that they have made decisions regarding discipline for students with disabilities based on the opinions or expectations set by administration (Allen & Roberts, 2024). School psychologists are well-versed in data collection procedures and have a strong background in disabilities, including the characteristics of the behaviors that manifest. School psychologists can provide educators with valuable strategies to improve classroom behavior management (Mayworm et al., 2021).

When implementing strategies and programs to promote positive behaviors in the educational setting, behavioral and exclusionary data regarding instances of pulling students out of their regular learning environment assist in formulating appropriate plans and responses to behavior (Bartlett & Ellis, 2021). Instruction provided to students on EBPs that promote and improve students' self-regulation using self-monitoring strategies allows students to evaluate their decisions and choose an appropriate response to an incident or situation (Estrapala et al.,



2022). Therefore, professional development provided to administrators, educators, and other related service providers may aid in building confidence for educators in making more informed decisions on the appropriateness of exclusionary discipline for students with disabilities.

The amount of training and professional development provided to educators regarding the characteristics of SWD and the MDR process depends on the organization's willingness and ability to support educators and staff in providing professional development training opportunities. Given adequate training, educators feel more compelled to provide their input on important issues without encountering pushback from the administration and avoid feeling attacked because their views have been expressed (Masoom, 2021). Conversely, there are instances when individuals within an organization do not want to disrupt the harmony that occurs when an organization tries to promote compliance and cooperation among its members (Turan Dalli & Sezgin, 2022). Thus, the silence of these individuals may deter the effectiveness of executing diverse views and opinions from all members during an MDR.

Educators' lack of knowledge regarding the characteristics and traits of students' disabilities may lead them to develop a bias against these students (Enders et al., 2022; Ramey & Freelin, 2023). Furthermore, their opinions regarding the student, the student's behavior, and the infraction may result in an overrepresentation of students receiving exclusionary discipline (Borrego & Maxwell, 2021; Gage et al., 2022; Hurwitz et al., 2021). When educators do not understand the student's traits and the specific characteristics of the disability category examined, the chance for teacher bias increases (Fisher et al., 2021). Therefore, the inclusion of school psychologists and other trained experts in interpreting data from evaluative reports aids in preventing the likelihood that decisions are made on a convenience basis rather than through confirmed research and data (Fisher et al., 2021).

Maintaining accurate and substantial records is common practice when creating plans for students for behavioral concerns, and adequate training on data collection procedures is required for educators to record data on student behavior effectively (Lemons et al., 2019). Specialized individuals trained in behavioral support can identify antecedents that provoke unwanted behaviors and recognize the impact of behavioral outcomes based on the characteristics of the disability (Allen, 2022; Chen et al., 2021). Researchers have indicated that tiered interventions teach the skills necessary to deliver behaviors that produce positive results. However, when students do not respond to standard interventions geared towards whole-group instruction, incorporating evidence-based practices is vital for meeting the needs of SWDs, especially students with EBD who struggle to meet the established behavioral expectations (Chen et al., 2021).

### ***Professional Development for Educators***

Educators, administrators, and professional stakeholders are required to know students and their disabilities while also understanding the process of conducting an MDR with fidelity in order to create positive behavioral outcomes that meet the needs of the students and their IEPs (Allen & Roberts, 2024). Educators' knowledge of students, disabilities, and practices contributes to effective communication and advocacy during MDRs (Fisher et al., 2021). Teams need to receive information and input regarding the student from experts who also work with the students in the educational setting, such as school nurses, who are not directly instructing the student but have knowledge and expertise on the student and the student's disability (Fraley et al., 2020). Without sufficient knowledge of disabilities, students' backgrounds and evidence-based strategies to limit problem behaviors, educators find it difficult to make educated decisions

regarding exclusionary discipline without the proper facts outlined and interpreted (Reed et al., 2020).

To implement programs and interventions with fidelity, educators must understand students' IEPs and provide accommodations and services accordingly (Gagnon et al., 2022). To support students further, frequent communication and involvement with parents when students engage in behaviors that involve restraint or seclusion is considered a highly regarded practice in building transparency (Bartlett & Ellis, 2021). Additionally, institutions that train educators in identifying feelings associated with bias can support them in evaluating their decisions regarding the needs of students based on background knowledge of the student, the student's disability, and social norms to prevent any inequities that may occur (Schlesinger & Schmits-Earley, 2021).

Collaboration between educators and parents promotes proactive solutions and encourages interactive discussions that build trustworthiness and satisfaction before, during, and after an MDR (Trapp et al., 2022). Ongoing collaboration between schools and parents builds problem-solving skills and encourages students and families to communicate constructively (Kervick et al., 2020). Families who do not receive information regarding behavioral infractions executed by their sons or daughters develop frustrations and concerns that result in conflict and limited communication. In contrast, information is essential to improving students' behavioral and educational outcomes (Wahman et al., 2022).

In addition to collaborating with families, educators who effectively consult with support staff within the school build trustworthiness when making decisions that impact students concerning their educational placements and the need for discipline and exclusion. School nurses also bring valuable information regarding the student, the student's disability, and the possible causes of behaviors through their understanding of the characteristics of disabilities (Fralely et al.,

2020). The information provided by all educational team members can aid in developing plans for students to follow explicit instruction related to practical problem-solving skills that can be translated to other areas (Nese et al., 2021). School districts can determine if programs should be implemented for students individually after collecting data from parents, educators, and service providers on the behaviors of students with disabilities (Lemons et al., 2019).

Professional development and training opportunities deliver the statement of an organization's expectations and aid in building confidence for educators when they feel like they play an essential role within an organization (Masoom, 2021). Furthermore, educators' self-worth and confidence build when organizational support encourages them to make proactive choices, share their views regularly, and utilize problem-solving skills and strategies when faced with complex tasks and challenging situations (Turan Dalli & Sezgin, 2022). Specific professional development opportunities related to implementing positive behavioral strategies for SWDs increased the implementation rate by professionals in the educational setting (V. L. Walker et al., 2021).

Even with professional development opportunities set for school-wide programs such as PBIS, educators reveal that they require continued professional development and assessment of the program to effectively implement programs and initiatives with fidelity (Kervick et al., 2020). As educators are engaged in research and making decisions on which strategies are integral for intervention, additional time for professional development opportunities provided by school districts or organizations is helpful to address the current needs of students (Beqiraj et al., 2022). Therefore, teachers must have sufficient training and preparation to increase their competence in implementing non-exclusionary practices consistently (Gahungu, 2021).

Educational opportunities where educators evaluate case studies of fictional or previous cases develop and enhance teachers' understanding of efficacious practices and policies that are examined on a case-by-case basis (Decker & Pazey, 2017). Professional development training has provided educators with essential information to build on their knowledge and skills that support them in effectively using their voices during MDRs. The information gained by educators ensures that not only do students have an informed advocate to support them, but all members are well-informed about special education law, the characteristics and effects of disabilities, and the individualized needs of students (Reed et al., 2020). Increased investment in professional development and the encouragement by administrators for educators to take on leadership roles improves the way a school functions and shares responsibility and vision (Kilinc et al., 2021).

### **Schoolwide Positive Behavior Support**

Positive behavior support frameworks involve multi-tiered approaches that use data from educators' observations to examine quantitative measures that identify which evidence-based practices have shown to support educators in improving their academic and behavioral outcomes (Corcoran & Edward Thomas, 2021). Multi-tiered levels of support that identify the targeted needs of students and provide instruction influenced by information gleaned and measured through data collection and observation provide positive results and reduce the number of unwanted behaviors exhibited by students (Gage et al., 2020; Hannigan & Hannigan, 2020). Alternatives to exclusionary discipline include techniques that develop relationships between students and teachers and instruction for students on alternative behaviors that can be used during times of uncertainty and discomfort (Nese et al., 2021). A team of experts can design

educational programs that promote positive outcomes by using observable data to determine which practices and strategies are most beneficial to meet the needs of SWDs (Chen et al., 2021).

Developing and implementing positive behavior support programs and interventions aim to deter students from exhibiting unwanted behaviors and acting in ways that require exclusionary discipline (Kervick et al., 2020; Meyer et al., 2021). The use of school-wide programs aids in addressing the root of the behavior and identifying strategies to prevent or address the behavior in real time so that students understand the expectations set by the teacher and the school regarding appropriate behavior and the prevention of unwanted behaviors (Schlesinger & Schmits-Earley, 2021). Furthermore, commitment to creating and administering a curriculum that provides hands-on instruction on executing appropriate behaviors is essential to improving students' self-regulation and behavioral management skills (Gage et al., 2020). With sufficient training for educators on effectively implementing evidence-based practices (EBPs) consistently, SWDs can meet the expectations in the inclusive setting (Rivera & McKeithan, 2021).

Researchers have indicated that positive behavioral supports with other evidence-based practices limit the number of exclusionary discipline referrals assigned to students with disabilities and aid in preventing high drop-out rates that occur because of uninformed or rushed MDR decisions (Richard & Hardin, 2018). The literature has noted that rural schools enforce exclusionary discipline for students with disabilities more than urban schools, even when schools adhere to the implementation strategies and initiatives for positive behavioral support (Grasley-Boy et al., 2022). The hypothesis is that urban schools may offer more support through their in-house and community programs. In contrast, rural schools lack these types of support, which correlates with higher suspension rates for students with disabilities (Grasley-Boy et al., 2022).

Students who reside in rural districts and are diagnosed with Other Health Impairments, Speech and Language Impairment, or Emotional Disturbance have received in-school suspensions and out-of-school suspensions at higher rates than students who attend school in urban areas (MacSuga-Gage et al., 2022). Schools that implement positive behavior support programs show a decrease in the number of exclusionary discipline referrals, and there are reports of instances where students with disabilities require the use of a restraint or placement in a secluded environment as a result of their behavioral infraction (Simonsen et al., 2022).

### ***Evidence-Based Interventions***

Evidence-based interventions such as Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) utilize a framework that incorporates multi-tiered levels of support for students. These frameworks incorporate measures that support students in realizing goals and objectives using systematic programs that incorporate active involvement and instruction tailored to their individualized behavioral needs (Gage et al., 2020; Hannigan & Hannigan, 2020; Melloy & Murry, 2019; Simonsen et al., 2022). Evidence-based practices include using positive reinforcement strategies and progress monitoring procedures tailored to address a student's needs (Gage et al., 2020). The three tiers implemented for students begin in a group setting and reduce to small group and individualized instruction based on the revealed data obtained from trained personnel.

Using tiered interventions, teachers deliver lessons and scenarios through schoolwide instruction and small group intensive support to prevent the need to engage in force or restraints with students with disabilities (Simonsen et al., 2022). Schools that implement programs that utilize explicit teaching, regulated routines, and positive reinforcement increase desired behaviors, minimizing the need for exclusionary discipline (Gage et al., 2020; Meyer et al.,

2021). Repeated training opportunities for teachers to learn and execute evidence-based practices such as Functional Behavioral Assessments (FBAs) provide learners with alternative actions that promote positive behaviors while reducing educator bias and developing an accurate cause of the behavior with a solution that provides appropriate replacement behaviors (Enders et al., 2022). Using research-based methods, schools utilize these models to create universal change from the collected data (Armstrong, 2021).

### ***Restorative Practices***

Restorative Practices (RPs) promote collaboration and community among educators, administrators, parents, and stakeholders (Kervick et al., 2020). RPs are programs that evade traditional punishment methods and promote community support to build positive relationships and engagement using multi-tiered support systems (Gregory et al., 2022). In addition to using collaborative approaches to address the needs of students with disabilities, RPs incorporate prosocial approaches in educational programs (Walters, 2022). These approaches meet the specific needs of communities and use discussion techniques to find the root of recurring problems of concern within the school community (Edber, 2022). Exercises include using communication circles where educators, students, and community members discuss prosocial solutions to recurring problems (Gregory et al., 2022). RPs used consistently with other evidence-based practices, such as MTSS, aims to improve the behavioral outcomes for students with disabilities and promote positive behavioral approaches that will reduce the need for exclusionary discipline (Kervick et al., 2020). It is important to note that programs that involve RPs require implementation up to three years to determine if there is effectiveness in the program and its interventions (Gregory & Evans, 2020; Gregory et al., 2022).



Researchers have reported improved relationships within school climates due to implementing restorative practices (Gregory & Evans, 2020). Restorative practices also integrate tiered approaches toward building collaboration and community among students and other community and organization members (Schlesinger & Schmits-Earley, 2021). The challenges of implementing these programs with fidelity include structured time devoted to professional development and implanting RPs, with the support and buy-in required by administrators and educators (Smith et al., 2021). When implemented with fidelity, RPs evaluate the infraction's impact on others and identify how those affected can be supported (Gregory et al., 2022). Discussion circles involve community members, the individual who performed the infraction, and those impacted by the transgression (Edber, 2022). The purpose of the circle is to develop a sense of connectedness within the community and address all needs to identify the root of the conflict and prevent future harm.

Researchers have noted that RPs seek equal opportunities and build positive relationships among those in a community affected by harm (Gregory & Evans, 2020; Smith et al., 2021). Although some behaviors and infractions require discipline or intervention by authority, RPs promote accountability and collaboration between school and community members to promote positive conflict-resolution practices (Edber, 2022). Effective communication and collaboration improve stakeholders' abilities to make decisions and improve collaboration within an organization (Gregory & Evans, 2020).

### ***Outcomes of Schoolwide Programs***

The literature has shown that evidence-based programs decrease the number of disciplinary referrals and exclusionary discipline towards students with disabilities, providing sustainability of positive behaviors through ongoing positive behavior intervention programs

(Chitiyo et al., 2019; Hannigan & Hannigan, 2020; Simonsen et al., 2022). Tiered interventions result in positive outcomes when program coordinators provide detailed step-by-step procedures incorporating active participation by educators and students to ensure an equal balance of accountability for achievement (Melloy & Murry, 2019). The collaborative effort among students, parents, educators, and stakeholders in training and implementing programs such as Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) has reduced the prevalence of exclusionary discipline when professional development is subsidized and ongoing, and the behavioral outcomes of students with disabilities are monitored regularly (Robert, 2020).

Evidence-based programs (EBPs) and interventions rely on data collection procedures that inform schools and institutions on the efficacy and sustainability of tiered programs (Forman & Markson, 2022). EBPs aim to reduce or eliminate the need for restricted practices that include suspension, expulsion, and confinement for students with disabilities; however, positive behavior supports are not effective in reducing restrictive practices if they do not coincide with evidence-based practices supported by literature to improve behavioral outcomes for students with disabilities (Hayward et al., 2023). Ongoing professional development and collaborative opportunities increase the effectiveness of such programs (Kervick et al., 2020).

Rural and urban school districts implementing EBPs aim to improve behavioral outcomes and reduce exclusionary discipline for students with disabilities. Students with disabilities living in rural areas have scored lower on ELA and Mathematics standardized assessments and received higher rates of exclusionary discipline than students enrolled in urban schools (Gage et al., 2022). Theories reveal that schools in rural areas have fewer staff members and teachers, including limited resources, than in urban settings (MacSuga-Gage et al., 2022). Increased

opportunities for professional development training in EBPs are hypothesized to improve behavioral and academic outcomes for students with disabilities (Gage et al., 2022).

In addition to tiered interventions, an outline of school-wide goals and best practices policies can identify codes of conduct and essential steps toward proper disciplinary practices to ensure that exclusionary discipline is the last option for students with disabilities (O’Neill, 2019). The recommendation for such support extends to all students, but students with emotional and behavioral disorders receive the highest rate of exclusionary discipline when compared with students without disabilities or with other identified disabilities; therefore, school-wide programs that utilize a framework to support all learners and improve behavioral outcomes in the school setting (Fisher et al., 2021; Meyer et al., 2021). Tiered frameworks provide interventions and support for all students. However, more specifically, students requiring a greater need for individualized support are offered specialized instruction tailored to meet their unique needs (Nese et al., 2021; V. L. Walker et al., 2021).

Students with disabilities receive exclusionary discipline at a higher rate than their non-disabled peers. Schools that have chosen to implement PBIS with fidelity did not expel students with disabilities at a high rate when compared to other schools that did not track or monitor PBIS programs (Meyer et al., 2021; Simonsen et al., 2021, 2022). Developing and implementing programs that prevent unwanted behaviors through evidence-based practices aid in delivering positive outcomes for students with disabilities (Meyer et al., 2021). Essentially, schools that implement programs that utilize evidence-based practices and successfully improve students’ behavior and performance require implementing these practices across multiple disciplines rather than enforcing instruction in a particular domain (Kirkpatrick et al., 2019). Reportedly, students engaged with positive behavior support programs were referred to alternative programs for

discipline at a much lower rate than their non-disabled peers; however, the use of in-school suspensions remained, although at a lower rate (Grasley-Boy et al., 2019). It is still unknown if school districts' use of discipline reform plans produces long-term positive outcomes in reducing the number of SWDs receiving exclusionary discipline (Linick et al., 2021).

Furthermore, community and parent involvement increased because collaborative initiatives build rapport between parents and educational systems, promoting positive outlooks and retention of behavioral programs and support (Gregory et al., 2022; Kervick et al., 2020). Positive behavior programs and practices introduced and implemented at the elementary level aim to build support that extends to the community throughout the student's educational career (Kervick et al., 2020). Increased and continued professional development opportunities have been shown to increase teacher efficacy regarding using and implementing tiered interventions and support programs (Nichols et al., 2020). Educators who take on leadership roles influence positive outcomes for students and families (Kılınç et al., 2021).

### **Summary**

The literature review provided theoretical frameworks and information regarding the Organizational Support Theory (OST) to support how educators view and perceive an organization and identify factors contributing to employee behaviors (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Using OST, researchers' findings regarding the MDR review process, decision-making procedures, rate of exclusionary discipline practices for students with disabilities, and the use of evidence-based practices to support students and educators in promoting positive behaviors were outlined (Chitiyo et al., 2019; Corcoran & Edward Thomas, 2021; Simonsen et al., 2022). A gap in the literature exists regarding educators' knowledge of students' individualized education programs and their comfort level with participating and

advocating for students in an MDR. The organizational support theory was used to determine educators' views regarding their preparedness and knowledge of students.

With this information on organizational support, practitioners can guide administrators, educators, and other stakeholders regarding professional development needs and best practices to prepare teams to make informed and educated decisions regarding the individual needs of students with disabilities during an MDR (Allen, 2022; Hannigan & Hannigan, 2020; Nichols et al., 2020). Additional research is needed to improve educational systems and practices regarding educators' knowledge and roles in the manifestation determination review process. Furthermore, this research aims to contribute to the field of special education and narrow the literature gap surrounding the factors that influence the views and perceptions of educators as they make appropriate decisions regarding exclusionary outcomes for students with disabilities.

## **CHAPTER THREE: METHODS**

### **Overview**

The purpose of this intrinsic case study aimed to understand K-12 educators' understanding of their students' characteristics and disabilities while identifying their efficacy in implementing evidence-based practices (EBPs) to promote positive behaviors. Additionally, it aimed to discover how their knowledge and skills regarding working with students with disabilities (SWDs) and implementing EBPs shaped their perceptions when making decisions regarding exclusionary discipline in a Manifestation Determination Review (MDR). The following subsections describe the research design and the procedures for analysis. Furthermore, this chapter identifies research questions and describes the setting and participants. Transferability, dependability, and ethical considerations are outlined to obtain trustworthiness.

### **Research Design**

I chose a qualitative research method because qualitative inquiry in case study research involves a rigorous approach to develop a rich and deep understanding of a phenomenon from the perspectives of those who experience the posed question and investigation of a related theory (Creswell & Poth, 2018). According to Yin (2018), theory plays a vital role in a case study research design because it provides the researcher with a framework to identify critical issues within the investigation field while reducing bias through rival theories and identifiable data previously observed and verified. Thus, qualitative research focuses on a small number of individuals to create a distinct focus on specific data aligned with exploring the phenomenon, problem, or issue from detailed perspectives developed into themes and codes rather than a generalized account from large quantities of statistical data gathered from impersonal questionnaires or surveys (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Saldaña, 2021).

A single intrinsic case study with an embedded analysis was most appropriate for my research design because I wanted to include administrators, educators, and staff within a single school district to answer my research questions. The single-case design was appropriate because it linked the philosophy of organizational support theory to educators' involvement in their organization and during an MDR. Furthermore, a single case study provided insight into how administrators and other stakeholders supported educators in building their self-efficacy when executing decisions regarding exclusionary discipline and implementing evidence-based practices and programs to improve unwanted behaviors.

Yin (2018) asserted that a single case should "represent a significant contribution to knowledge and theory building by confirming, challenging, or extending the theory" (p. 49). Stake (2010) added that case studies contribute to research by creating an understanding of a case through the unique characteristics captured by individuals or groups through their unique lens. Once data was obtained, analyzed, and evaluated, I determined if these theories contributed to educators' views regarding their values and contributions within an organization. The identified subunits provided opportunities for further analysis and a clearer understanding of the single case (Yin, 2018).

### **Research Questions**

The purpose of this intrinsic case study was to understand K-12 educators' understanding of their students' characteristics and disabilities while identifying educators' efficacy in implementing evidence-based practices to promote positive behaviors. This intrinsic case study also aimed to discover how educators' knowledge and skills regarding their involvement with SWDs and implementing EBPs shaped their perceptions when making decisions regarding exclusionary discipline in a Manifestation Determination Review. The following research

questions were given in this study:

### **Central Research Question**

How do K-12 educators' perceptions regarding organizational support affect the decisions they make concerning exclusionary discipline for students with disabilities in a Manifestation Determination Review?

### **Sub-Question One**

How do K-12 educators utilize their perceived role within an organization to make decisions regarding exclusionary discipline for students with disabilities in a Manifestation Determination Review?

### **Sub-Question Two**

How do educators' perceptions of students with disabilities and their understanding regarding the characteristics of their disabilities affect the decisions they make concerning exclusionary discipline in a Manifestation Determination Review?

### **Sub-Question Three**

How do educators' perceptions regarding evidence-based practices impact their decisions regarding exclusionary discipline for students with disabilities in a Manifestation Determination Review?

## **Setting and Participants**

This embedded single case study was conducted at a rural Pre-K-12 school district in a southwestern county region. Fairmont is the pseudonym I used for this study's school district, buildings, and setting. The Fairmont School District (FSD) covered approximately 109 square miles in area and utilized elementary, middle, and high school buildings. FSD engaged in 21st-century learning initiatives and opportunities that utilize evidence-based practices from



kindergarten through twelfth grade. Additionally, students at the secondary level could participate in transitional workplace activities through their partnership with the local vocational technology center and the district's in-house vocational education programs.

### **Site**

FSD was responsible for educating approximately 1,797 students in the 2022-2023 school year and over 50% of the students were economically disadvantaged (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2024). The demographics for race and ethnicity during the 2022-2023 school year consisted of 93.4% White, 4.0% Mixed, 1.7% Black, 0.5% Hispanic, 0.3% Asian, and 0.1% American Indian/Alaskan Native students (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2024). The number of special education students in the 2022-2023 school year was 362, which was 20.1% of the total student population (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2023b). The leadership team at Fairmont School District consisted of one superintendent, one assistant superintendent, one director of special services, three assistant principals, and three principals. In the 2022-2023 school year, 68.8% of the students in the special education program at Fairmont participated 80% or more of the time in the regular education classroom (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2023b). This number was above the state's average of 61.6% (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2023b). There was a steady decline in out-of-school suspensions for all students in the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 school years; however, over the 2021-2022 school year, there was a 1.71% increase (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2023a). There was an increase of 2.25% from the 2021-2022 to the 2022-2023 school year (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2023a). In a statewide special education report in the 2021-2022 school year, 0.54% of students with special needs in the state were suspended or expelled for more than ten days (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2023b). The latest public report for FSD regarding

exclusionary discipline for the special education population reported in the 2019-2020 school year showed that less than 10 SWDs received suspension or expulsion (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2023b). An exact number was not provided in the state data report. Due to an increase of exclusionary discipline measures overall in the Fairmont School District, further investigation into the district's current policies and practices was needed to determine how educators in FSD make decisions regarding exclusionary discipline for SWDs in an MDR and how they utilize evidence-based practices to reduce behaviors that call for exclusionary discipline.

### **Participants**

The sample pool of participants in this study included school administrators, educators, and other contracted non-instructional staff in FSD who have participated in a Manifestation Determination Review at least once. A total of 16 participants volunteered for this study. Participants were categorized into three groups: non-instructional staff, regular and special education teachers, and administrators. Pseudonyms were used during the conduct and reporting of this study to ensure the participants' safety and confidentiality. Explanations of participants' demographics are provided in Chapter 4 of this study.

### **Recruitment Plan**

Following notification of approval to conduct this case study, an email was sent to prospective candidates for their approval to participate in the study (see Appendix C). Once I had received notification from volunteers who met the criteria for recruitment, the volunteers completed and returned the consent form (see Appendix D) that described their roles and rights in this case study. The sample pool included educators, administrators, and non-instructional

staff members. There were 16 participants, and those selected had participated in a Manifestation Determination Review at least once while employed in FSD.

Participants chosen for this case study were recruited using purposeful sampling. I recruited participants with the help and support of a gatekeeper knowledgeable of the FSD demographics (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Those involved experienced the proposed phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Once I established contact, I prioritized gaining the trust and rapport of participants to ensure that they felt safe and comfortable engaging freely with me during all interactions (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

### **Researcher's Positionality**

This qualitative single case study was based on my interest in understanding educators' role in the decision-making process during Manifestation Determination Reviews for students with disabilities. I aimed to provide researchers, educators, and school districts with valuable information that not only can improve positive behavioral outcomes for students with disabilities but also support these organizations in evaluating their programs and implementing best practices to meet the needs of the students and the organization. Based on my experiences as a special education teacher over the past 15 years, I have participated in MDRs and made decisions and judgments in my organization. After examining my self-efficacy and experiences in making decisions for students with disabilities in the MDR process, I can contribute to closing the research gap surrounding this issue.

### **Interpretive Framework**

The framework chosen for this topic included social constructivism. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), social constructivists “seek understanding of the world in which they live and work” (p. 24). Through multiple opportunities for participants to provide open-ended

responses, I interpreted the meaning of their unpredicted responses utilizing active listening and adaptive techniques, procedures, and strategies to maintain focus and rigor during individual and focus group interviews (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018).

### **Philosophical Assumptions**

As researchers identify a problem and formulate questions to ascend the research process, they choose a philosophical assumption that supports how they gather information and solve problems configured from their assumptions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Incorporating philosophical assumptions in case study research aided in presenting the various aspects and representations from the participants involved to craft a detailed picture that presents reality using various data collection methods to gather evidence and identify themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The three essential philosophical assumptions addressed in this case study include ontological, epistemological, and axiological.

#### ***Ontological Assumption***

The perspectives obtained in the social constructivist approach aligned with the approach that reality is gathered from many angles and forms and developed into identifiable themes through the responses and perceptions obtained by the researcher (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The themes emerged from the perceptions obtained to aid in answering the research questions posed in this study. Each participant's contribution to the study provided insight into the reality level (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I believe that the responses offered by the participants provided me with the information I needed to construct meaningful themes that will benefit organizations in addressing professional development needs regarding understanding students with disabilities and the characteristics of their disabilities. It also provided an opportunity to identify how organizations support staff in making their voices heard when deciding on exclusionary

discipline for students with disabilities.

### ***Epistemological Assumption***

Researchers aim to reach their participants on a close and personal level to understand their experiences from a subjective point of view (Creswell & Poth, 2018). My position was to meet participants at their level and provide them with an environment rooted in respect, rapport, and unbiased views and opinions. Eliminating bias and reporting rival theories support the researcher in meeting the expectations set forth to obtain quality research that utilizes ethical standards with fidelity (Yin, 2018). Engaging with participants in their familiar environment for an extended period provided clear insight into their perspectives and gained trust and understanding between the participants and the researcher (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

### ***Axiological Assumption***

The researcher identifies and addresses the views and biases that emerge in research to fulfill the components of the approach that the axiological assumption addresses in qualitative research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Collaboration and communication with students, parents, and co-workers helped shape my views and opinions based on 15 years of experience in the education field. My established views were obtained through demonstrations and practices observed as a special education teacher within the educational setting. Therefore, to meet the expectations of ethical practices and transparency throughout this case study, biases were identified and addressed to achieve credibility and reliability (Yin, 2018).

### **Researcher's Role**

Creswell and Poth (2018) posited that researchers develop a case study to benefit the participants while protecting them from harm. Credibility is accomplished by carefully considering ethical issues, mitigating any bias that may emerge, incorporating validation efforts

and strategies with the participants, and delivering honest and trustworthy findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018). As an educator and student, I often employ these characteristics through my practices and pedagogy in the educational setting. Although I seek to meet high standards at every level and opportunity, I strive to grow further as an accomplished educator and realize the goals and expectations set by leaders in the qualitative research field. At the onset and throughout this case study, I was removed from the educational setting through a sabbatical leave granted by my employer. Even though I did not have a professional connection at that time to the participants in the study, I had background knowledge of the demographics of the school district selected for this case study. Ethical issues did not develop because I only had outside connections and correspondence with the participants in this case study.

### **Procedures**

This single-embedded case study employed seven steps. First, I obtained approval from the institutional review board (IRB) through Liberty University (See Appendix A). Next, I gained approval prior to IRB approval from Fairmont School District and then written and verbal approval to conduct the study at the FSD site (See Appendix B). When I gained access to the site and approval from all parties, I began the data collection process (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

In the fourth step, I emailed prospective participants and described the study and their possible roles in a recruitment letter (see Appendix C). In addition to this information, I included a consent form that outlined this information and confirmed the protection of their identities while involved in this case study (see Appendix D). Furthermore, participants understood that they could leave the study without repercussions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The fifth step involved virtual or face-to-face interviews with individual participants. The participants were recorded using two recording devices, and the virtual recordings also utilized an audio recording

as a backup device for assurance. Audio and video recordings were initially transcribed utilizing an AI transcription program. I then reviewed the transcriptions for accuracy. Once transcriptions were reviewed for accuracy, participants were emailed a copy of their transcription for review and approval. Participants were given the opportunity to correspond with the researcher during this process.

For the sixth step, I employed focus group interviews with 3-6 participants in each group. One focus group contained administrators, while the other included educators and service providers. All participants were employed in the district and participated in an MDR. A consent form was distributed to the participants, signed, and received before conducting focus group interviews (see Appendix D). A copy of signed consent forms were distributed to each participant. An audio recording was utilized as a data collection procedure. Data collected in the audio recordings were transcribed similarly to the individual interviews. Incorporating pseudonyms and protecting participants' privacy through aliases were paramount (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Participants had the opportunity to review transcripts for accuracy.

The final step in collecting data included a thorough review and examination of the responses in protocol writing provided by educators. Educators wrote or typed their open-ended responses to three posited questions. The questions related to educators' experience making decisions on exclusionary discipline in an MDR. These responses were incorporated into the coding process. The information gathered from these codes was included in the findings.

### **Data Collection Plan**

Data was collected through multiple means to ensure that triangulation occurred. Triangulation occurred through empirical evidence collected using interviews, focus groups, and protocol writing. This method is considered the best practice for creating a high-quality, ethical,

reliable research design (Carter et al., 2014; Creswell & Poth, 2028; Yin, 2018). Triangulation supports the researcher in gaining a clearer understanding of a phenomenon (Carter et al., 2014). One of the most effective methods to produce in-depth results includes interviews. Interviews were essential in understanding educators' views regarding their roles and feelings toward their preparedness during an MDR. Furthermore, interviews provided me with detailed information on the experiences educators have implementing positive behavior supports and their confidence levels when making educated decisions using background knowledge of students and disabilities to determine if exclusionary discipline is needed following an MDR.

Focus groups were the second data collection method I employed. I used focus groups with educators, administrators, and staff members to provide an additional platform to speak openly about their experiences implementing positive behavior supports and how their knowledge compares to one another to determine if they have standard views or shared experiences (Yin, 2018). Additionally, focus groups provided me with insightful information regarding educators' background knowledge of the characteristics of disabilities and students with those disabilities. I aimed to find answers related to educators' experience with the MDR process and how their experiences influenced their decision-making patterns and views regarding their roles.

Finally, this study used documentation that included educators' open-ended reflections on their feelings and experiences in making decisions regarding exclusionary discipline for SWDs in an MDR. Protocol questions documented participants' reflections. Protocol questions allowed the participants to think of their own experiences and provide rich and detailed descriptions. Documents also helped the researcher identify essential details related to the topics of interest or concern (Yin, 2018).



## **Individual Interviews**

Participants included 16 administrators, teachers, and non-instructional staff members who have participated and made decisions regarding exclusionary discipline for students with disabilities. Yin (2018) suggested that interviewers conduct their interviews using a “guided conversation rather than structured queries” (p.118). Thus, I employed semi-structured interviews using open-ended questions. The questions I used were reviewed by experts in the field and remained pertinent, unbiased, and non-threatening to the participant. Furthermore, I began the interview by using background questions to build a rapport with the participants, creating an environment that provided them with comfort from the start to feel compelled to answer questions freely (Hatch, 2023).

I conducted my interviews face-to-face unless the participant chose to engage in the interview via a web-based application. A description of how each question related to the proposed research questions, theoretical framework, or reviewed literature was provided following the list of research questions. Before administering the interview questions to participants, questions received IRB approval. All interviews were recorded using at least two methods (Yin, 2018). The following questions were implemented during the individual interviews:

### **Table 1**

#### *Individual Interview Questions*

1. How many years have you been employed as a \_\_\_\_ in this school district? IBQ
2. How many times have you been involved in a Manifestation Determination Review meeting? IBQ
3. What is your background in working with students with disabilities? CRQ

4. What types of training or professional development opportunities are offered in the district to provide information regarding students with disabilities and the characteristics of their disabilities? SQ1
5. How closely do you work with special education teachers to review plans for students with disabilities? SQ1
6. How have you been involved in the evaluation process or behavior plans for students with disabilities? SQ2
7. What benefits have you observed and experienced collaborating with educators and other stakeholders regarding best practices to support students? CRQ
8. What kind of training would you find beneficial to best support students with disabilities in your current role? SQ2
9. How could you better be supported in understanding the needs and characteristics of students with disabilities? SQ1
10. How do you advocate for students with disabilities when it comes to managing their behaviors and enforcing discipline? SQ3
11. To your knowledge, how are students with disabilities disciplined in your school/district? SQ1
12. Why do you feel you were recruited to participate in the MDR meeting? CRQ
13. How did you lend your knowledge and experience with the student(s) to support the determination of the outcome concerning the need for exclusionary discipline? CRQ
14. How does your school prepare you for the meeting? CRQ

15. What guidance was offered to support you in understanding the regulations and procedures for your role as a participant in a Manifestation Determination Review?  
SQ3
16. In what ways do you feel your organization could better support you in making decisions regarding discipline for students with disabilities? SQ3
17. How qualified do you feel you are in making decisions on the need for exclusionary discipline for students with disabilities? SQ3
18. How do you contribute to implementing positive behavior evidence-based practices for students with disabilities? SQ2
19. How often do you provide these supports? SQ2
20. How effective do you feel your school's approach to implementing positive behavioral supports and programs have been? SQ2
21. How is progress monitored for students with special needs who participate in positive behavior support programs or plans? SQ2
22. What additional training/education do you feel is necessary to implement evidence-based positive behavior support programs with fidelity? SQ2
23. How does your organization support educators in implementing programs/strategies to promote positive behaviors? SQ2

Morgan (1997) explained that the icebreaker questions help set the tone for the rest of the interview. Questions one and two were asked to participants to build comfort and rapport as icebreaker questions at the beginning of the conversation. Once rapport was established, questions three through eight allowed interviewees to express their views regarding the

opportunities provided in professional development and collaboration to understand the current conditions regarding training and education for educators within the organization.

Question nine gauged participants' views on their organizational role. I used the information from this question to identify if their experiences align with the claims presented in Organizational Support Theory (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Questions 10 through 16 were presented to understand how the individuals were recruited to participate in a Manifestation Determination Review and the current conditions involving how meetings are planned and organized. Question 17 was posed to grasp the participants' self-efficacy and views on how their organization could support them in making informed decisions during an MDR.

Questions 18 through 23 were implemented to identify participants' roles and engagement with positive behavior supports. Furthermore, they were used to engage the participants in providing their views and suggestions of how their organization could improve current conditions or maintain the status quo. Their views regarding their organizational roles were used to support or negate the Organizational Support Theory (Eisenberger et al., 1986).

### **Focus Groups**

Focus groups was the second approach I used to collect data. According to Leavy (2020), the data gleaned from focus groups contributes to filling any missing gaps that arise through other methods. Since the nature of focus groups is to engage socially, they can often be used to reduce apparent conflicts when comparing single interviews. Focus groups promote triangulation by utilizing multiple data sources, providing an opportunity to gain substantial data in a short time (Hatch, 2023). My goal was to understand the participants' experiences from their unique roles within the organization.

I used three focus groups. The first focus group consisted of 4 administrators. The second

and third focus groups contained four to seven educators and staff who have participated in an MDR and made decisions regarding exclusionary discipline for students with disabilities. Open-ended questions were presented to multiple participants, along with information provided to them regarding their roles in the study. A consent form was distributed that addressed the purpose and the protections afforded to voluntary participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Online focus groups were offered to keep participants' identification private. To support participants' privacy, pseudonyms and aliases replaced names and protect identities. The information documented protected the participants from harm (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The following questions were presented to each focus group following the data I will obtain from the individual interviews prior to conducting the focus groups.

**Table 2***Focus Group Questions*

1. What professional development opportunities were provided to educators prior to the implementation of evidence-based positive behavior support programs and supports? SQ2
2. What are the expectations surrounding how often positive behavior support programs are offered and monitored in this school district? SQ2
3. How are programs and supports implemented with fidelity? SQ2
4. What professional development opportunities are provided to staff to inform them of the characteristics of students and their disabilities, and what possible behaviors may arise because of their disabilities? SQ1
5. What exclusionary discipline measures are enforced schoolwide/districtwide for students with disabilities? CRQ

6. How are the members assembled to participate in a Manifestation Determination Review? CRQ
7. What are the roles of each member in an MDR? CRQ
8. How are guidelines and procedures carried out during each MDR? SQ3
9. What information is reviewed during the MDR regarding the student? SQ1
10. Who would you consider to be essential members that must be present at an MDR, and are these members always present? CRQ
11. What factors may hinder the decision-making process when determining if exclusionary discipline is required for a student with a disability during an MDR? SQ3
12. How would you describe your confidence and ability levels in your role as a member of the MDR team to effectively make decisions regarding exclusionary discipline for students with disabilities? SQ3

The first question in the focus group acted as a "discussion starter" question (Morgan, 1997, p.50). Questions two through three built an understanding of the current programs and strategies the educators use and implement regarding positive behavioral supports to prevent unwanted behaviors by students with disabilities. The participants' experiences and views provided insight into how they effectively or ineffectively implement positive behavior programs and support for students with disabilities. Suppose educators needed adequate preparation and education to implement such programs. In that case, the Theory of Planned Behavior addressed that employees' views of their worth motivate them to perform a certain way (Ajzen, 1991). I aimed to understand how their views reflect their overall performance when tasked to implement programs that promote positive behaviors.

Questions four through ten were framed to seek information from the participants regarding their knowledge of the procedures regarding a Manifestation Determination Review and their background knowledge of the characteristics of their students and how that influences their decision-making. Questions 11 and 12 involve educators' confidence levels in their performance and how the organization supported educators in making exclusionary discipline decisions for students with disabilities. I intended to create a thoughtful conversation among the professionals that encouraged them to express their views on their confidence as decision-makers and how valued they felt by the organization to make such important decisions.

### **Protocol Writing**

The third and final type of data collection I used involved protocol writing through open-ended responses to three questions. Participants' responses were gathered on sight or through electronic mail. Documents that provide information regarding teachers' experiences implementing EBPs and making decisions regarding exclusionary discipline for SWDs provided a clear picture of how decisions were made within an organization (Yin, 2018). Thus, educators' reflections on implementing evidence-based practices that utilized positive behavioral supports to reduce problematic behaviors were analyzed. Furthermore, educators' knowledge of students and their disabilities validated the data reported through the information received in interviews and focus groups. The documents I reviewed helped me identify essential details that were related to the topics of interest or concern. Finally, participants' anonymity was protected, and I used pseudonyms and aliases to protect their identities to ensure that I followed ethical standards with fidelity (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Participants were allowed to complete an open-ended response via paper/pencil or electronically. The writing prompt consisted of three questions that asked the participants to

express their knowledge and views regarding their experiences working with students with disabilities, implementing positive behavioral supports to prevent unwanted behaviors, and making decisions regarding exclusionary discipline for SWDS in an MDR when unwanted behaviors manifested. The recommendation was made to participants to respond in 150-200 words in total. Their responses and feedback were based on the following open-ended questions:

### **Table 3**

#### *Protocol Writing Questions*

1. What challenges are presented when disciplining a student with special needs?
2. Describe your involvement in an MDR and explain how your knowledge of evidence-based practices, the student, and his or her disability affect how you make decisions in an MDR.
3. What resources or training would support your confidence in making decisions regarding exclusionary discipline for SWDs in an educational setting?

### **Data Analysis**

To understand how and why educators made decisions regarding exclusionary discipline for students with disabilities during an MDR, I utilized In Vivo Coding as the first order of coding that incorporated actual words and responses of the participants broken down line by line (Saldaña, 2021). A pre-coding technique occurred that separated subject matter and units into noticeable breaks when a subject matter or topic changed. Saldaña (2021) described that a researcher should identify these words or phrases using various techniques, including bolding, circling, or highlighting meaningful words. In addition to audio recording participants' responses using two methods, I also reviewed notes and memos taken during the interview (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).



Following In Vivo Coding, I incorporated pattern coding in my data analysis for individual interviews in this case study. Pattern coding assisted me in organizing summaries obtained from the notes and codes in the summaries of the transcripts into smaller systems of themes (Saldaña, 2021). This procedure aided in identifying the criteria that explained the research questions posed (Yin, 2018). I utilized a coding system that displayed identifiable patterns and possible threats to validity to organize the descriptions and data gleaned through the responses provided by individual interviews. Next, the transcribed interviews were analyzed to identify descriptive words that formulated meaningful themes generated from the experiences described by the participants (Saldaña, 2021). Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that researchers immediately review notes and transcribe interviews into a first draft. This draft requires careful review for accuracy, and errors were corrected through member checking to ensure that triangulation occurred.

Visual displays can support a researcher in organizing and developing themes from the data obtained through the responses gleaned from participants during focus groups (Saldaña, 2021; Yin, 2018). The visual display identified the differences and similarities that occur in the case (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Furthermore, focus groups examined theoretical propositions (Yin, 2018). In Vivo and pattern coding were also used during coding phases to obtain themes that enhanced explanation building, centered on comparing data obtained with theoretical assumptions, and thus contributed the information learned from this single case study to future multiple case studies (Saldaña, 2021; Yin, 2018).

Memos were essential in organizing and coding information from the documents reviewed (Yin, 2018). Yin (2018) postulated that adding additional ways to gather information from individual participants helps confirm if their views are consistent with their previous

responses. In Vivo coding was utilized to develop codes on participants' actual words (Saldaña, 2021). Data interpretation can be reviewed and coded from original documents and reread for validation and verification using computer or technology-based programs for qualitative research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Direct interpretations were realized by pulling apart the written response from the participant and assembling it again to find meaning in the interpretation, placing the meaning of these individual interpretations into a data table, and developing themes. The experiences of the individuals were explored, and evidence of theories or claims were identified using their written responses (Billups, 2021). This data was examined and interpreted. I used these written protocol questions to accurately compare the results to theoretical propositions while avoiding any biases interfering with validating the results.

Yin (2018) concluded that influential researchers must interpret data through an organized system that identifies codes, patterns, and themes. I synthesized previously analyzed data by using coding strategies, including organizing the data, marginal notes, detailed descriptions of the case, and identifying the presence of categorical aggregation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Leavy (2020) suggested that researchers employ insight through a human lens using feelings and emotions, organization of data for quick access and in-depth analysis, use prioritization to sort data, analyze data to construct meaning, identify patterns from the data assembled, and coding strategies from transcriptions and artifacts obtained. Through a thorough investigation, analysis, and synthesis of the data obtained, I contributed to closing the gap in the literature surrounding the need for additional research on educators' roles during a Manifestation Determination Review and how they implemented positive behavioral supports and strategies using Organizational Support Theory (Eisenberger et al., 1986).

## **Trustworthiness**

Yin (2018) discussed the criteria required to ensure that the researcher realizes quality by carefully implementing strategies through tests that produce reliability, external validity, internal validity, and construct validity. My single-case study described my steps and strategies to obtain trustworthiness, including the procedures outlined in Yin (2018) and Lincoln and Guba (1985). The procedures followed in this qualitative research design included credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. I employed procedures outlined in Creswell and Poth (2018) and utilized effective research techniques, including engagement, validation, collaboration, and self-assessment.

### **Credibility**

The credibility techniques employed included triangulation and member checking (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Stake, 2010). Triangulation is a reasonable practice because it incorporates information gathered from multiple data sources and, therefore, incorporates the aspects of construct validity (Yin, 2018). Triangulation used three data sources to build thorough and abundant descriptions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Additionally, Creswell and Poth (2018) included how extended engagement periods in the research field add credibility to qualitative research designs. Additionally, I built credibility in the research by describing my experience and verifying my findings with the participants.

The second credibility technique I utilized included member checking. Lincoln and Guba (1985) asserted that this is an essential step employed prior to finalizing qualitative research to ensure that the information presented is credible. I provided my participants with transcripts and information on the data I gathered and requested that they review the data collection and my description of interpretations to confirm whether the information presented was accurate.

**Transferability**

I intended to report information containing “thick” descriptions with embedded units (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I provided rich detail and applied it to other appropriate and applicable situations that assist researchers in answering questions like my own and relating them to their propositions (Shenton, 2004). Lincoln and Guba (1985) contended that the researcher could provide details regarding the situation. It is up to future researchers to determine if the information gleaned from this case study can apply to other situations. The detailed descriptions provided in the case study will determine this decision.

**Dependability**

Creswell and Poth (2018) asserted that the auditing stage in a research study establishes dependability. My research chair, committee member, and director of qualitative research conducted an inquiry audit (see Appendix H). Through an auditing process, a procedure of checks and balances occurred and thus produced stability and assurance in the quality of the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I clarified in Chapter 5 how my study could be replicated in another case study that includes participants, characteristics, and data collection procedures. Clarification and prudence increased reliability since I limited the possibility of errors and biases that may arise (Yin, 2018). Additionally, explicit descriptions of the following procedures ensured dependability and set the stage for the delivery of a repeated study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

**Confirmability**

To meet the reliability standards and criteria outlined in Yin (2018), confirmation of the efficacy in a case study included the development of a database that was used to analyze data sources and was checked with an auditor to ensure that procedures were precise and followed

with fidelity. The precision and definitiveness of the responses gathered from the participants used reflective techniques garnered from Lincoln and Guba (1985). A reflexivity journal collected memos and reflections. I evaluated my views and biases by reviewing and reflecting on the information gleaned through interviews, focus groups, and analysis of documents and artifacts. I recorded information that accurately reflected the views and opinions of the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Furthermore, my research answered the *"how"* and *"why"* questions proposed at the origin of the research study (Yin, 2018).

### **Ethical Considerations**

In qualitative research, adherence to ethical standards and considerations maintains positive efficacy and validity in the procedures and design (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018). I created a rapport with participants and provided them with essential information regarding their purpose within the study and assurance of confidentiality and protection from harm by using pseudonyms and alternative locations for interviews and focus groups (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I evaluated the proposed site and any possible risks. There were no power differentials between the prospective participants and me, avoiding any possible conflicts of interest. I gained IRB approval before I collected data.

### ***Permissions***

This study's participants were volunteers and were recruited using letters of consent (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018). I received permission to access the acquired site before engaging in interviews and focus groups. Before data was collected, permission was obtained from Liberty IRB and Fairmont School District (see Appendix A). Recruiting participants did not occur until permission was granted from the school district and Liberty University's IRB. To solidify the site and conduct the case study, conversations with the school district were

conducted to gauge FSD's availability and interest in the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

### ***Other Participant Protections***

I protected the recording devices and information gathered from interviews and documents in a secure, locked location. Sensitive information stored on computers and recording devices was protected using passwords. Participants received information discussing that the protected data would remain for three years before deletion (see Appendix D). Although the researcher utilized pseudonyms, confidentiality could not be guaranteed following focus groups, as participants could release information on the statements made by other participants; however, the researcher would not discuss or release identifiable information regarding the participants (see Appendix D). Furthermore, if the participants chose to withdraw from the study, their data regarding individual interviews and protocol writing responses would be destroyed. Additionally, their contributions to the focus group would not be included in the study (see Appendix D).

### **Summary**

This embedded single case study aimed to describe how educators view themselves as valued members of their organization. These views explained how educators defined their role in the organization and made decisions regarding exclusionary discipline for students with disabilities. The responses gained regarding educators' self-efficacy and preparedness to make decisions provided the researcher with an understanding of how educators can best be supported to implement evidence-based practices to limit problematic behaviors that result in exclusionary discipline for this population of learners. The data collection procedures provided in Chapter Three, along with descriptions and procedures of analysis of the recommendations outlined in Yin (2018) for case study research, provided a clear understanding of the relevance and importance of this study. This chapter concluded with information that supports trustworthiness

by presenting ethical considerations that sustain credibility and reliability. Furthermore, the outlined transferability, confirmability, and dependability sections affirmed adherence to ethical reporting of qualitative inquiry. The findings and analyses presented in Chapter Four fully describe the results of the case study.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS**

### **Overview**

The purpose of this intrinsic case study was to understand K-12 educators' knowledge of their students' characteristics and disabilities while identifying their efficacy in implementing evidence-based practices (EBPs) to promote positive behaviors. Additionally, the study aimed to discover how their knowledge and skills regarding working with students with disabilities (SWDs) and implementing EBPs shaped their perceptions when making decisions regarding exclusionary discipline in a Manifestation Determination Review (MDR). The problem is that K-12 educators make decisions regarding exclusionary discipline for students with disabilities without sufficient background knowledge of the characteristics of disabilities and a clear understanding of how students' disabilities can affect behavior (Fisher et al., 2021; Hurwitz et al., 2021; Reed et al., 2020; J. D. Walker & Brigham, 2017). This chapter will provide information regarding the participants, themes, subthemes, discovered outliers, answers to the research questions, and a summary of the findings.

### **Participants**

Pseudonyms protected participants' identities in place of actual names, including a pseudonym for the name of the school district. Additionally, I referred to a professional development program offered by the district described by the participants with an alternative title. Participants' roles in this study included administrators, regular education teachers, special education teachers, and non-instructional staff, including medical and counseling staff. All participants indicated that they had participated in an MDR at least once. There were four male and 12 female participants, and the experience level of participants ranged from 1-31 years. Although all participants in the study were White, the educators' roles, years of service, and



number of participated MDRs revealed the diversity of educators' experiences. Triangulation, a credible and reliable practice, was used to collect data (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Stake, 2010; Yin, 2018).

### **Allie**

Allie had been an FSD administrator for 10 years and participated in approximately 5-10 MDRs throughout her 20-year tenure. She explained that her background working with SWDs included training as an educator in a teaching role and her role as an administrator.

### **Avery**

Avery's initial experience working in FSD was as a general educator, but at the time of interviews, she served students in the district in a non-instructional role. She had worked in FSD for 12 years and had participated in less than 5 MDRs.

### **Candace**

Candace was a special education teacher in the district and taught there for 25 years. She expressed that she had extensive training and experience working with SWDs in her many roles as a special education teacher. At the time of this study, Candace had worked in other buildings in the district. Candace stated she had participated in less than 5 MDRs throughout her career.

### **Drew**

Drew was an FSD administrator for 3 years and had participated in approximately 5-8 MDRs. He had experience working with SWDs in other settings outside of FSD, in administrative and faculty roles.

**Evelyn**

Evelyn was a special education teacher who taught in the district for 12 years. She had participated in at least 3 MDRs. Her background in working with SWDs included experience at the elementary and secondary levels through learning and emotional support roles.

**Felicia**

Felicia had been employed as an educator in FSD for 30 years. She had experience working with SWDs through her roles as a regular education teacher and special education teacher, and she participated in 8 MDRs as a special education teacher.

**George**

George taught in FSD for 21 years at the secondary level throughout his career. George participated in approximately 12 MDRs and had experience working with SWDs in the general education setting through inclusion.

**Grace**

Grace was an administrator in FSD for 5 years. She had experience working with SWDs in past roles as an educator in other districts. Grace had extensive experience in Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (PBIS). Additionally, she had participated in approximately 7 MDRs.

**Hailey**

Hailey had served in FSD as a regular education teacher for 15 years. She participated in three MDRs. Her experience working with SWDs included time co-teaching with a special educator in an inclusion classroom.

**Isabel**

Isabel worked as a special education teacher in FSD for 6 years, with 14 years of experience. She gained experience working with SWDs at the elementary and secondary levels. Isabel participated in at least 3 MDRs at FSD and held leadership roles.

**Jordon**

Jordon had been employed at FSD for 1 year and participated in 3 MDRs. He worked in a non-instructional role and collaborated with SWDs and teachers daily. His experience working with SWDs stemmed from work experiences before his employment at FSD.

**Marcus**

Marcus had been employed in FSD for 31 years as a regular education teacher and administrator. He was an administrator at the time of this study. He participated in approximately 5 to 10 MDRs. He had experience working with SWDs in an inclusion classroom.

**Marissa**

Marissa had been a general education teacher in FSD for 16 years. She participated in 1 MDR and had experience working with SWDs in the inclusion classroom. She had collaborated with special education teachers and followed behavior plans in her position.

**Mia**

Mia had been a special education teacher in FSD for over 2 years. She had 15 years of experience overall as an educator, including having extensive experience working with SWDs, ranging from students with emotional disturbance, Autism, multiple disabilities, and learning disabilities. She participated in 1 MDR.

## Nora

Nora had been employed in FSD for 17 years but had over 30 years of work experience. She participated in approximately 2 MDRs. Nora served in a non-instructional role in the district and collaborated with SWDs, educators, and administrators daily. She worked with educators in a consultative and expert role.

## Sophia

Sophia had served in FSD as a regular education teacher for 4 years. She participated in 1 MDR but had instructed SWDs in her classroom for a longer time. She collaborated with special education teachers regularly to support students and implement specially designed instruction outlined in their educational plans.

**Table 4**

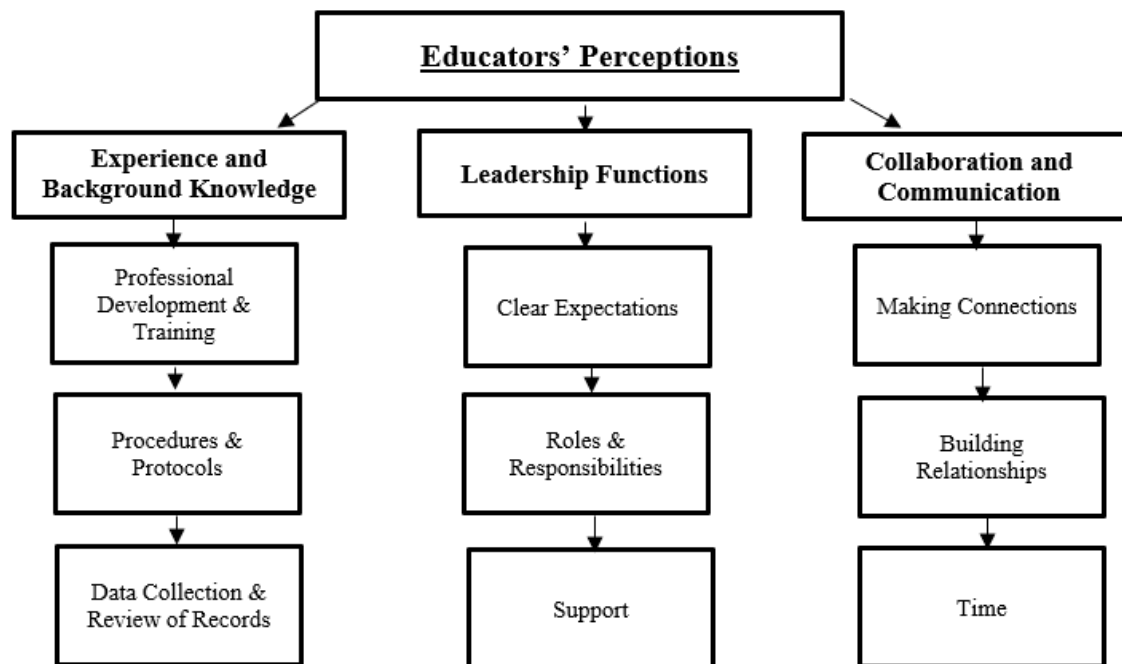
### *Participants*

Participant	Years of Service in Fairmont School District	Range of Number of Participated MDR Meetings	Educational Role	Mode of Participation
Allie	10	5-10	Administrator	Interview, Focus Group, Protocol Writing
Avery	12	1-5	Non-Instructional Staff	Interview, Focus Group, Protocol Writing
Candace	25	1-5	Special Education Teacher	Interview, Protocol Writing
Drew	3	5-10	Administrator	Interview, Focus Group, Protocol Writing
Evelyn	12	1-5	Special Education Teacher	Interview, Focus Group, Protocol Writing
Felicia	30	5-10	Special Education Teacher	Interview, Focus Group, Protocol Writing

George	21	10-15	Regular Education Teacher	Interview, Focus Group, Protocol Writing
Grace	5	5-10	Administrator	Interview, Focus Group, Protocol Writing
Hailey	15	1-5	Regular Education Teacher	Interview, Focus Group, Protocol Writing
Isabel	6	1-5	Special Education Teacher	Interview, Focus Group, Protocol Writing
Jordon	1	1-5	Non-Instructional Staff	Interview, Focus Group, Protocol Writing
Marcus	31	5-10	Administrator	Interview, Focus Group, Protocol Writing
Marissa	16	1-5	Regular Education Teacher	Interview, Protocol Writing
Mia	3	1-5	Special Education Teacher	Interview, Focus Group, Protocol Writing
Nora	17	1-5	Non-Instructional Staff	Interview
Sophia	4	1-5	Regular Education Teacher	Interview, Focus Group, Protocol Writing

## Results

The themes in the following section are presented into central themes and subthemes. The subthemes were developed following careful analysis and synthesis of the individual interviews, focus groups, and protocol writing samples. The data is presented via a figure followed by a narrative explanation of the results.

**Figure 1***Themes & Subthemes***Experience and Background Knowledge**

The amount of background knowledge educators had regarding a student with a disability, their knowledge of the MDR process, and how to implement evidence-based practices were based on the educator's experience and, often, their level of education. Educators' experiences in the field and their knowledge of the students' disabilities and diverse backgrounds aided the decision-making process. Candace added how teachers, regarded as "experts" in their roles, provided input on implementing evidence-based practices. "We kind of coordinate it and then share it with the other teachers because we're considered experts," Candace stated. Further, educators utilized their knowledge of their role to consult colleagues from their involvement with the student. "If I'm brought in and I am consulted by the teacher, often, you know, I might sit with a teacher and I might be able to give some examples of things that have worked in the past

with other students,” explained Nora. Based on their comments in interviews and focus groups, educators expressed appreciation and gratitude for colleagues’ knowledge and the information relayed from their expert opinions. The revelation that educators considered one another experts added to the primary theme and supported how opportunities for experience and building background knowledge increased educators’ confidence when making decisions. In-vivo coding revealed that five participants stated “expert” 16 times in individual interview transcripts.

The perceptions regarding educators’ ability to make decisions concerning exclusionary discipline in an MDR varied. Educators remarked that they felt comfortable with the MDR process, making decisions based on their past and repeated experiences in an MDR. The participants described various experiences and backgrounds working with students with disabilities. Participants who were regularly involved in the inclusive classroom expressed comfort and confidence in identifying the needs and triggers of SWDs. Special education teachers’ roles and responsibilities have transitioned over the years, and inclusion has influenced how regular education teachers learn how to teach and interact with students with special needs. “I will say that the teachers that I teach with that have taught learning support have taught me a lot about teaching learning support students,” noted Hailey. Repeated exposure to SWDs and pedagogical practices modeled by special education teachers influenced general educators’ instructional and behavioral management decisions. The codes *growth*, *qualified*, *knowledge*, and *experience* were used throughout participants’ individual interviews, focus groups, and protocol writing responses, adding to the formulation of the theme *Experience and Background Knowledge*. These codes appeared 330 times from the individual interviews, focus groups, and protocol writing transcripts, with each participant identifying the code *experience* in his or her interview transcript.

### *Professional Development and Training*

Case-by-case scenarios for professional development were expressed as a need by participants. Jordon explained, “I always think that the more we learn about the disability, understanding what ID is or what ADHD is, or what Other Health Impairment is, because the more we understand it, the more we understand the struggles and we could better prepare for some of the behaviors that come along with it.” Additionally, administrators Drew, Marcus, and Grace mentioned the importance of reading and reviewing special education law and literature as a tool when making decisions regarding exclusionary discipline for students with disabilities.

Participants described the challenges of participating in mandated professional development training that focused on reviewing characteristics of students with disabilities that contained vague descriptions of typical behaviors. For example, Grace reported, “I think the biggest issue that comes into play when training teachers, staff, and even administrators on students with disabilities is that it is so incredibly individualized. You can provide me with a training, but you can’t tell me how to deal with ‘Johnny’ on Tuesday.” Other participants shared this sentiment and described that professional development topics should be relatable to situations usable in the daily routine of educators who experience situations requiring background knowledge and problem-solving skills. Avery said, “I think going back to understanding the disabilities better. And then maybe even before certain things come up, like as part of that training. What would happen if that student did get themselves in trouble? What does that look like?” Educators did not express a lack of professional development training offered to faculty and staff; instead, their views showcased how vital intentional training is when identifying the needs for SWDs and strategies needed to realize success.



Based on the responses provided by the participants in their individual interviews, focus groups, and protocol writing responses, first-order coding produced the codes *behavior-based*, *activities*, *hypothetical*, *review*, *accommodations/adaptations*, *refresher*, and *learn*, which occurred throughout all data collection methods. These codes were aggregated to formulate the codes *scenario*, *education*, and *training* to form the sub-theme of *Professional Development and Training*, which occurred 202 times from the transcripts of all three methods of data collection.

### ***Procedures and Protocols***

Fairmont School District (FSD) followed the rules and regulations the district's school board outlined in its board policies. When it came to administering exclusionary discipline, participants indicated they follow "black and white" policies to the letter; however, all participants agreed that it is not always easy to see every disciplinary situation as "black and white" when students with disabilities have specific challenges that require educators to look at the students, their disabilities, and the characteristics of their disabilities through another lens. Drew explained, "We often need to be creative to adhere to school board policy while at the same time being conscious of special education law and the rights of the special needs students." Avery agreed with her position by stating, "I always think that we need to really take a look at the fact that, did their disability play a role in this? I think a lot of people look at fair like it's the same for everybody. To me, fair is more like what is appropriate for that individual." Educators discussed the importance of looking closely at the individual case, the factors surrounding the student, and the situation that may influence behavior. The concept of "fair" in terms of exclusionary discipline is subjective; therefore, participants noted that it is up to the team to decide proper steps based on the needs of the students overall.

Although rules and procedures were in place for students through school policies, when

asked about their understanding of the policies and protocols for an MDR, Marissa and Sophia, both regular education teachers, expressed challenges they encountered in their first MDR experience. Marissa explained, “Going into the meeting, I didn’t even know what the possibilities were for the student.” Sophia felt underprepared initially when entering her first MDR, stating, “They asked me to participate, and I showed up and they told me what it was about and what had happened, so it was kind of a last-minute thing.” However, once the procedures and expectations were explained to her, Sophia felt more confident in the process. “It was good to hear. I got to hear why everyone else is there. Everyone else’s input was first, and I was last which was good to get. This was the first time I had ever been there, and I had no idea this even existed at that time.” Due to timeline constraints required to conduct an MDR following an infraction, there was some consideration for participants’ limited knowledge of certain events of cases. If participants were initially unsure of the protocols and procedures, they were well informed during the MDR before making decisions regarding exclusionary discipline. The codes, *practices*, *policies*, and *processes* were represented 109 times to support the sub-theme *Procedures and Protocols*. Drew, Grace, and Isabel highlighted the importance of following mandated protocols and policies in their district to meet the criteria and ensure that the MDR was conducted with fidelity.

### ***Data Collection and Review of Records***

When educators sought to find the cause of the behavior, a review of records and a thorough review of school policies and protocols was crucial. Marcus described a series of steps in his building at the beginning of every school year by emphasizing scheduled time to read and review the individualized plans of SWDs. “We go through, and we’ll do an IEP meeting, and we will develop 504 plans with you know, with the director of special services, the guidance

counselor, the learning support teachers, couple of regular ed teachers will sit on those meetings.” Drew added, “I think it comes down to each individual case and each individual student as to reviewing all the data and seeing, again, what caused the behavior, and then, you know, moving forward with the most appropriate discipline.” Reviewing records and collecting data were essential when identifying patterns of behavior.

A component of reviewing the records included detailed descriptions of educators’ observations. Observations of the student were valuable when communicating and collaborating on the functions of the student in the academic setting. Marissa added, “We meet as a team every day and sometimes we are talking about learning support students, and sometimes we are talking about regular ed kiddos. And I think that, you know, the ability to be able to share our experiences and what’s working with one kid versus another kid is definitely awesome.” The opportunity to review essential information involving the student and her background was a factor that aided and benefited educators in the decision-making process. The codes *observe*, *collect*, and *evaluate* were identified when formulating the sub-theme *Data Collection and Review of Records*. Codes appeared 148 times across participant transcripts from individual interviews, focus groups, and protocol writing responses.

### **Leadership Functions**

All participants in this study indicated that they felt confident in the district’s leadership and relied heavily on the direction and guidance of those leaders to facilitate the MDR and carry out the required procedures as outlined by the law. Building leaders regarded their director as highly educated, and they trusted her knowledge and skills to lead the team in making the right decision when tasked to decide if a SWD’s infraction was a direct result of her disability. Grace emphasized this point while also addressing that postsecondary programs do not always prepare

educators for an MDR, “The director of special services is very much a veteran in her position as well as special education because she just facilitates that entire meeting.” She added, “But as far as being trained on manifestation, I would say absolutely not. I would say no education program gives you that training. And I would say that doesn’t even come out of an administration program, which that’s not good.” No other participants noted any formal training on the MDR process outside of a basic overview of teacher preparation programs or their own experiences as educators.

Participants across the board also felt supported when offering input on possible strategies to support students when asking for professional development opportunities or training. The overarching theme was that educators felt encouraged to advocate for professional development opportunities. “In our building, our current administration right now will give us latitude up to a certain point. I think currently, right now, at least the current administration we have is at a point in their career where they trust us as educators in this building to let us do that,” commented George. Further, the educators at FSD were encouraged to look at their current programs and ideas for strategies and programs that were research and evidence-based practices. Even though tiered behavioral interventions and programs were not in place building-wide at the secondary level for the participants in the study, programs that promoted appropriate behaviors utilizing positive reinforcement were engaged.

The leadership in FSD expressed high regard for their teachers and often referred to them as “experts” in their roles. Grace stated that she respected the staff’s autonomy, but it was clear that she would intervene when necessary. She communicated with educators individually or as a group, providing them with valuable information that could assist them with implementing positive reinforcement or evidence-based practices. Candace, an administrator, valued the

opportunities to collaborate with the teachers in her building. She stated, “I think what we find is once you start collaborating with the teachers or other educators, you get their experiences and then you can build upon those. You also have the opportunity to share your experience so that someone else can learn from an event or you know, something you went through.” The confidence administration provided to the staff was evident in educators’ responses related to perceived organizational support.

All participants shared the view that it was a difficult task to make decisions regarding exclusionary discipline for students with disabilities, and not one person felt highly qualified to make those tough decisions on his or her own. Hailey, a regular education teacher, explained, “I am not an expert on every manifestation of a disability, so I rely on the knowledge and expertise of people that are more qualified than myself. The disability discussion really helped review the various means that a disability would affect decision-making and such. This assisted in my decision.” Open discussions and forums provided insight and information for educators that supported the goal of understanding the cause of the behavior enacted by SWDs. Key elements of the theme of *Leadership Functions* included: *explain, director, requirements, involved, referral, lawyer, and fair/equal*. The transcripts provided these elements and occurred 143 times in the individual interviews, focus groups, and protocol writing responses. *Leadership* was identified in 58 of those times, emphasizing participants’ trust and reliance on the administration.

### ***Clear Expectations***

Participants commented that they had access to materials, whether it was through professional development training or online resources. Marcus noted that receiving guidance from his director when preparing for his role in the MDR was extremely helpful. “The Director of Special Services will review law that is involved with it. (The Director) might call me and say,

hey, you need to do a search of this. Make sure you read that before we go in. We have to understand going in, you know, what the regs are pertaining to that type of discipline for that type of student.” Research and follow-up with special education law experts, such as administrators or third-party experts, provided educators with guidance and support to enter MDRs with background knowledge and pertinent information.

FSD administrators utilized their staff and valued their expert knowledge and expertise when asked how their schools implement evidence-based practices. Candace explained, “The team’s telling me behaviors, and then I try to come up with different techniques or ways to reinforce positive behavior. And then I let the team know what the expectation is and how to implement it.” On the other hand, the expectations involving exclusionary practices for SWDs were unclear. Hailey, a regular education teacher, stated that she would like to know what is appropriate in terms of how she can or should exclude a student with special needs. “Because one of the techniques I use a lot is if a student is acting out, I sent him out of the room. Does that qualify as removing them from that or not? Is there a certain duration of time? I still don’t know the answers to some of those questions.” Expectations were clear when educators had opportunities to meet and collaborate with administrators and other educators. Therefore, first-order codes, which included *individualized, requirement, prepare, alternative, discipline, essential, regulations, consequences*, and *explain* were assembled into the codes *accountable, rules*, and *standards* to define how educators determined consequences. Participants addressed these codes 184 times to produce the sub-theme of *Clear Expectations*.

### ***Roles and Responsibilities***

Pertinent steps regarding roles and responsibilities were that each member of the MDR must provide input on the student and the case under review. Administrators and educators

collected data and provided firsthand observations. Included in the discussion was information about the students from current and past evaluations and IEP documentation. “My role is to see that the appropriate discipline is given when school policy or rules are not followed. In cases of MDR, I rely on a team of special educators and administrators to present mitigating circumstances and evidence of diagnosis to determine how we should move forward with discipline,” explained Marcus. Distinguishing individual roles and responsibilities was noted by administrators, non-instructional, and special education staff. However, the roles and responsibilities of some general educators in the MDR remained unclear based on the number of experiences these educators had in their involvement in an MDR.

Those who have participated in fewer MDRs felt less prepared and less confident in their role. “I don’t feel like I ever had enough knowledge to truly give this profound statement during one of those meetings,” stated Avery. While some felt unsure of their role in the MDR process, others felt confident in their purpose. Isabel, a special education teacher, stated, “I think our role is vital, depending on the disability.” Additionally, Nora, who has a non-instructional role at FSD, described that her job was to communicate the facts of the risks and dangers the student placed on other students, “I was brought in to make sure everybody understood the severity of what the student had done, and the risks that student provided to others by doing what they did.” Experience and involvement played a role in educators’ determining their perceived roles in an MDR.

Isabel, Marcus, George, Jordon, Candace, and Nora confirmed that standard practices included analyzing data, reviewing records, and individualized charts or checklists. Behaviors for SWDs were monitored most through the learning support teachers; however, regular education teachers were also responsible for collecting and submitting input and data. Educators who

monitored SWDs understood their responsibilities for implementing and tracking student data through progress monitoring methods. Sophia and Hailey, regular education teachers, acknowledged they needed clarification on monitoring the progress of students with behavior plans. Plans were individualized, and changes to those plans or goals happened when students met the goals or when the team decided that changes were necessary. “Just monitoring and changing based on what we’re seeing. You know, try to make one change at a time so we can see what does work and if something’s not working, then we change it to get something that maybe does work,” explained Candace. Collaboration and communication created a link in understanding educators’ roles and responsibilities concerning progress monitoring; however, participants responded substantially to the codes, *listen*, *monitor*, *implement*, and *reflect* to confirm the sub-theme *Roles and Responsibilities*. Throughout the transcripts for individual interviews, focus groups, and protocol writing responses, participants responded with codes related to this sub-theme 233 times.

### ***Support***

All participants felt supported in their decision in an MDR, and no participant felt pressure to choose a particular outcome when determining if there was a need to implement exclusionary discipline for the SWD. Isabel and Avery mentioned that based on the knowledge and expertise of some in attendance at the meeting, they felt like they would only go against the majority of the recommendations of their leaders if they felt strongly in their position. However, participants indicated they made the right decision regarding the need for exclusionary discipline in the MDR they attended.

Participants noted that each case in an MDR was individualized, and members looked closely at the situation and participants’ background knowledge of the student. Participants were



not opposed to alternative consequences for students that would prevent the need for exclusionary discipline. “If the district came up with other ways to hold kids accountable without suspension or without detention, and maybe, here are other ways that students would be able to learn,” explained Allie. Grace expressed that students need to reflect upon their experiences and receive information regarding the proper ways to behave while suggesting alternative actions or behaviors they could have used instead as a learning tool. “So, I think having those conversations with the students when you’re disciplining them, because I think it’s basically futile for them to come in here and you tell them they’re suspended for three days, but never have a conversation about how they could have handled the situation differently because they’ve learned nothing.” Drew discussed “restorative” discipline also as a learning tool. “Students learn, they learn their behavior affected other people, that their behavior affected themselves in a way that they learned that that behavior is not leading them being successful.” Education and instruction on appropriate behaviors were essential for students and educators in learning from behaviors and supporting the prevention of future infractions.

The amount of support relating to positive behaviors educators devoted to students varied among the participants. While Felicia, Candace, Mia, Isabel, and Evelyn expressed that they provided support regularly, all other participants stated that they provided support to students with disabilities monthly, yearly, or as needed. For special education teachers with changing students on their caseloads year after year, the frequency of their support could also vary yearly. Also, special education teachers in different buildings at FSD followed and monitored students differently. While special education teachers in one building change students each year, special education teachers in another building follow the same students throughout the grades until the students move on. While procedures and frequency for monitoring behaviors were relatively the

same, teachers were allowed to support SWDs in their buildings through systematic methods that met the standards of supporting the students based on students' needs.

Educators used mentorship to support one another at FSD. Isabel indicated that some teachers have come to her for advice on enforcing consequences for a student with a disability because they were unaware of what they were permitted to do. When educators did not know if the behavior directly resulted from the disability, special education teachers and other non-instructional staff used consultations to identify tools and strategies to support the student. They informed their colleagues of appropriate steps to take if discipline was appropriate. Isabel recalled a situation where she consulted teachers regarding a student's behavior. "They reached out; they asked what to do, which is exactly what we want them to do. So, we need to know not to pull all the stops out. Let's work our way there to see if we can reduce how much we're using it." Participants used phrases such as *mentored* and *consulted* when discussing how educators supported other professionals and stakeholders. The codes *consult*, *help*, and *reward* were collected from the first-order codes that included *choices*, *beneficial*, *mentor*, *appreciate*, *motivation*, *ideas*, and *assist*. The codes were addressed 149 times across individual interviews, focus groups, and protocol writing responses to produce the *Support* sub-theme.

### **Collaboration and Communication**

Collaboration and communication was a major theme described in every individual interview and focus group. Collaborating with experts, colleagues, and leaders in FSD was emphasized. "I think anytime you can collaborate with other people in the field, it benefits you," stated Isabel. This communication was not limited to employees in FSD. Marcus revealed that communicating with others in education is equally beneficial. He explained, "It's being able to meet with professionals that are in child development. Meeting with mental health

professionals.” He added, “So the ability to sit down with people that are dealing with this, whether it’s behavioral health, whether it’s private therapists, whether it is our good professors and departments from the colleges. You know, we’re lucky. We have a plethora of outstanding universities around us and colleges that have resources available to us.” Statements such as this made it clear that communication and collaboration were not limited to educators and experts within FSD.

Communication was essential to the decision-making process in an MDR, and participants looked at their experiences with students individually. Using a team approach, participants Drew and Grace stated that they often consulted with special education teachers to gain more knowledge of the student and the situation of concern before the MDR. Grace explained that in her experience, sometimes the administrative team paused before enforcing discipline for SWDs if they needed more information regarding the students, characteristics of their disabilities, and applicable information regarding the investigation of the incident.

### ***Making Connections***

Felicia, Isabel, and Candace stated that more background knowledge of the situation or infraction before the MDR would help process what happened. Hailey admitted that not knowing all the events that led up to the infraction made the decision-making process more challenging. Allie indicated that her concern is if a student with an intellectual disability understands the consequences of her actions. She explained, “My biggest thing is if the child will understand what he or she did, and this is the result or the consequence of it because some students. I don’t know if they put that together.” Making those connections between the student and his disability was noted as a challenge for Avery because it is difficult to know what consequence should be enforced for each situation if the characteristics of the disability are not known. Avery shared, “I

feel like it's not hit upon hard enough, really, for all of us to really understand how these kids tick, to be really honest." Closing the gap in making these connections tied into continued collaboration and professional development on the characteristics of disabilities and evidence-based practices that promote positive behaviors.

Avery and George advocated that fair consequences do not always mean equality. Experts in other disciplines or environments to the MDR who have a relationship and experience with SWDs provided other perspectives on why a specific behavior may have occurred. To understand behavior from the SWDs' perspectives, Felicia, Marcus, George, and Candace explained how educators at FSD developed a "FOCUS" training to all educators in the district over 10 years ago. This training involved a hands-on learning opportunity that created scenarios where the educators took on the role of students with disabilities. The "FOCUS" training centered on characteristics of disabilities and how these characteristics impacted students in the classroom. Strategies and tools were offered in this training to support educators, and the training provided opportunities and time for educators to collaborate and design curricula and resources to support students with disabilities in the educational setting. The sub-theme of *Making Connections* emerged from the combined codes, which included *factors, resources, perspectives,* and *effects*. In total, participants represented these codes 125 times in individual interviews, focus groups, and protocol writing responses.

### ***Building Relationships***

Participants' confidence in their abilities, performance, and relationships strengthened when educators at FSD participated in activities that provided opportunities to engage in meaningful conversations through collaboration. This engagement included educators actively listening, exchanging knowledge and ideas, and looking into a situation from multiple lenses.

Marcus explained the importance of supporting and believing in his staff in terms of relationships. “To me is, you know, you gotta love your staff. You’ve got to take care of your staff. And I’m here to serve them. And I think if I can do those things that they’ll feel supported, but they’re the ones with the knowledge.” Support and encouragement offered by the administrative staff supported educators’ comments surrounding their perceptions of being supported within their organization.

Educators’ efforts to communicate with families also provided valuable insight into the characteristics of their students while building positive relationships between the school and home. Educators monitored and followed plans for use through multiple modalities, including paper or electronic means. Parents were encouraged to participate in the monitoring and informed of their child’s progress through the data collection measures. Drew, an administrator in FSD, also viewed parents as valuable team members. He added, “I just think it’s looking at each case, getting to creating a relationship with those students, having an open line of communication with their families, and trying to find the best outcome for students.” Evelyn, a special education teacher, shared this view in her own experiences working with SWDs and families, “I think working with the teachers and the students a lot of times well, and the parents, it’s not always what you think it is for the behavior. Usually there’s something more deep rooted, and just building those relationships with the student and parents is more helpful than just coming up with the plan itself.” Educators commented that family engagement was encouraged and practiced in FSD through educators’ implementation of quarterly phone calls and emails to parents concerning the positive aspects of students observed. The sub-theme of *Building Relationships* developed from the combination of codes *rapport*, *involve*, *trust*,

and *reinforce*, which were identified 243 times. The code *rapport* was found in individual interviews and focus groups, and the code *reinforce* was recognized over 20 times.

### ***Time***

Isabel, Avery, and Hailey indicated they needed more time to prepare for their first meetings. Initially, Mia said she did not feel prepared, which was nerve-wracking, but with years of experience, the task is no longer stressful. George, who stated he has participated in over 12 MDRs, described his confidence now with the MDR process as “second nature.” Candace, who had over 25 years of teaching experience, agreed, “I guess I’ve been here so long I just know it. So I don’t know that I really need the support as maybe a younger teacher, and one that has been through less MDRs.” The time needed for preparation regarding the procedures and protocols of an MDR decreased for educators with more experience and background knowledge; however, educators did express that the time needed to review the incident and records of the student when a serious infraction occurred did not decrease regardless of the amount of experience the educator held.

Educators also described time for collaboration as an essential factor in fulfilling the duties and responsibilities in their current positions. Hailey addressed how the mandated timeline to hold an MDR prevented the addition of crucial information from being entered into the investigation, “Because you had to do it in a certain number of days, then all of the information wasn’t there, so you can only make the determination of the information that was present. So that was a factor that may have altered my personal opinion about that particular situation.” Timelines for assembling members and conducting MDRs contributed to educators' challenges when investigating the infractions and characters involved.

Mia, Felicia, and Isabel expressed needing more time to review records and collaborate with students and colleagues. Mia explained, “Just having time to go through their stuff and work with the students when they first come in, especially at the beginning of the school year.” Felicia added, “It’s either before class or after class. Possibly during seminar time, possibly during my prep. But there’s no specified time whatsoever in our day.” Isabel’s views paralleled Mia and Felicia’s, and she emphasized that there is a need for more time and availability to collaborate and communicate with others while also acknowledging that if there was a severe case, scheduled time supported that collaboration. “I think anytime you can collaborate with other people in the field, it benefits you. I think the issue is there’s a lack of time for that collaboration.” She later added, “There’s no real set time unless it’s a larger concern where we’re going to set a meeting and bring in the IEP team to discuss, which we do as well.” Requests for additional time to collaborate with colleagues were valued but not regarded as a set time during the instructional day for all educators.

Sophia and Grace recommended additional time in the future allotted for collaborating with building leaders when students transition from one building to the next. Sophia explained, “By the time they get to high school, there have been a lot of teachers involved and a lot that have had a whole year or more of experience with these children. It would be great to know what, you know, what worked with them.” Furthermore, Isabel expressed the need for more teachers, especially special education staff. “We need more special education teachers. The best way to help our students and really dig down into their disabilities are more levels of support.” There was no recommendation for how much additional staff was needed by educators, but educators noted that additional time was essential. The participants' responses varied regarding the codes for the sub-theme *Time*. The codes *included limited, regularly, and lengthy* emerged

from the first-order codes that included *infrequent, more constraints, minimal, and quickly*.

Participants referred to these codes in individual interviews, focus groups, and protocol writing transcripts 116 times.

### **Outlier Data and Findings**

Fairmont School District is one of many schools obligated to adhere to state and federal legislation involving MDRs for SWDs, and the participants' years of experience in education ranged from 1 to 31 years. Additionally, the number of MDRs attended by the participants ranged from 1 to more than 12 occurrences. Even with the thick descriptions provided by the participants recounting their extensive backgrounds and experience levels working with SWDs, participants in MDRs, and implementing strategies to promote positive behaviors, outliers surfaced from the rigorous review, analysis, and synthesis of the data.

### ***Views Regarding Essential Members***

Participants in this study offered their views of who they believed were essential members who must be present at an MDR; however, no participant mentioned or indicated that the school psychologist should attend each MDR. Researchers have indicated that school psychologists are experts in understanding diagnostic information and can inform and explain how the characteristics of a disability could influence behavior (Fisher et al., 2021; Mayworm et al., 2021). No participant mentioned a school psychologist as an essential member, which does not mean a school psychologist was absent in any MDR at Fairmont School District.

### ***Prior Knowledge of a Student and the Infraction***

A central theme throughout this study was more time for educators to communicate and collaborate. One participant, George, emphasized that he had attended many MDRs and had gained exceptional experience, and he prefers to walk into the MDR without background



knowledge of the infraction. He stated that he can eliminate any bias that may emerge if he comes in with an open mind. In his interview, George said, “I can remove my emotional attachment from it. I can sit, and I can listen, and I can be objective.” He further explained in the focus group, “I appreciate that. So, if I have no background information, then I feel like I can make an objective decision based off of the information that’s put in front of me.” He concluded with a conversation he had with an administrator, “I’ve actually said to her the last few times, I don’t want to know anything. I want to go in clean.” Statements regarding personal preferences call for policymakers and school leaders to evaluate educators and staff to determine which procedures, practices, and protocols support educators in making unbiased and well-informed decisions in an MDR. According to George, this was his personal request that administrators honor.

### ***Legal Counsel for MDR Members***

One participant, Nora, described her first experience in an MDR where she received counsel from the school solicitor, who provided her with pertinent information regarding her rights and responsibilities in the MDR. There was no mention of support from legal counsel by any other participant in this case study. Nora stated that she received answers to her questions regarding the case to ensure she was being “fair and appropriate to all students.” This situation was noted as unique since Nora’s role within the district is non-instructional, and her knowledge of the student was utilized based on her expertise.

### **Research Question Responses**

The following section provides answers to the proposed research question and sub-questions. The answers provided a summative description of the responses given by the participants. They were organized through first and second-order coding procedures to provide a

thorough view through the perspectives and feedback of the participants. Sixteen participants participated in individual interviews, 15 completed protocol questions, and 13 attended three focus groups.

### **Central Research Question**

How do K-12 educators' perceptions regarding organizational support affect the decisions they make concerning exclusionary discipline for students with disabilities in a Manifestation Determination Review? Educators recognized that there is not a one-size-fits-all approach to enforcing discipline for students with disabilities. "We just have to go through the process of a team and determine if their disability impeded their learning or determine if their disability caused them to do what they did," stated Allie. Educators commented that an individualized approach is necessary to meet the needs of each student. "I think just continued collaboration. Continued conversations. I think the more we talk about it, the more people can understand exactly what's going on and what the policy and procedures are," explained Jordon. Frequent communication and collaboration were appreciated and deemed necessary when the organization aimed to solve problems and implement practices that promote positive behaviors.

Collecting data and reviewing the records of each student was described as time-consuming, and educators who participated in the inclusion classroom setting were given additional opportunities to collaborate and gain background knowledge of the student and the characteristics of disabilities. Barriers included inconsistent and limited time allotted in participants' daily activities to meet and collaborate with other administrators and colleagues to discuss information regarding the student, characteristics of disabilities, and best practices when implementing evidence-based strategies. Mia identified parent disagreement as an additional barrier when making decisions in an MDR.

**Sub-Question One**

How do K-12 educators utilize their perceived role within an organization to make decisions regarding exclusionary discipline for students with disabilities in a Manifestation Determination Review? Several participants noted that FSD provided in-service training and professional development opportunities to educators and staff throughout the school year. Mandated in-service training informed the staff in FSD on the expectations regarding their responsibilities in observing compliance measures, such as goals and specially designed instruction outlined in students' Individualized Education Programs (IEPs).

Participants confirmed that some of the trainings offered to the educators dedicated to disabilities were vague or irrelevant to educators' current roles or positions; however, collaboration and consultations with administrators, colleagues, and staff provided an opportunity for educators to problem-solve and determine possible solutions to ongoing concerns in the classroom for students with disabilities. "The more I can know, the better I can support," stressed Marcus. Additionally, Candace noted a strong level of trust between members of the organization and their leadership staff, "I think they trust that that's our area of expertise and that we are going to do what we need to do to help encourage positive school behaviors. I think they trust us and know that we know what we're doing, and that's just the expectation that we do it, but they support us to do it." FSD offered opportunities at the end of the school year for educators to express their views regarding educators' requests for future training and professional opportunities. It was not identified in this study whether all educators take advantage of this opportunity to request professional development opportunities or suggest topics of concern when offered.

## **Sub-Question Two**

How do educators' perceptions of students with disabilities and their understanding regarding the characteristics of their disabilities affect the decisions they make concerning exclusionary discipline in a Manifestation Determination Review? Participants stressed that substantial background knowledge of students and experience in the field were primary factors determining whether exclusionary discipline is needed for SWDs when an infraction occurs. Other factors often emerged as educators investigated the root cause of students' behaviors. "But when you start to add in a specific student and then their diagnoses, and then their home life, and the potential history of trauma, and all of those things, now you're talking about a very individualized situation," explained Grace. Furthermore, educators' perceptions of students depended on their engagement with the student and their reliance on expert advice from mentors, experts, and leaders in the district. Several participants mentioned that additional training and education on the characteristics of students with disabilities would aid in implementing positive reinforcement and strategies that promote positive behaviors while also understanding the student and the behaviors that may emerge as a characteristic of the disability.

FSD implemented positive reinforcement strategies and programs to promote positive behaviors. However, buy-in for students at the secondary level was noted as a challenge because it took much work to obtain buy-in from the older student population. Based on educators' knowledge of students, an administrator stated that at the secondary level, individualized programs may be more beneficial to students at FSD than a school-wide program. Educators noted that additional education and professional development were necessary to implement a program with fidelity if a change in current programs were to occur.

### **Sub-Question Three**

How do educators' perceptions regarding evidence-based practices impact their decisions regarding exclusionary discipline for students with disabilities in a Manifestation Determination Review? School-wide behaviors were not a concern for participants; instead, strategies were implemented at the secondary level more individually. Participants expressed how positive reinforcement and rewards were regular practices. The staff monitored behavior regularly, but there was interest in participating in training and professional development where they were given information on the characteristics of disabilities with case studies or scenarios that provided them with information that they could utilize in their roles within the organization. Furthermore, educators supported and appreciated opportunities to collaborate with peers or other experts who could support them in implementing evidence-based strategies and programs for all learners.

When evaluating the need for exclusionary discipline for students with disabilities, all participants stated they relied on the guidance of administrators to facilitate the policies and procedures for the group during the MDR, and they also relied on the information gathered from the data collected for the student and investigation on the infraction. Participants expressed how background knowledge and experience guided their decisions, as well as their observations and relationships with the students.

### **Summary**

Educators' perceptions of SWDs were directly related to their experiences and background knowledge regarding positive reinforcement strategies, their relationship with students, and their understanding of the characteristics of disabilities. Experience and background knowledge, leadership functions, and communication and collaboration guided

educators' perceptions. The participants valued time for opportunities to communicate and collaborate with colleagues and experts. Professional development opportunities that provide situational information, along with detailed explanations of the characteristics of SWDs and how these characteristics determine behavioral attributes, were regarded as the most valuable training tool needed for educators to effectively make decisions and evaluate if there is a need for exclusionary discipline. Leadership built on trust and support contributes to educators' perceived organizational support. Reviewing data and records will contribute to making connections between the student, the characteristics of her behavior, and the resulting behaviors, which are imperative to the decision-making process when determining if there is a need for exclusionary discipline for SWDs. Instruction for students and staff regarding evidence-based practices that promote positive behaviors will serve educators in monitoring students to reduce the need for exclusionary discipline for SWDs.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION**

### **Overview**

The purpose of this study was to understand K-12 educators' knowledge of their students' characteristics and disabilities while identifying their efficacy in implementing evidence-based practices (EBPs) to promote positive behaviors. Additionally, it aimed to discover how their knowledge and skills regarding working with students with disabilities (SWDs) and implementing EBPs shaped their perceptions when making decisions regarding exclusionary discipline in a Manifestation Determination Review (MDR). This chapter discusses how the interpretation and findings of this study link Eisenberger et al.'s (1986) Organizational Support Theory (OST) to educators' perceptions regarding the use of evidence-based practices, their knowledge of the characteristics of students with disabilities and how that influences their decision-making in an MDR. This chapter will also provide information regarding policy, practice, implications, limitations, and delimitations resulting from this study's findings. A conclusion follows recommendations for future studies.

### **Discussion**

To address the gap in the literature regarding educators' views and perceptions concerning their readiness to make decisions regarding exclusionary discipline while implementing positive behavioral supports using evidence-based practices with fidelity, the following central research question was formulated, "How do K-12 educators' perceptions regarding organizational support affect the decisions they make concerning exclusionary discipline for students with disabilities in a Manifestation Determination Review?" Eisenberger et al.'s (1986) Organizational Support Theory guided this research question and identified the major themes and subthemes that emerged from the thick descriptions and analysis of individual

interviews, focus groups, and protocol writing from participants in Fairmont School District (FSD) who participated in a Manifestation Determination Review (MDR). FSD's school board and district leaders provided permission and access to the site. Additionally, school leaders at FSD supported the researcher by disseminating information for recruitment. School administrators at FSD provided access to the site and permitted the researcher to conduct individual interviews and focus groups in person upon the request of the participants. Thematic findings are provided in the following sections, as well as analysis and synthesis that explain the findings of this case study. Following the interpretation of findings are implications for policy and practice with an explanation of limitations and delimitations. Finally, recommendations for future research are provided prior to the conclusion.

### **Summary of Thematic Findings**

The findings indicate that educators' perceptions involved three focused themes: Professional Development, Leadership Functions, and Communication and Collaboration. Each thematic finding contained sub-themes, and based on the collective responses by participants, there was a strong sense of mutual support between the administrators and staff at FSD. The support and information offered in each MDR gave educators the confidence to make decisions that were effectively in the best interests of SWDs regarding the need for exclusionary discipline. Positive behavioral supports and strategies were invited and practiced, but there was no set plan surrounding school-wide positive supports at each building level; however, individualized supports continued to occur and were identified as an area that participants supported and hoped to improve. Additional education and training were noted as a need, as well as continued opportunities for collaboration and communication between professionals, colleagues, and experts in the field of education. Special education law, information regarding the characteristics



of students and disabilities, and evidence-based strategies to promote positive behaviors were considered areas of need for further professional development at FSD.

### **Interpretation of Findings**

This section reveals the results and summary of the thematic findings, followed by a discussion of the themes outlined in Chapter 4. The findings resulted from the data collected in the individual interviews, focus groups, and protocol writing. The interpretations of findings follow a review of the analysis and synthesis of the data. The findings provide new information regarding educators' perceptions of exclusionary discipline and how they make decisions during an MDR, as well as insight into how educators implement evidence-based practices to support positive behaviors.

#### ***Communication and Collaboration Build Connections***

A positive sense of respect, rapport, and trust is built on frequent communication and collaboration among administrators and colleagues (Trapp et al., 2022). The support offered to employees in FSD by the district administration aided in building trust. In addition, administrative staff commonly referred to its constituents as "experts" in their roles. The assigned role of an "expert" supported educators in identifying their roles and building confidence in their positions, which parallels Ajzen's (1991) description of how employees contribute to an organization. Likewise, educators trusted the leadership staff during MDRs to guide and facilitate the meetings. The trust gained was a direct reflection of the collaboration and communication offered to staff, parents, and other stakeholders. Educators received encouragement and opportunities to express their direct views, observations, and background knowledge and experience with students, which supported the decision-making process in an MDR and contributed to relaying pertinent information (Masoom, 2021).

The descriptions by educators regarding the positive relationships indicated that positive Perceived Organizational Support (POS) existed at FSD. When employees felt supported by their organization, they showed a willingness to develop ideas and steer new initiatives. Employees' willingness to develop new positive behavioral support initiatives aligned with the findings of Nair (2020), who explained how positive organizational support increases employees' involvement, engagement, and rigor within the organization. A team-based approach connects members of an organization and identifies "experts" in the field who can contribute to understanding the student and the characteristics of his or her disability. Fisher et al. (2021) also expressed the importance of adding experts to discussions because the information obtained will help team members make informed decisions. Chen et al. (2021) reinforced how experts could provide consultations that support educators using data-driven strategies. The MDR process at FSD was considered a team process, and all members were encouraged to participate and share their experiences and knowledge with the students.

Regular communication with parents was a highly regarded practice by participants and a recommended practice by researchers to advocate constructive conversations that result in effective problem-solving that builds satisfaction and trustworthiness (Kervick et al., 2020; Trapp et al., 2022). By initiating this point of contact, educators could gain important information on the student's behaviors from the parent's perspective. Sophia modeled this behavior when she had specific questions regarding the student, "I do like to call home or email and, you know, discuss that with families." She later added, "I'd like to get their input on what's worked with, you know, your child before, and a lot of times you get a ton of information from the parents, and so I think that's really important." Communication with parents strengthened

bonds and opened the line of reciprocal communication between educators, parents, and other stakeholders.

### ***Experience and Background Knowledge Increase Confidence***

Participants indicated how time devoted to increasing professional development opportunities builds confidence in educators' abilities when making decisions and implementing programs to meet goals established by the organization. Marcus asserted, "Trainings in educational law pertaining to SWDs would be extremely helpful to protect both the student and the district." Researchers also recognized time for professional development and access to materials as factors that promote increased organizational engagement (Lemons et al., 2019). Gaining background knowledge of the student was essential when making decisions regarding exclusionary discipline. Participants preferred professional development and training on disabilities through case studies or a hands-on approach. When given little information regarding the process of the MDR, educators felt that their role was limited in an MDR. For example, Avery expressed that she viewed herself as a "quiet participant" compared to her leaders and counterparts with more experience and education on critical aspects of the procedures and protocols surrounding the MDR.

Additional training supports educators in reducing repeated challenges that emerge related to unwanted behaviors exhibited by SWDs in the classroom. Educators may not have sufficient knowledge on identifying if behaviors manifested from students' disabilities; however, since inclusion was commonplace in FSD, it was expressed that students and educators in the district understand that there are variables that exist surrounding SWDs, especially students with severe cognitive disabilities. Ongoing and routine professional development will address the concerns of educators regarding what they are required and permitted to do when addressing

students' behaviors, as well as identifying other factors that contribute to students' behaviors. Allen (2022) and Trapp et al. (2022) supported educators' decisions to evaluate factors while carefully reviewing student records.

### ***Clear Expectations Reduce Barriers***

Educators in FSD held professional development education and training as an essential function of their organization to realize positive outcomes for its students. Masoom (2021) shared this stance and stressed how professional development also supports members in an organization in establishing the expectations for the organization. Educators were assigned the responsibility of engaging in practices that utilized strategies that promoted positive reinforcement. This was realized through monthly, quarterly, or yearly school-wide acknowledgement initiatives for students who portrayed positive behaviors through various methods, such as increased attendance, visual displays of kindness, and regular practice of positive behaviors. Students with disabilities who received individualized supports were monitored regularly through measures that were outlined explicitly to educators.

Although school-wide multi-tiered programs use evidence-based methods to identify the targeted needs of students as a whole (Corcoran & Edward Thomas, 2021), FSD showed that information regarding students' needs can be evaluated on a smaller scale to support students and reduce the number of students who are receiving exclusionary measures for behaviors of concern when there is not a need for a school-wide system or program. Academic and behavioral outcomes can be addressed in a student's IEP and followed with fidelity, regardless of whether a school-wide system exists. It is unclear if FSD has addressed alternatives to exclusionary techniques that would promote instruction on positive behaviors that could include a school-wide approach (Nese et al., 2021).

Educators admitted that they appreciated information regarding how they could support SWDs that deter students from exhibiting unwanted behaviors, which corroborates researchers who promote positive behavioral programs that aim to reduce students from displaying inappropriate behaviors that call for exclusionary discipline (Kervick et al., 2020; Meyer et al., 2021). Drew emphasized how understanding students and their backgrounds was crucial to making important decisions. He stated, “It’s crucial, being a part of that meeting, just to be able to, number one, understand what may be causing the student’s behavior, and then be able to make a comprehensive decision as a team to what’s best not only for that student, but you also have to take into account all the other students in the building and the safety of everybody.” Obtaining information regarding the antecedents and actions of the student of concern provided insight to MDR team members on how they must move forward when deciding how to provide resources and support that would benefit all students.

### **Implications for Policy or Practice**

The findings of this study provide implications for policy and practice for public elementary schools, secondary schools, and higher education institutions. My aim in this study was to provide researchers, educators, and school districts with valuable information that will improve positive behavioral outcomes for students with disabilities while supporting organizations in evaluating their programs and implementing best practices to meet the needs of the students and the organization.

### ***Implications for Policy***

The results of this study suggest that school boards may want to consider their policies specific to exclusionary discipline and determine if the language in their rules, procedures, and handbooks addresses circumstances for discipline that require further consideration for SWDs.

School districts may find it best practice to inform their staff which types of removal or behavioral strategies are considered exclusionary discipline, and they could inform educators on how much time out of the classroom is considered too much time for SWDs. Also, they may consider whether the time spent outside the classroom should be different for all SWDs. Postsecondary institutions of higher education may evaluate their education programs to determine the effectiveness of coursework regarding MDR procedures, students' knowledge and understanding of SWDs, and the characteristics of their disabilities as they prepare for statewide exams and pre-service teaching experiences. Policymakers at the government level may wish to review statewide data to determine which disability categories are represented most for exclusionary discipline, defining what steps districts must take to remediate the behaviors or implement programs or supports that will educate and maintain positive behaviors.

### ***Implications for Practice***

Communication and collaboration were essential for participants at FSD, and they offered appreciation for that time to meet and collaborate on programs and strategies that support students in the classroom, promoting positive behaviors utilizing evidence-based practices being essential. New teacher induction programs can consider adding education or professional development in special education law regarding a Manifestation Determination Review (MDR) with a guide on educators' roles and responsibilities in that experience for new teachers. A flow chart or document that describes an MDR may be utilized as a resource for staff yearly or as needed for accountability purposes.

School districts may also want to consider the number of students with disabilities who are disciplined and the type of discipline enforced. Next, educators can identify the disability categories that experience higher numbers of required MDRs. Once the disability categories are

identified, a plan to educate staff on how to use evidence-based practices such as tiered interventions will aid them in identifying the need for instruction to reduce or eliminate targeted behaviors.

### **Empirical and Theoretical Implications**

The data collected from individual interviews, focus groups, and protocol writing samples emerged with empirical and theoretical implications. Notable empirical implications included the finding that FSD could effectively implement individualized, evidence-based approaches to address behavioral concerns when a school-wide system was unnecessary. Additionally, educating students on the consequences of behaviors with restorative practices was beneficial in increasing positive behavioral outcomes for students with disabilities.

Theoretical implications revealed how positive Perceived Organizational Support (POS) endured because of the trust gained when mutual respect existed between administrators and employees. Motivating factors when making decisions regarding exclusionary discipline for SWDs included confidence gained by participants through experience in an MDR aligned with sufficient information provided to interpret the law and rights for all individuals. The overarching theoretical implication included opportunities for employees to feel empowered by the leadership staff through employee-led research initiatives implemented and monitored by educators and staff at FSD.

### ***Empirical Implications***

The literature promotes the implementation of systematic school-wide multi-tiered programs and supports to improve the outcomes for positive behavior in schools (Corcoran & Edward Thomas, 2021; Kervick et al., 2020; Meyer et al., 2021). While FSD did not implement an evidence-based school-wide support system at the secondary level, this study outlined how

individualized and grade-level support can promote positive behavioral outcomes. This study emphasized identifying factors requiring a closer look at individualized approaches when a school-wide system is unnecessary. Individualized approaches included implementing evidence-based practices, such as Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA) and Behavior Intervention Plans (BIPs), for individual students who qualified for these supports through a thorough review of data and records (Armstrong, 2021; Enders et al., 2022; Gage et al., 2020).

Additionally, this study reinforced the ideals of restorative practices with implementation and education on appropriate behaviors to realize positive outcomes (Gregory et al., 2022; Kervick et al., 2020; Mayworm et al., 2021; Walters, 2022). This study also recognized the implications and adverse outcomes for SWDs when exposed to repeated exclusionary measures without sufficient support and education through meaningful lessons and conversations (Curran, 2019; Fisher et al., 2021; Gagnon et al., 2022; Gregory & Evans, 2020). Participants placed importance on instilling positive relationships through collaboration and communication to promote problem-solving techniques in inclusive environments, noted in the literature as practices deemed effective in realizing positive outcomes for SWDs (Al-Shammari & Hornby, 2020; Cruz et al., 2021).

### ***Theoretical Implications***

Eisenberger et al.'s (1986) Organizational Support Theory (OST) was the central theory in this case study. The ideals of Perceived Organizational Support (POS) aided in outlining the importance of school districts to consider developing opportunities to engage employees and establish roles that emphasize worth and accountability in making decisions that support their feelings of worth and value to make meaningful contributions to the organization based on the expectations that are set and outlined by the organization (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Kachchhap &



Horo, 2021; Khanipour & Fathi, 2020). While OST and POS outline how employees develop perceptions regarding their roles and responsibilities while emphasizing how they formulate their worth within an organization, this study outlines how trust and teamwork engage the decision-making process through education and training as a foundation that ultimately leads to confidence and responsibility.

The literature demonstrated how a balance of power enables workers to invest in their roles, partner with their leaders, and participate in opportunities that invite engagement and leadership within the organization (Saeed & Hussain, 2021). This study corroborates this finding, as educators placed confidence in their supervisors, trusting them to model behaviors, make pertinent decisions, and implement supports that were researched and introduced by the staff. The leadership in FSD provided opportunities for empowerment, which is a motivating factor for employees when tasked to meet the goals set forth by an organization (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). The literature does not specify motivating factors for educators when obligated to make decisions regarding exclusionary discipline for SWDs; instead, researchers stressed how an organization's support system assists in building confidence for employees (Ergul & Cetin, 2022).

### **Limitations and Delimitations**

The limitations of this study included the race of participants and the number of male participants. Additionally, securing the confidentiality of the participants engaged in an MDR and adhering to policies regarding age restrictions of students who initiated the need to conduct MDRs were limiting factors that hindered opportunities to observe authentic MDRs.

Delimitations included a single case, the geographic location, and the need for participants who had experience working with SWDs and who participated in an MDR, which were important in

determining specific views and interpretations of the experiences of educators. The views obtained by the participants may benefit future educators while aiding in developing professional development opportunities.

### ***Limitations***

The first limitation of this study was that all the participants were White, and there were only four male participants. Due to confidentiality measures and the students' ages, I could not observe an MDR during the data-collection phase of this study. Participants in this study were from the secondary level, and even though an invitation was sent to all educators in FSD to participate during recruitment, there were no participants from the elementary level. Finally, participants mentioned a school-wide tiered positive support program at the elementary school. However, this could not be confirmed, and details on the program could not be revealed based on the volunteers who chose to participate in this study.

### ***Delimitations***

Delimitations included a single case of one school district in a small rural county region instead of multiple cases in diverse regions. I chose a rural school because state reports indicated increased exclusionary discipline of students in FSD in the three years leading to this study. I limited the participants to only those who had participated in an MDR and had experience working with SWDs. I sought to understand the experiences of those directly involved in MDR procedures so that the information gleaned from educators' in-depth responses could support post-secondary teacher preparation programs and school districts with professional development curricula.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Future researchers may consider implementing this qualitative case study with urban school districts or districts with many exclusionary discipline measures for their special education populations. Future research should focus on participants who currently implement tiered evidence-based programs that are monitored and implemented with fidelity to determine if school-wide evidence-based programs impact exclusionary discipline for SWDs. Analysis of schools with low rates of exclusionary discipline and fewer drop-out rates could support researchers in determining which resources, policies, programs, or supports influence positive behaviors and prevent exclusionary discipline for students with disabilities.

A quantitative study that utilizes a Likert scale could determine the statistical significance between educators' perceptions regarding organizational support and their commitment to utilizing EBPs to reduce exclusionary discipline for SWDs. Measurements can be determined using Eisenberger et al.'s (1986) Survey of Perceived Organizational Support. Using SPSS Statistics, educators, administrators, and policymakers can utilize the data gleaned from the survey responses to develop educational and professional development programs that meet educators' needs while utilizing evidence-based practices that promote positive behaviors and reduce the need for exclusionary discipline for SWDs in schools.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to understand K-12 educators' knowledge of their students' characteristics and disabilities while identifying their efficacy in implementing evidence-based practices (EBPs) to promote positive behaviors. Additionally, it aimed to discover how their knowledge and skills regarding working with students with disabilities (SWDs) and implementing EBPs shaped their perceptions when making decisions regarding exclusionary

discipline in a Manifestation Determination Review (MDR). Following a review of educational literature surrounding Eisenberger et al.'s (1986) Organizational Support Theory, I created a single embedded case study set at a rural school district in a southwestern state that utilized positive reinforcement strategies and evidence-based practices to support students with disabilities in the educational setting. Further, I chose a school that had conducted Manifestation Determination Reviews for students with disabilities. Experience and background knowledge, leadership functions, and collaboration and communication were the themes that emerged regarding educators' perceptions. Most importantly, educators in FSD revealed that leadership built on trust and support contributed to educators' perceived roles, how they make decisions for students regarding exclusionary discipline, and how they implement positive behavioral practices and supports. Clear expectations regarding educational law, district-wide policies, and procedures regarding an MDR are essential in building educators' confidence and understanding as essential team and organization members.

## References

- Abdulaziz, A., Bashir, M., & Alfalih, A. A. (2022). The impact of work-life balance and work overload on teacher's organizational commitment: Do job engagement and perceived organizational support matter. *Education and Information Technologies*, 27(7), 9641-9663. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-022-11013-8>
- Afacan, K., & Wilkerson, K. L. (2019). The effectiveness of behavior-focused alternative middle schools for students with disabilities. *Behavioral Disorders*, 45(1), 41-52. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0198742919846619>
- Ajzen, I. (1991). The theory of planned behavior. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 50(2), 179-211. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0749-5978\(91\)90020-t](https://doi.org/10.1016/0749-5978(91)90020-t)
- Ajzen, I. (2020). The theory of planned behavior: Frequently asked questions. *Human Behavior and Emerging Technologies*, 2(4), 314-324. <https://doi.org/10.1002/hbe2.195>
- Aldabbas, H., Pinnington, A., & Lahrech, A. (2023). The influence of perceived organizational support on employee creativity: The mediating role of work engagement. *Current Psychology*, 42(8), 6501–6515. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-021-01992-1>
- Allen, J. P. (2022). The school psychologist's role in manifestation determination reviews: Recommendations for practice. *Journal of Applied School Psychology*, 38(1), 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15377903.2021.1895396>
- Allen, J. P., & Roberts, M. T. (2024). Practices and perceptions in manifestation determination reviews. *School Psychology Review*, 53(1), 31-41. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2372966x.2021.1916781>

- Al-Shammari, Z., & Hornby, G. (2020). Special education teachers' knowledge and experience of IEPs in the education of students with special educational needs. *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education*, 67(2), 167–181.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1034912x.2019.1620182>
- Anderson, K. P. (2021). The relationship between inclusion, absenteeism, and disciplinary outcomes for students with disabilities. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 43(1), 32–59. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0162373720968558>
- Armstrong, D. (2021). Addressing the wicked problem of behaviour in schools. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 25(8), 976–992.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2019.1597183>
- Bartlett, N. A., & Ellis, T. F. (2021). Policies matter: Closing the reporting and transparency gaps in the use of restraint, seclusion, and time-out rooms in schools. *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy*, (196), 2–15. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1078514ar>
- Beqiraj, L., Denne, L. D., Hastings, R. P., & Paris, A. (2022). Positive behavioural support for children and young people with developmental disabilities in special education settings: A systematic review. *Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disabilities*, 35(3), 719–735. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jar.12989>
- Billups, F. D. (2021). *Qualitative data collection tools: Design, development, and applications* (Vol. 55). SAGE Publications. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781071878699>
- Blatt, B., & Kaplan, F. (1966). *Christmas in purgatory*. Boston, MA: Allen & Bacon.
- Borrego, R., & Maxwell, G. M. (2021). The lingering effects of zero-tolerance: Perceptions of educators and former students. *Research in Higher Education Journal*, 40.

- Canboy, B., Tillou, C., Barzantny, C., Güçlü, B., & Benichoux, F. (2023). The impact of perceived organizational support on work meaningfulness, engagement, and perceived stress in France. *European Management Journal*, *41*(1), 90–100.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emj.2021.12.004>
- Carter, N., Bryant-Lukosius, D., DiCenso, A., Blythe, J., & Neville, A. J. (2014). The use of triangulation in qualitative research. *Oncol Nurs Forum*, *41*(5), 545-7.  
<https://doi.org/10.1188/14.ONF.545-547>
- Chen, C.-C., Sutherland, K. S., Kunemund, R., Sterrett, B., Wilkinson, S., Brown, C., & Maggin, D. M. (2021). Intensifying interventions for students with emotional and behavioral difficulties: A conceptual synthesis of practice elements and adaptive expertise. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders*, *29*(1), 56–66.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1063426620953086>
- Chitiyo, J., May, M. E., Mathende, A. M., & Dzenga, C. G. (2019). The relationship between school personnel’s confidence with using the school-wide positive behaviour intervention support model and its sustainability. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, *19*(3), 232–240. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1471-3802.12445>
- Connor, D. J., & Cavendish, W. (2018). Sharing power with parents: Improving educational decision making for students with learning disabilities. *Learning Disability Quarterly*, *41*(2), 79–84. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0731948717698828>
- Corcoran, T., & Edward Thomas, M. K. (2021). School-wide positive behaviour support as evidence-making interventions. *Research in Education*, *111*(1), 108–125.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/00345237211034884>

- Creswell, J., & Poth, C. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Cruz, R. A., Firestone, A. R., & Rodl, J. E. (2021). Disproportionality reduction in exclusionary school discipline: A best-evidence synthesis. *Review of Educational Research, 91*(3), 397–431. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654321995255>
- Curran, F. C. (2019). The law, policy, and portrayal of zero tolerance school discipline: Examining prevalence and characteristics across levels of governance and school districts. *Educational Policy, 33*(2), 319–349. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904817691840>
- Decker, J. R., & Pazey, B. L. (2017). Case-based instruction to teach educators about the legal parameters surrounding the discipline of students with disabilities. *Action in Teacher Education, 39*(3), 255–273. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01626620.2017.1292160>
- Dell’Anna, S., Pellegrini, M., Ianes, D., & Vivonet, G. (2022). Learning, social, and psychological outcomes of students with moderate, severe, and complex disabilities in inclusive education: A systematic review. *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education, 69*(6), 2025–2041. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1034912X.2020.1843143>
- Dembo, R. S., & LaFleur, J. (2019). Community health contexts and school suspensions of students with disabilities. *Children and Youth Services Review, 102*, 120–127. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2019.04.027>
- Edber, H. (2022). Community circles in response to restorative justice research and critique. *Journal of Educational Research and Practice, 12*(0). 28-38. <https://doi.org/10.5590/jerap.2022.12.0.3>



- Eisenberger, R., Huntington, R., Hutchison, S., & Sowa, D. (1986). Perceived organizational support. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 71*(3), 500–507.  
<https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.71.3.500>
- Eisenberger, R., Rhoades Shanock, L., & Wen, X. (2020). Perceived organizational support: Why caring about employees counts. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior, 7*(1), 101-124.  
<https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-012119-044917>
- Enders, O. G., Buonomo, K., & Robertson, R. (2022). Addressing race and implicit bias in the functional behavior assessment process: A pilot study of preservice teacher training modules. *Multiple Voices for Ethnically Diverse Exceptional Learners, 22*(1), 6–23.  
<https://doi.org/10.56829/2158-396x-22.1.6>
- Ergul, G., & Cetin, S. K. (2022). Investigation of the teachers' perceptual organizational support and job satisfactions in terms of school type variable. *International Journal on New Trends in Education & their Implications (IJONTE), 13*(1).
- Estrapala, S., Bruhn, A. L., & Rila, A. (2022). Behavioral self-regulation: A comparison of goals and self-monitoring for high school students with disabilities. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders, 30*(3), 171–184. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10634266211051404>
- Fazel, M., & Newby, D. (2021). Mental well-being and school exclusion: Changing the discourse from vulnerability to acceptance. *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties, 26*(1), 78–86. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13632752.2021.1898767>

- Fisher, A. E., Fisher, B. W., & Railey, K. S. (2021). Disciplinary disparities by race and disability: using DisCrit theory to examine the manifestation determination review process in special education in the United States. *Race Ethnicity and Education, 24*(6), 755–769. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2020.1753671>
- Forman, K., & Markson, C. (2022). Students with disabilities and suspension rates: A cautionary tale for school districts. *Journal for Leadership and Instruction, 21*(1), 20-24.
- Fraley, H. E., Capp, G., & Aronowitz, T. (2020). School discipline experiences among youth with disabilities from the perspective of school nurses. *Advances in Nursing Science, 43*(4), E148–E167. <https://doi.org/10.1097/ANS.0000000000000320>
- Gage, N. A., Beahm, L., Kaplan, R., MacSuga-Gage, A. S., & Lee, A. (2020). Using positive behavioral interventions and supports to reduce school suspensions. *Beyond Behavior, 29*(3), 132–140. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1074295620950611>
- Gage, N. A., Pico, D. L., & Evanovich, L. (2022). National trends and school-level predictors of restraint and seclusion for students with disabilities. *Exceptionality, 30*(1), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09362835.2020.1727327>
- Gagnon, J. C., Kern, L., & Mathur, S. R. (2022). The council for exceptional children, division of emotional and behavioral health’s position statement on solitary confinement. *Behavioral Disorders, 47*(4), 282–291. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01987429211063625>
- Gahungu, A. (2021). Adopting non-Exclusionary discipline practices: The first steps are the most confusing. *International Journal on Social and Education Sciences, 3*(2), 379–393. <https://doi.org/10.46328/ijonses.72>

- Gibson, P., & Robles, A. (2021). School discipline and engagement of law enforcement in charter and traditional public schools. A secondary analysis of the civil rights data collection to inform policy and practice: Key findings and guiding questions that examine the experiences of students with disabilities in charter and traditional public schools. Technical Brief 4. *Center for Learner Equity*.
- Graham, G. H. (1982). *Understanding human relations: the individual, organization, and management*.
- Grasley-Boy, N. M., Gage, N. A., & Lombardo, M. (2019). Effect of SWPBIS on disciplinary exclusions for students with and without disabilities. *Exceptional Children*, 86(1), 25–39. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0014402919854196>
- Grasley-Boy, N. M., Gage, N. A., Lombardo, M., Anderson, L., & Rila, A. (2022). School-wide positive behavior interventions and supports in rural and urban california schools: Effects on fidelity of implementation and suspension outcomes. *Rural Special Education Quarterly*, 41(2), 84-94. <https://doi.org/10.1177/87568705221092766>
- Gregory, A., & Evans, K. R. (2020). The starts and stumbles of restorative justice in education: Where do we go from here? *National Education Policy Center*.
- Gregory, A., Huang, F., & Ward-Seidel, A. R. (2022). Evaluation of the whole school restorative practices project: One-year impact on discipline incidents. *Journal of School Psychology*, 95, 58–71. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsp.2022.09.003>
- Hannigan, J. D., & Hannigan, J. (2020). Best practice PBIS implementation: Evidence indicators in each tier of the PBIS champion model. *Journal of School Administration Research and Development*, 5(1), 36–43.

- Hatch, J. A. (2023). *Doing qualitative research in education settings*. State university of New York press.
- Hayward, B. A., McKay-Brown, L., & Poed, S. (2023). Restrictive practices and the ‘need’ for positive behaviour support (PBS): A critical discourse examination of disability policy beliefs. *Journal of Intellectual Disabilities*, 27(1), 170-189.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/17446295211062383>
- Homans, G. C. (1958). Social Behavior as Exchange. *American Journal of Sociology*, 63(6), 597-606. <https://doi.org/10.1086/222355>
- Huang, F. L., & Cornell, D. G. (2021). Teacher support for zero tolerance is associated with higher suspension rates and lower feelings of safety. *School Psychology Review*, 50(2-3), 388–405. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2372966x.2020.1832865>
- Hurwitz, S., Cohen, E. D., & Perry, B. L. (2021). Special education is associated with reduced odds of school discipline among students with disabilities. *Educational Researcher*, 50(2), 86–96. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X20982589>
- Husk, S. A. (2022). Cutting the idea’s gordian knot: Accepting entanglements of disability and self and embracing a “best interests” approach to disciplining students with disabilities. *Journal of Law & Education*, 51(2), 86–143.
- İlik, Ş. Ş., & Er, R. K. (2019). Evaluating parent participation in individualized education programs by opinions of parents and teachers. *Journal of Education and Training Studies*, 7(2), 76. <https://doi.org/10.11114/jets.v7i2.3936>
- Jacobsen, W. C., Pace, G. T., & Ramirez, N. G. (2019). Punishment and inequality at an early age: Exclusionary discipline in elementary school. *Social Forces*, 97(3), 973-998.  
<https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/soy072>

- Jino, M. J., & Dyaram, L. (2019). The mediating role of moral ownership in the relationship between organizational support and employees' ethical behavior: A study of higher education faculty members. *Ethics & Behavior*, 29(4), 305–319.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10508422.2017.1409628>
- Kachchhap, S. L., & Horo, W. (2021). Factors influencing school teachers' sense of belonging: An empirical evidence. *International Journal of Instruction*, 14(4), 775–790.  
<https://doi.org/10.29333/iji.2021.14444a>
- Kauffman, J. M., Hallahan, D. P., & Pullen, P. C. (Eds.). (2017). *Handbook of Special Education* (2nd ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315517698>.
- Kervick, C. T., Garnett, B., Moore, M., Ballysingh, T. A., & Smith, L. C. (2020). Introducing restorative practices in a diverse elementary school to build community and reduce exclusionary discipline: Year one processes, facilitators, and next steps. *School Community Journal*, 30(2), 155–183.
- Khanipour, H., & Fathi, E. (2020). Organizational support, participation in organizational decision-making, organizational politics, and perceived social status among faculty members: The mediating effects of status seeking styles. *Iranian Journal of Management Studies*, 13(4), 623–644. <https://doi.org/10.22059/ijms.2020.281430.673636>
- Kılınç, A. Ç., Bellibaş, M. Ş., & Bektaş, F. (2021). Antecedents and outcomes of teacher leadership: the role of teacher trust, teacher self-efficacy and instructional practice. [Antecedents and outcomes of teacher leadership] *The International Journal of Educational Management*, 35(7), 1556-1571. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJEM-04-2021-0148>

Kirkpatrick, M., Akers, J., & Rivera, G. (2019). Use of behavioral skills training with teachers: A systematic review. *Journal of Behavioral Education, 28*, 344-361.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10864-019-09322-z>

Knudsen, M. E., & Bethune, K. S. (2018). Manifestation determinations: An interdisciplinary guide to best practices. *TEACHING Exceptional Children, 50*(3), 153–160.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0040059917745653>

Kodelja, Z. (2019). Violence in schools: zero tolerance policies. *Ethics and Education, 14*(2), 247-257. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17449642.2019.1587682>

Koh, M.-S. (2022). An exploration of precursors for at-risk American public schools: The comparative behavioral profiles between children with and without disabilities. *Preventing School Failure: Alternative Education for Children and Youth, 66*(3), 247-255.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/1045988x.2022.2059430>

Kozikoğlu, İ., & Albayrak, E. N. (2022). Teachers' attitudes and the challenges they experience concerning individualized education program (IEP): A mixed method study.

*Participatory Educational Research, 9*(1), 98-115. <https://doi.org/10.17275/per.22.6.9.1>

Kurtessis, J. N., Eisenberger, R., Ford, M. T., Buffardi, L. C., Stewart, K. A., & Adis, C. S.

(2017). Perceived organizational support: A meta-analytic evaluation of organizational support theory. *Journal of management, 43*(6), 1854-1884.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206315575554>

Lake, D. F. (2022). Educators' sensemaking about seclusion and restraint in a changing regulatory context. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk (JESPAR), 27*(3), 213–238. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10824669.2021.2023541>

Leavy, P. (2020). Introduction to the oxford handbook of qualitative research, Second Edition.

*The Oxford Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 1-20.

<https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190847388.013.9>

Lemons, C. J., Sinclair, A. C., Gesel, S., Gandhi, A. G., & Danielson, L. (2019). Integrating intensive intervention into special education services: Guidance for special education administrators. *Journal of Special Education Leadership*, 32(1), 29–38.

Lenderman, K., & Hawkins, J. (2021). Out of the classroom and less likely to graduate: The relationship between exclusionary discipline and four-year graduation rates in Texas. *Texas Education Review*.

Lincoln, Y., & Guba, E. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Linick, M. A., Garcia, A. N., & Dunn-Grandpre, H. (2021). The effect of discipline reform plans on exclusionary discipline outcomes in Minnesota. REL 2021-115. *Regional Educational Laboratory Midwest*.

Locke, E. A. (1976). The nature and causes of job satisfaction. *Handbook of industrial and organizational psychology*.

MacSuga-Gage, A. S., Gage, N. A., Katsiyannis, A., Hirsch, S. E., & Kisner, H. (2021).

Disproportionate corporal punishment of students with disabilities and black and hispanic students. *Journal of Disability Policy Studies*, 32(3), 212–223.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1044207320949960>

MacSuga-Gage, A. S., Kaplan, R., Batton, B., Ellis, K., & Gage, N. A. (2022). Outcomes in rural and urban settings for students with disabilities. *Rural Special Education Quarterly*, 41(2),

61–72. <https://doi.org/10.1177/87568705221087678>

- Mansouri, M. C., Kurth, J. A., Lockman Turner, E., Zimmerman, K. N., & Frick, T. A. (2022). Comparison of academic and social outcomes of students with extensive support needs across placements. *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities*, 47(2), 111–129. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15407969221101792>
- Masoom, M. R. (2021). Educators' self-esteem: the effect of perceived occupational stress and the role of organizational support. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 35(5), 1000-1015. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJEM-11-2020-0550>
- Mayworm, A. M., Sharkey, J. D., Hunnicutt, K., & Wroblewski, A. (2021). A survey of school psychologists' attitudes, training, and involvement in discipline policy and practice: Implications for supporting equitable school discipline. *School Psychology Training & Pedagogy*, 38(1), 37–53.
- McDaniel, T. R. (2020). School law and classroom discipline: New questions about corporal punishment. *The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas*, 93(2), 58–61. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00098655.2020.1713615>
- Melloy, K. J., & Murry, F. R. (2019). A conceptual framework: Creating socially just schools for students with emotional and behavioral disabilities. *World Journal of Education*, 9(5), 113–124. <https://doi.org/10.5430/wje.v9n5p113>
- Meyer, K., Sears, S., Putnam, R., Phelan, C., Burnett, A., Warden, S., & Simonsen, B. (2021). Supporting students with disabilities with positive behavioral interventions and supports in the classroom: Lessons learned from research and practice. *Beyond Behavior*, 30(3), 169-178. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10742956211021801>
- Morgan, D. L. (1997). Focus groups as qualitative research. SAGE Publications, Inc., <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412984287>



- Nair, R. S. (2020). Core self-evaluation as a predictor of meaningful work and altruism: Perceived organizational support as a mediator. *Journal of Organisation and Human Behaviour*, 9(1&2), 1-9.
- Nese, R. N. T., Nese, J. F. T., McCroskey, C., Meng, P., Triplett, D., & Bastable, E. (2021). Moving away from disproportionate exclusionary discipline: developing and utilizing a continuum of preventative and instructional supports. *Preventing School Failure: Alternative Education for Children and Youth*, 65(4), 301–311.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1045988X.2021.1937019>
- Nichols, J. A., Nichols, W. D., & Rupley, W. H. (2020). Teacher efficacy and attributes on the implementation of tiered instructional frameworks. *International Journal of Evaluation and Research in Education (IJERE)*, 9(3), 731–742. <https://doi.org/10.11591/ijere.v9i3.20625>
- O’Neill, P. (2019). Student discipline best practices for charter schools to employ. In *National Center for Special Education in Charter Schools*. National Center for Special Education in Charter Schools.
- Pennsylvania Department of Education. (2023a). *LEA/School Dashboard*. Safe Schools Office Discipline Data Repository. <https://www.safeschools.pa.gov>
- Pennsylvania Department of Education. (2023b). *Special Education Data Reporting*. Bureau of Special Education. <https://penndata.hbg.psu.edu>
- Pennsylvania Department of Education. (2024). *Future Ready PA Index*. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. <https://futurereadypa.org>
- Pierce, H., Jones, M. S., & Gibbs, B. G. (2022). Early adverse childhood experiences and exclusionary discipline in high school. *Social Science Research*, 101, 102621.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2021.102621>

- Raj, C. (2018). Disability, discipline, and illusory student rights. *UCLA Law Review*, 65(4), 860–925.
- Ramey, D. M., & Freelin, B. N. (2023). Exploring the relationships between school suspension, ADHD diagnoses, and delinquency across different school punitive and special education climates. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 148, 106849.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chilyouth.2023.106849>
- Reed, K. N., Fenning, P., Johnson, M., & Mayworm, A. (2020). Promoting statewide discipline reform through professional development with administrators. *Preventing School Failure: Alternative Education for Children and Youth*, 64(2), 172-182.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1045988x.2020.1716674>
- Rhoades, L., & Eisenberger, R. (2002). Perceived organizational support: a review of the literature. *Journal of applied psychology*, 87(4), 698-714.  
<https://doi.org/10.1037//0021-9010.87.4.698>
- Richard, L., & Hardin, L. (2018). Suspensions and special education: An examination of disproportionate practices. *National Teacher Education Journal*, 11(2), 67–74.
- Rivera, M. O., & McKeithan, G. K. (2021). High-leverage social, emotional and behavioural practices for students with disabilities in inclusive settings. *Educational Review*, 73(4), 436– 450. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2019.1632800>
- Rizvi, R., Rizvi, A. M., & Jamal, A. (2023). The interplay of perceived organizational support, innovation at work, and burnout among teachers. *Bahria Journal of Professional Psychology*, 22(1), 38.
- Robert, C. (2020). Implementing discipline reform: One district’s experience with PBIS. *School Leadership Review*, 15(1).

- Saeed, S., & Hussain, A. (2021). The role of perceived organizational support towards teachers' work engagement. *Bulletin of Education and Research*, 43(3), 95-106.
- Saldaña, J. (2021). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publishing Inc.
- Schlesinger, T., & Schmits-Earley, M. (2021). Colorblind policy in a carceral geography: Reclaiming public education. *Youth Justice*, 21(1), 33–54.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1473225420931188>
- Shenton, A. K. (2004). Strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research projects. *Education for information*, 22(2), 63-75. <https://doi.org/10.3233/efi-2004-22201>
- Shore, L. M., & Tetrick, L. E. (1991). A construct validity study of the Survey of Perceived Organizational Support. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 76(5), 637–643.  
<https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.76.5.637>
- Simonsen, B., Freeman, J., Gambino, A. J., Sears, S., Meyer, K., & Hoselton, R. (2021). Are fewer students with disabilities suspended when schools implement PBIS? In *Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports*. Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports.
- Simonsen, B., Freeman, J., Gambino, A. J., Sears, S., Meyer, K., & Hoselton, R. (2022). An exploration of the relationship between pbis and discipline outcomes for students with disabilities. *Remedial and Special Education*, 43(5), 287–300.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/07419325211063490>

- Smith, L. C., Herbert, A., Payne, A., Grudev, N., Volkmar, S. S., Garnett, B. R., & Aguda-Brown, F. (2021). “Real meaningful change comes from building relationships”: School counselors’ experiences implementing restorative practices. *Journal of School Counseling, 19*(48).
- Stake, R. E. (2010). Qualitative research: Studying how things work.
- Stichter, J., Stormont, M., Buranova, N., Herzog, M., & O’Donnell, R. (2021). Educational and diagnostic classification of autism spectrum disorder and associated characteristics. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 51*(11), 4033–4042.  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-020-04867-9>
- Trapp, L., Gershwin, T., & Robinson, J. (2022). Honoring team decision-making during manifestation determination meetings through collaborative and proactive solutions. *Intervention in School and Clinic, 57*(3), 25–31.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/10534512211014877>
- Turan Dalli, H., & Sezgin, F. (2022). Predicting teacher organizational silence: The predictive effects of locus of control, self-confidence and perceived organizational support. *Research in Educational Administration and Leadership, 7*(1), 39–79.  
<https://doi.org/10.30828/real.931632>
- Tzucker, B. (2022). Disruptive disabilities and room clears: Rethinking the IDEA’s least restrictive environment provision. *University of Illinois Law Review, 2022*(3), 1261–1292.
- United States Department of Education. (2023). *Free Appropriate Public Education for Students With Disabilities: Requirements Under Section 504 of The Rehabilitation Act of 1973*. <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/edlite-FAPE504.html>

- United States Department of Education. (2024). *Laws and Guidance*. [Policy - ED.gov](https://www.ed.gov/policy)
- Wahman, C. L., Steele, T., Steed, E. A., & Powers, L. (2022). “No intervention, just straight suspension”: Family perspectives of suspension and expulsion. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *143*, 106678. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2022.106678>
- Walker, J. D., & Brigham, F. J. (2017). Manifestation determination decisions and students with emotional/behavioral disorders. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders*, *25*(2), 107–118. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1063426616628819>
- Walker, V. L., Carpenter, M. E., Lyon, K. J., & Button, L. (2021). A meta-analysis of paraprofessional-delivered interventions to address challenging behavior among students with disabilities. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions*, *23*(2), 68–80. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1098300720911147>
- Walters, A. (2022). Restorative justice: An opportunity for non-exclusionary discipline. *The Brown University Child and Adolescent Behavior Letter*, *38*(7), 8-8. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cbl.30642>
- Welsh, R. O. (2022). Schooling levels and school discipline: Examining the variation in disciplinary infractions and consequences across elementary, middle, and high schools. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk (JESPAR)*, *27*(3), 270–295. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10824669.2022.2041998>
- Yin, R. (2018). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods (6<sup>th</sup> ed.)*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Zafar, S., Amjad, N., & Saeed, A. (2019). Personal and organizational predictors of job satisfaction among teachers. *Putaj Humanities & Social Sciences*, *26*(1), 103–129.

- Zagona, A. L., Kurth, J. A., Lockman Turner, E., Pace, J., Shogren, K., Lansey, K., Jameson, M., Burnette, K., Mansouri, M., Hicks, T., & Gerasimova, D. (2022). Ecobehavioral analysis of the experiences of students with complex support needs in different classroom types. *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities*, 47(4), 209–228. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15407969221126496>
- Zakszeski, B., Rutherford, L., Heidelberg, K., & Thomas, L. (2021). In pursuit of equity: Discipline disproportionality and swpbis implementation in urban schools. *School Psychology*, 36(2), 122–130. <https://doi.org/10.1037/spq0000428>
- Zeng, S., Pereira, B., Larson, A., Corr, C. P., O’Grady, C., & Stone-MacDonald, A. (2021). Preschool suspension and expulsion for young children with disabilities. *Exceptional Children*, 87(2), 199–216. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0014402920949832>

## Appendix A

### IRB Approval Letter

# LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

## INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

October 10, 2023

Jenell Huska  
Breck Perry

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY23-24-322 EDUCATORS' PERCEPTIONS OF EXCLUSIONARY DISCIPLINE FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN A MANIFESTATION DETERMINATION REVIEW: A CASE STUDY

Dear Jenell Huska, Breck Perry,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) 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 no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:104(d):

Category 2.(iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:

The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

**For a PDF of your exemption letter, click on your study number in the My Studies card on your Cayuse dashboard. Next, click the Submissions bar beside the Study Details bar on the Study details page. Finally, click Initial under Submission Type and choose the Letters tab toward the bottom of the Submission Details page. Your information sheet and final versions of your study documents can also be found on the same page under the Attachments tab.**

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

Sincerely,

**G. Michele Baker, PhD, CIP**  
*Administrative Chair*  
**Research Ethics Office**

## Appendix B

### Site Approval Letter



Assistant Superintendent	Superintendent	Business Administrator
--------------------------	----------------	------------------------

July 13, 2023

Mrs. Jenell Huska  
Doctoral Student Researcher



Dear Mrs. Huska,

After careful review of your research proposal entitled A Case Study on Educators' Perceptions of Exclusionary Discipline for Students with Disabilities in a Manifestation Determination Review, I have decided to grant you permission to conduct your study at [redacted]

Check the following boxes, as applicable:

- I grant permission for Jenell Huska to contact [redacted] Professional Staff to invite them to participate in her research study.
- The requested data WILL NOT BE STRIPPED of identifying information before it is provided to the researcher.
- I am requesting a copy of the results upon study completion and/or publication.

Please feel free to contact me should you have any questions or need any clarification.

Sincerely,



Superintendent





## Appendix C

### Participant Recruitment Letter

Dear Distinguished Educator:

As a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Philosophy degree. The purpose of my research is to understand educators' perceptions when making decisions regarding exclusionary discipline for students with disabilities in a Manifestation Determination Review, and I am writing to invite you to join my study.

Participants must be a K-12 educator, administrator, or related service provider and have participated in a Manifestation Determination Review. Participants will be asked to take part in three phases. First, participants will be requested to participate in a recorded in-person or virtual open-ended interview that will take approximately 45 minutes. Participants will have the opportunity to review their transcripts for accuracy, which should take approximately 15 minutes. Second, participants will be asked to participate in a recorded in-person or virtual focus group that will last approximately 45 minutes. Third, participants will be asked to complete a 150-200 word open-ended written or typed response to a question posited by the researcher that will be provided upon their consent to participate in the study. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but participant identities will not be disclosed.

To participate, please contact me at [redacted], or at [redacted] for more information/to schedule an interview. A consent form is attached to this email. The consent document contains additional information about my research. If you choose to participate, you will need to sign the consent form and return it to me at the time of the interview.

Participation in this study is voluntary, and there is no compensation for participation.

Thank you so much for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Jenell Huska  
Doctoral Candidate

[redacted]

## Appendix D

### Participant Consent Form

#### Participant Consent Form

**Title of the Project:** Educators' Perceptions of Exclusionary Discipline for Students with Disabilities in a Manifestation Determination Review: A Case Study

**Principal Investigator:** Jenell Huska, Doctoral Candidate, School of Education, Liberty University

#### Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be a certified K-12 educator, administrator, or related service provider contracted with the [REDACTED] School District and have participated in a Manifestation Determination Review for a student with a disability. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

#### What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to understand K-12 educators' perceptions of the characteristics of students with disabilities and how their ability to implement evidence-based practices shapes their perceptions to make decisions regarding exclusionary discipline in a Manifestation Determination Review.

#### What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following:

1. **Open-Ended Interview:** This interview will take place in person or virtually, be audio recorded (in person) or audio/video recorded (virtual) and take approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour to complete. Participants will have the opportunity to review their interview transcripts for accuracy.
2. **Focus Group Interview:** The focus group will be conducted in person or virtually. The groups will include 4 to 5 educators or administrators, and the sessions will be audio recorded (in person) or video recorded (virtual) and take approximately 45 minutes to an hour to complete. Participants will have the opportunity to review their focus group transcripts for accuracy.
3. **Open-Ended Response:** Participants will be given a question regarding his or her role in a Manifestation Determination Review and asked to describe their experience in 150-200 words. This writing exercise will take approximately 30-60 minutes.

Liberty University  
IRB-FY23-24-322  
Approved on 10-10-2023

**How could you or others benefit from this study?**

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Your participation will benefit future professional development training for educators on best practices when making decisions regarding exclusionary discipline for students with disabilities. Additionally, your participation will assist researchers in identifying how to implement positive behavior supports in schools with fidelity.

**What risks might you experience from being in this study?**

The expected risks from participating in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

**How will personal information be protected?**

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher and doctoral committee members will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential by replacing names with pseudonyms.
- Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.
- Data collected from you may be used in future research studies or shared with other researchers. If data collected from you is reused or shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed beforehand.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and in a locked file cabinet and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all digital data will be deleted, and all hardcopy records will be shredded.
- Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then deleted. The researcher and members of her doctoral committee will have access to these recordings.

**Is study participation voluntary?**

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Liberty University  
IRB-FY23-24-322  
Approved on 10-10-2023

**What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?**

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

**Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?**

If you have any questions regarding this study, you may contact Jenell Huska via email at [REDACTED] or by phone at [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Breck Perry at [REDACTED].

**Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?**

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the IRB. Our physical address is Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA, 24515; our phone number is 434-592-5530, and our email address is [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

*Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.*

**Your Consent**

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

*I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.*

The researcher has my permission to audio and video record me as part of my participation in this study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Subject Name

Liberty University  
IRB-FY23-24-322  
Approved on 10-10-2023

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature & Date

Liberty University  
IRB-FY23-24-322  
Approved on 10-10-2023

## Appendix E

### Individual Interview Questions

1. How many years have you been employed as a \_\_\_\_ in this school district? IBQ
2. How many times have you been involved in a Manifestation Determination Review meeting? IBQ
3. What is your background in working with students with disabilities? CRQ
4. What types of training or professional development opportunities are offered in the district to provide information regarding students with disabilities and the characteristics of their disabilities? SQ1
5. How closely do you work with special education teachers to review plans for students with disabilities? SQ1
6. How have you been involved in the evaluation process or behavior plans for students with disabilities? SQ2
7. What benefits have you observed and experienced collaborating with educators and other stakeholders regarding best practices to support students? CRQ
8. What kind of training would you find beneficial to best support students with disabilities in your current role? SQ2
9. How could you better be supported in understanding the needs and characteristics of students with disabilities? SQ1
10. How do you advocate for students with disabilities when it comes to managing their behaviors and enforcing discipline? SQ3
11. To your knowledge, how are students with disabilities disciplined in your school/district? SQ1

12. Why do you feel you were recruited to participate in the MDR meeting? CRQ
13. How did you lend your knowledge and experience with the student(s) to support the determination of the outcome concerning the need for exclusionary discipline? CRQ
14. How does your school prepare you for the meeting? CRQ
15. What guidance was offered to support you in understanding the regulations and procedures for your role as a participant in a Manifestation Determination Review? SQ3
16. In what ways do you feel your organization could better support you in making decisions regarding discipline for students with disabilities? SQ3
17. How qualified do you feel you are in making decisions on the need for exclusionary discipline for students with disabilities? SQ3
18. How do you contribute to implementing positive behavior evidence-based practices for students with disabilities? SQ2
19. How often do you provide these supports? SQ2
20. How effective do you feel your school's approach to implementing positive behavioral supports and programs have been? SQ2
21. How is progress monitored for students with special needs who participate in positive behavior support programs or plans? SQ2
22. What additional training/education do you feel is necessary to implement evidence-based positive behavior support programs with fidelity? SQ2
23. How does your organization support educators in implementing programs/strategies to promote positive behaviors? SQ2

## Appendix F

### Focus Group Questions

1. What professional development opportunities were provided to educators prior to the implementation of positive behavior support programs and supports? SQ2
2. What are the expectations surrounding how often positive behavior support programs are offered and monitored in this school district? SQ2
3. How are programs and supports implemented with fidelity? SQ2
4. What professional development opportunities are provided to staff to inform them of the characteristics of students and their disabilities, and what possible behaviors may arise because of these disabilities? SQ1
5. What exclusionary discipline measures are enforced schoolwide/districtwide for students with disabilities? CRQ
6. How are the members assembled to participate in a Manifestation Determination Review? CRQ
7. What are the roles of each member in an MDR? CRQ
8. How are guidelines and procedures carried out during each MDR? SQ3
9. What information is reviewed during the MDR regarding the student? SQ1
10. Who would you consider to be essential members that must be present at an MDR, and are these members always present? CRQ
11. What factors may hinder the decision-making process when determining if exclusionary discipline is required for a student with a disability during an MDR? SQ3
12. How would you describe your confidence and ability levels in your role as a member of the MDR team to effectively make decisions regarding exclusionary discipline for students with disabilities? SQ3

## **Appendix G**

### **Protocol Writing Questions**

1. What challenges are presented when disciplining a student with special needs?
2. Describe your involvement in an MDR and explain how your knowledge of evidence-based practices, the student, and his or her disability affect how you make decisions in an MDR.
3. What resources or training would support your confidence in making decisions regarding exclusionary discipline for SWDs in an educational setting?



## Appendix H

### Audit Trail

Consent and Participation Information and Materials	The researcher obtained IRB approval and site permission and approval via electronic documentation and correspondence. Information and forms were distributed via email from site administration to prospective participants.
Consent Forms	Participants signed consent forms (electronically or by hand). All forms were electronically scanned and saved on a password-protected computer. The researcher collected signed consent forms before scheduling individual interviews and writing protocol. All participants received a copy of their signed consent forms.
Individual Interviews and Focus Groups	The researcher scheduled interviews and focus groups with participants by email and conducted them based on their choices. Two recording devices were used to record the interviews and focus groups. Meeting locations and times were pre-approved by all participants.
Storage of Materials and Consent Forms	Audio and video recordings were uploaded on a password-protected computer. Written memos and notes were stored in a professional notebook in a locked cabinet. Electronically typed notes, interviews, focus groups, and protocol writing submissions were printed and stored in a locked cabinet.
Data Transcription of Individual Interviews and Focus Groups	The researcher uploaded individual interviews and focus groups to the Otter.ai password-protected program for initial transcripts in a password-protected computer. The researcher reviewed each individual interview and focus group transcript and then sent it to each participant for review and confirmation before coding procedures. Individual interviews, focus groups, and protocol writing samples were printed, filed in folders, and securely stored in a locked cabinet.
Coding and Synthesis of Themes from Transcriptions	Level 1 structural coding was done by hand on hard-copy printed interviews, focus groups, and protocol writing documents and stored in folders in a locked cabinet. A Microsoft Excel spreadsheet of Level 1 descriptive coding was stored in a password-protected computer. A Microsoft Word document containing Level 2 coding in structured tables was stored in a password-protected computer. Codes were tallied and grouped to determine themes, sub-themes, and prevalence. Typed notes and memos were also stored in a password-protected computer. Written notes and memos were stored in a professional notebook and securely placed in a locked cabinet. Participants had the opportunity to read the interpretations from codes and themes and provide feedback in member checking.