

Disproportionality of Suspensions:  
An Analysis of Special Education Services in Juvenile Court School

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Masters of Arts

By  
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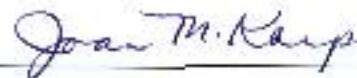
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## ABSTRACT

This research analyzes the assignment of school suspensions to two subgroups of students attending juvenile court school: general education and special education. This study draws on enrollment and discipline data to determine if school suspensions were assigned in greater proportion to students' with academic and social and emotional challenges.

It was determined approximately 20% of the student population was qualified for special education services. Additionally, it was determined that students receiving special education services were subject to a disproportionately greater amount of disciplinary exclusion than their general education peers. Based on their representation in the total school population, students in the special education subgroup were suspended an amount more than two times that of general education students. Finally, by examining the locations where suspensions occurred, it was clear that classrooms taught by long term substitutes had a greater number of suspensions than those taught by permanent teaching staff.

It was postulated that a collection and examination of suspensions would reveal information useful to school staff. This analysis could assist in the development of more effective services for all students paying particular mind to students receiving special education services.

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## Chapter One

This study examines the behavioral experience of students attending a Juvenile Court School located in the California south west. The analysis focuses specifically on the assignment of suspensions to two subgroups within the school population: general education students and students receiving special education services. This study draws on enrollment and discipline data to determine if school suspensions were assigned in greater proportion to students' with academic and social and emotional challenges.

In this chapter, I will first describe the prevalence of students receiving special education services and the incidence of disability categories in our nation's public schools. I will then discuss the structural evolution of Juvenile Court Schools in California. Finally, I will set the stage for the rest of this study by describing how this particular setting operates.

### *Introduction*

A significant number of youth in the Juvenile Justice system have education-related disabilities and are eligible for special education services under the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)<sup>1</sup>. Estimates at the site level regarding this population's size vary due to different accounting methods.

Reliable figures of public school age students who have disabilities do exist. For example, the Office of Special Education Programs at the United States Department of Education compiles prevalence data from the states into an Annual Report to Congress. These reports examine special education eligibility figures across age groups, disability categories, and ethnicity. However, within the subpopulation of incarcerated youth who have disabilities the math gets fuzzy. According to research conducted by Quinn,

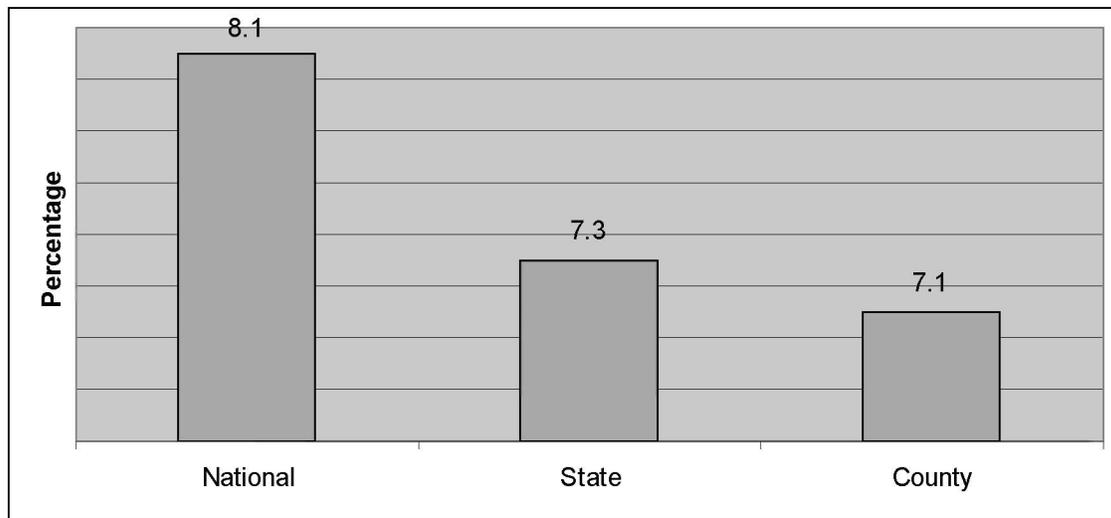
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<sup>1</sup> P.L. 108-446.

Rutherford, Leone, Osher, and Poirier (2005), the estimated prevalence of children and adolescents with disabilities in juvenile corrections ranges from 30% to 70% compared to 10% in a traditional school setting. Moreover, reliable discipline data which could be used to inform educational program administration and teaching practice in relation to this population is even more difficult to locate. Therefore, it is incumbent upon individual court schools to collect, analyze, and make meaningful use of enrollment and discipline data at the site level.

In 2000, the National percentage of public school students identified with disabilities was greater than the California state percentage. The Via County percentage was less than both National and State percentages. Figure 1 summarizes these numbers.

*Figure 1.1* Percent of public school students identified as qualifying for special education services<sup>2</sup>



Census 2000 percentages of non-institutional children and youth ages 5-20 years with disabilities.

According to the California Department of Education, in the academic year 2007-2008 there were 824,231 suspensions in the state's public schools. With a total

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<sup>2</sup> United States Census Bureau.

enrollment of 6,219,657 students, this averages out to 7.5% of the total school age population having been suspended.<sup>3</sup>

In 2004, The 28th Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of IDEA revealed that special education and related services under IDEA were received by 6,118,437 students nationally, representing 9.2 percent of the United States general population of student ages 6 through 21. This was an increase of .5 percent over the year 2000 figures and a .8 percent increase since 1995. At this rate of increase, it could be expected the percentage of students receiving special education services in 2008 is very near, at, or above 10 percent of the total population. Table 1.1 summarizes these numbers.

Table 1.1

*Services under IDEA 2004 and Percentage of Population Served*

<i>Year</i>	<i>Number of Students</i>	<i>Percentage of Students</i>
1995	5,078,841	8.4
2000	5,773,863	8.7
2004	6,118,437	9.2

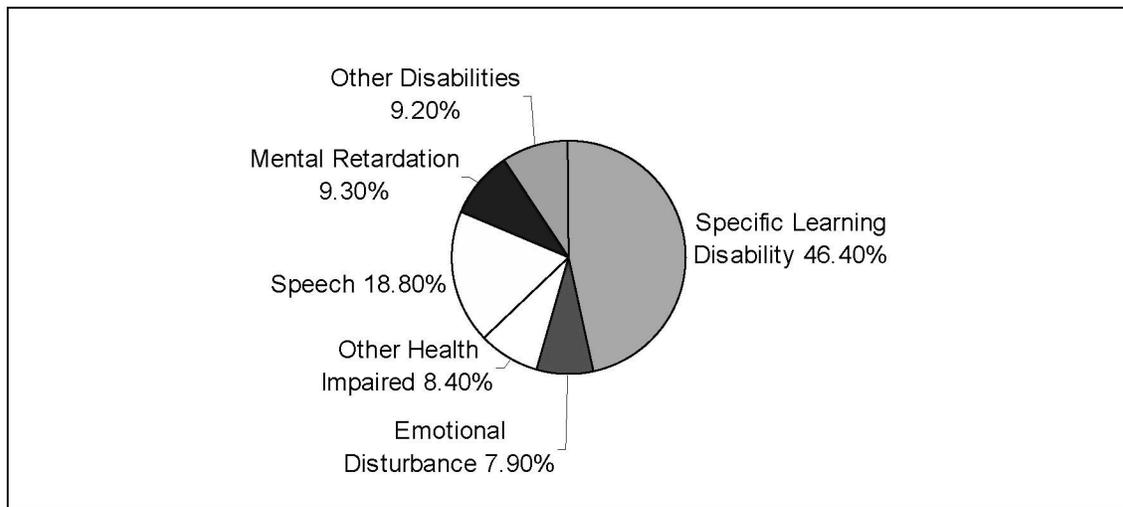
Source: U.S. Department of Education (2004), *Twenty-Eighth Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of IDEA*. U.S. Government Printing Office

Also in 2004, the 28th Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of IDEA revealed the largest disability category was specific learning disability. The next most common disability category was speech/language impairments, followed by mental retardation, other health impairments and emotional disturbance. Other disabilities

<sup>3</sup> California Department of Education Safe & Healthy Kids Program Office. [www.dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest](http://www.dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest), retrieved April 28, 2009.

combined include hearing impairments, multiple disabilities, orthopedic impairments, visual impairments, autism, deaf-blindness, traumatic brain injury, and developmental delay. Figure 1.2 summarizes these percentages.

*Figure 1.2* Disability distributions for students receiving special education and related services<sup>4</sup>



*Figure 1.2* Disability Distribution for Students Ages 6 through 21 Receiving Special Education and Related Services Under IDEA, Fall 2004

### *Background California Juvenile Court Schools*

It must be acknowledged that progress has been made in both general education and special educational programming at Juvenile Court Schools in California. On August 27<sup>th</sup> 1977, Assembly Bill 391, authored by Gary Hart, was signed into law by Governor Jerry Brown creating Juvenile Court Schools in California.

Prior to Assembly Bill 391, the responsibility of providing educational services to wards in juvenile detention facilities was that of the California Youth Authority. This

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Department of Education, (2004). *Twenty-Eighth Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of IDEA*. U.S. Government Printing Office.

body, under Welfare and Institution Code (WIC) Sections 856-861 and Section 869-890,<sup>5</sup> extended the authority of operation of juvenile detention facilities to the County Boards of Supervisors in the respective county of each facility's location. These County Boards of Supervisors would in turn assign operational responsibility to County Probation Departments, who generally contracted with a local school district to provide education services.

By the early 1970's, it was apparent the educational services provided in these settings were substandard. Programming was fragmented, geared to serve students with average ability levels, and lacked the focus of the unique needs of the court school population (Mendel, 2000). It was also recognized that this population included a significant number of students who possessed disabilities. At best, students received a satisfactory education. At worst, students received little or no education (Taylor & Hughes, 2003).

With the passage of Assembly Bill 391, County Boards of Education assumed responsibility for school administration. This shift to a coordinated working relationship between county probation departments and county offices of education greatly improved the quality of services. The passage of the bill established a minimum school day, required the year-round operation of school, implemented a school board approved course of study, and mandated school districts accept course credit from Juvenile Court Schools (Uslan, 2004).

During this same time period, a major advancement in educational programming for students with disabilities occurred when on November 29, 1975, President Gerald Ford signed the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (Public Law 94-192),

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<sup>5</sup> California Juvenile Laws and Rules, 2000.

currently known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). While this legislation improved access to educational programs for students with disabilities, special education services in the Juvenile Court Schools still lacked.

Through the 1980's and 1990's both special education and court schools made steady progress in their ability to positively affect the future of students. With the reauthorization of IDEA 1997, and subsequent reauthorization in 2004, discipline concerns regarding students receiving special education services were addressed. Among the amendments to IDEA 1997 affecting discipline, the manifestation determination process and continuation of services rule were important in their implication for students receiving special education services. Determining whether the student's conduct is a manifestation of his or her disability and whether the conduct is part of a larger pattern was added to the law. For students who exhibit violent behavior, are found with illegal drugs, or are in possession of weapons, the manifest determination process helps determine how a school district can discipline students receiving special education services. It assists in answering the question of whether the student is treated like a non special education student in regard to discipline decisions, or one who is not accountable for his or her actions. If the student's action is deemed not a manifestation of his or her disability, the student can be suspended for as long as school policy says a non special education student would be suspended. The difference, however, is the special education student must receive educational services after the first ten days of the suspension under the continuation of services rule.

In 2004, the reauthorization of IDEA added serious bodily injury as an offense that may allow administration to place a student in an alternative setting up to 45 days

without manifest determination. Now, schools not only must ask if the behavior was a manifestation of disability, but did the school implement the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) properly. This would make schools consider whether the IDEA provision including behavior plans to teach replacement behavior was adhered to. With the passage of California Assembly Bill 602 in 1997, which allowed Juvenile Court Schools access to Special Education Local Plan Area funding, juvenile court school sites became better able financially to provide special education services (Canady, 2007). Where school officials may have at one time used disciplinary measures to exclude children with disabilities, due process protections in IDEA 1997 now strengthened guaranteed access to curriculum and services. And, the improved access to special education funding provided by Assembly Bill 602 increased the degree of educational opportunity to all juvenile court school students.

#### *Statement of the problem*

As mentioned in the previous discussion, it is believed that many more youth than are identified may have some sort of disability and could be eligible for special education services. Estimates vary considerably with regard to the number of youth with disabilities who are in the juvenile justice system (Rutherford, Bullis, Anderson, & Griller-Clark, 2002). The reasons for this discrepancy among the correctional population include: inconsistent and inaccurate enrollment and service calculations, inconsistent definitions of disabilities, inadequate special education screening processes upon entry to juvenile facilities, failure or difficulty obtaining prior school records, and the mobility of this population (Rutherford et al., 2002). Here, mobility refers to the transient nature of student attendance at school.

### *Suspension offenses*

This school saw an array of suspension offenses. The suspensions at the target school occurred in nine different categories at this site during 2007-2008. These suspension categories are defined in Education Code sections 48900, 48900.2, and 48900.4 and are displayed in Figure 1.3.

*Figure 1.3* Suspension offenses

<p><b>48900</b></p> <p><b>(a)</b></p> <p>(1) Caused, attempted to cause, or threatened to cause <i>physical injury</i> to another person; or</p> <p>(2) Willfully used force or <i>violence</i> upon the person of another, except in self-defense.</p> <p><b>(f)</b> Caused or attempted to cause <i>damage to school property</i> or private property.</p> <p><b>(g)</b> <i>Stole or attempted to steal</i> school property or private property.</p> <p><b>(i)</b> Committed an obscene act or engaged in habitual <i>profanity or vulgarity</i>.</p> <p><b>(k)</b> <i>Disrupted school activities</i> or otherwise willfully defied the valid authority of school officials or other school personnel.</p> <p><b>(o)</b> <i>Harassed, threatened, or intimidated</i> a pupil who is a complaining witness or witness in a school disciplinary proceeding.</p> <p><b>48900.2</b> Committed <i>sexual harassment</i>.</p> <p><b>48900.4</b> Engaged in <i>harassment, threats, or intimidation</i> against school district personnel or pupils.</p>
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### *Definition of Terms*

Minors at the Juvenile Justice Complex (JJC) are served by 3 primary agencies. County Probation is responsible for the correctional operations of the facility. County Behavioral Health provides mental health counseling services. The County Office of

Education implements the school program. The facility is divided into two physical sections: Detention and Commitment.

The Detention portion of the facility houses wards or dependent youth *going through the court process*; or, in temporary custody in need of short-term removal from the community and/or awaiting transfer to other jurisdictions or suitable placement facilities.

Students are housed and attend classes segregated according to gang affiliation or “get along” status. Those of “get along” status do not claim a gang and mix more readily into a general population. Detention has a daily point system that minors earn through behavior in the housing pod and effort in school.

The Commitment portion of the facility houses wards or dependent youth *servicing court imposed commitments* of up to two years. The Commitment program is based on a more complex system of levels that minors earn through behavior in the housing pod, effort in school, and participation in groups (e.g., Drug and Alcohol Recovery, Anger Management). The first location a student enters upon being assigned to commitment is the west housing unit which is divided into four separate living/schooling pods. Here, segregated, students begin at the bronze level. Once achieving the silver level, students move through desegregated housing. Upon earning gold level, students are transferred to the entirely desegregated south housing unit. They enter at the gold level with the goal of achieving honors level. It is possible to drop down a level to silver in this unit. A fall to bronze level returns the minor to the west unit where they must begin the process again.

These levels are based on a system of points earned through behavior in the housing units, school, groups, and various assignments completed throughout the day.

Minors are graded daily by Probation Department housing unit staff and Presence School teaching staff. Grades are based on the following: AM/PM Behavior, Work/Effort, Bed Room, Personal Hygiene, School, Community Service, and Employment. The daily grade is figured by the midnight Probation Department Staff and posted the following morning. A minor's bedtime for the following night depends on that grade. A level is determined by averaging the daily grades earned from Thursday to Wednesday. Weekly levels may change depending upon the point average for that week.

### *Research Question/s*

The purpose of this research was to examine student prevalence and suspension patterns. The following questions guide this research.

1. What is the prevalence of students with and without disabilities at the Juvenile Court School setting?
2. What is the relationship of suspensions between non special education students and those qualified for special education services in this Juvenile Court School setting?
3. What factors, if any, contribute to suspension patterns?

It was postulated that a collection and analysis of school disciplinary actions, specifically suspensions, would reveal information useful to school staff which could assist in the development of more effective services for all students paying particular mind to students receiving special education services.

### *Research Design*

This study used quantitative analysis of documents. Data were summarized using descriptive statistics. A critical comparison and analysis was conducted to answer the research questions presented.

### *Theoretical/Conceptual Framework*

Several theories dominate discussions of the higher rates of students with learning disabilities in the juvenile delinquent population. Some postulate that delinquent behavior is the result of the presence of a learning disability. Among them are the school failure theory, susceptibility theory, and differential treatment theory.

The School Failure Theory suggests delinquent behavior is a secondary result of the disability. The disability is thought to lead to school failure. Poor sense of self contributes to behavior causing consequences (e.g., school suspension). Unstructured time away from school offers many more opportunities for further delinquent behavior (Murray, 1976). According to this theory, learning disability leads to school failure, which leads to a negative self-image, which in turn results in school dropout and delinquency.

The Susceptibility Theory suggests delinquency stems from behaviors that are a direct result of the defining characteristics of the disability. Characteristics (personal traits, cognitive deficits) lead to lack of impulse control, inability to anticipate consequences or actions, irritability, and poor social perception (Murray, 1976). According to this theory, learning disabilities are frequently accompanied by socially troublesome personality characteristics which present as acting out, delinquent behaviors.

The Differential Treatment Theory suggests there is little difference between the criminal behavior of youth who are not disabled and youth who are disabled. However, certain personality traits that result from the learning disability cause these youth to frustrate authority figures and be treated differently. This ultimately results in overrepresentation of incidences of arrest, adjudication, and punishment (Larson, 1988).

According to this theory, miscommunication between authority figures and youth often results in harsher treatment for those youth with disabilities.

### *Limitations*

This site based study provides data that can be used for program development and additional research. The primary limitation of this study was that the sample comes from a particular slice in time and it comes from a particular institution. Generalizations applied to similar populations at other facilities should be made only cautiously.

### *Significance of Project*

Disabilities can affect children's emotional health. National data indicate that children with disabilities are more likely than other children to be sad, unhappy, or depressed; 31% for children with a disability, compared with 17% for other children (Center for Disease Control, 1999). This, compounded with the additional circumstance of incarceration, makes the task of educational programming for students with learning disabilities in such a setting all the more disconcerting. Improving our knowledge of the number of incarcerated youth with disabilities and their behaviors while in the correctional setting may assist educators, mental health, and probation to develop more effective services.

To this point, at this site, no disaggregation of discipline data has occurred. Through a reflective analysis of discipline data, it may be possible to identify suspension patterns. Insight into the behavior of students and school discipline in this setting could increase the likelihood of positive academic outcomes for all students.

Therefore, in summary, this research focuses on these questions:

1. What is the prevalence of students with and without disabilities at the Juvenile Court School setting?
2. What is the relationship of suspensions between non special education students and those qualified for special education services in this Juvenile Court School setting?
3. What factors, if any, contribute to suspension patterns?

## Chapter Two

### Literature Review

In this chapter, I review relevant research relating to the prevalence of students receiving special education services in the juvenile corrections setting, the effect of school exclusion on students, and teacher variables which may impact classroom culture that can lead to suspensions. Studying the experience of students attending juvenile court schools requires the integration of research relating to the population who attends school in this unique setting, school suspension as a disciplinary measure, and teachers who staff juvenile court schools.

Each of the delinquency theories I explore postulates a direct relationship between disabilities and delinquency. If they hold merit, it could be expected that students with learning disabilities would have a greater representation among the juvenile court school population than non learning disabled. Nor would it be a surprise that they would have a more difficult experience in this unique setting. To state that delinquency may result from learning disability is a bold claim which demands considerate examination.

#### *Population*

Very often, the youth housed in our state's correctional facilities are the most socially and academically marginalized in our nation's school systems (Brown, 2007). Among them exists a population of students operating from an additional disadvantage. This population's educational needs are greater than their typical peers' due to social and emotional and academic disabilities.

Researchers generally agree that students with disabilities are overrepresented in the juvenile justice system. However, estimates of the prevalence of students with

disabilities in correctional facilities vary considerably (Perryman, DiGangi, & Rutherford, 1989). Here, prevalence refers to how many people in a given population have disabilities (Rutherford, Bullis, Anderson, & Griller-Clark, 2002). According to research conducted by Quinn, Rutherford, Leone, Osher, and Poirier (2005), the estimated prevalence of children and adolescents with disabilities in juvenile corrections ranges from 30% to 70%. In a study conducted by Shippen (2004), youth with disabilities represent approximately 38% to 45% of the students incarcerated in our Nation's juvenile justice system. Finally, Leone (1997) reports that more than one in three youths who enter correctional facilities have previously received special education services which is a considerably higher percentage of youths with disabilities than is found in public elementary and secondary schools.

The researchers cited above all agree that the prevalence of youth with disabilities in the correctional population is at least three times the national average of all school age youth (9.2%). However, the estimate range which these researchers present varies. Some suggest the prevalence is as great as seven times the national average due to a failure of students with undiscovered disabilities being identified and counted. Further, Quinn and her colleagues (2005) found additional reasons for the discrepancies in disability prevalence estimates of students with disabilities in the juvenile justice system. These included inconsistent definitions of disabilities, difficulties in obtaining prior school records, and litigation in juvenile corrections increasing the numbers identified and served (Quinn et al., 2005).

The need to achieve in school is adopted and aspired to by all (Cohen, 1955). The school failure theory postulates that the need to achieve through academic success for

students with disabilities goes unfulfilled (Murray, 1976). This leads to a negative self image and disengagement from school. Unstructured time away from school results in youth with learning disabilities seeking out delinquent-prone peer groups to satisfy increased needs for recognition and achievement (Murray, 1976).

The difficulties in determining who is or who may be eligible for special education services underscores the importance of effective screening processes for students when first enrolled at juvenile court schools. It further emphasizes the need for regular analysis of population data to inform school administrative and teaching practice. An accurate account of student population from which the prevalence of students with disabilities can be determined could assist in the commitment and planning of educational resources and services.

### *Suspension*

The term school discipline refers to students complying with a code of behavior often known as the school rules (Stage, 1997). Among other things, these rules may set out the expected standards of social behavior. The term may also be applied to the punishment that is the consequence of transgression of the code of behavior (Stage, 1997). For this reason, the use of school discipline sometimes means punishment for breaking school rules rather than behaving within the school rules.

According to Skiba and Knesting (2001), school exclusion remains one of the most common disciplinary responses to behavior which falls outside acceptable boundaries; yet, is not considered an effective strategy for improving problem behavior. In their study, Achilles, McLaughlin, and Croninger (2007) found that suspension and expulsion are widely used to exclude students with and without disabilities who present

problem behaviors in school, despite evidence associating these methods with high ecological stress and problematic developmental outcomes. In fact, exclusion contributes to a gradual process of academic and social disengagement that increases the probability of subsequent disciplinary exclusions, academic failure, and drop out (Achilles et al., 2007).

It can not be denied there are times when school exclusion is necessary. The immediate safety and security of those on campus must be a priority. However, it should be recognized that school exclusion is a powerful form of discipline and can have a far lasting effect; particularly on those who experience it more often. Studies indicate that suspension is used disproportionately with students who are identified as having a disability or low academic competence (Skiba & Knesting, 2001). Disproportionality means that there are more or fewer children from a particular group who are experiencing a given situation than we would expect, based on the group's representation in the general population (Oswald, 2006). Achilles, McLaughlin, and Croninger (2007) support the claim that disciplinary exclusion disproportionately affects students with disabilities. In particular, students with learning and behavior disabilities are more prone to displaying behaviors (e.g., inability to self-regulate, misinterpretation of social cues) that may lead to disciplinary actions. This disproportionate exclusion among students in certain disability groups has resulted in students with emotional and behavioral disorders and learning disabilities being suspended or expelled at rates that double or even triple rates for the school population as a whole (Achilles, McLaughlin, & Croninger, 2007).

Thus, the research suggests that those students with perhaps the greatest need for enhanced supports as a result of their academic and social disadvantages are most likely

to experience disciplinary exclusion. This may support the susceptibility theory which takes the position that negative social-personality characteristics are specific social characteristics that increase the likelihood of delinquent behavior (Larson, 1988). That is, students with disabilities find themselves in trouble more often because they are low in social skillfulness.

### *Variables*

Generally, the aim of any teacher is to create a safe and happy learning environment in the classroom. Classrooms where a teacher is unable to maintain order can lead to lower achievement and higher rates of exclusion (Christle, Nelson, & Jolivette, 2004). That the use of suspension has little positive effect on either behavioral or academic achievement competes with the continual use of school exclusion by certain schools and teachers.

Classroom management is a critical component of instruction every teacher must employ effectively to establish a safe, productive learning environment. In a study conducted by Huochins, Shippen, and Cattret (2004), permanent juvenile justice teaching staff reported being frequently stressed with student behavior as the top stressor. Stress, caused by how teachers interact with students and the manageability of their classrooms, suggests that behavioral concerns are the most problematic for teachers in the juvenile justice setting. This challenge for veteran teachers would seem compounded for beginning teachers or itinerant substitutes.

Due to its year round operational nature, substitutes play a significant role at the school under study. Here, teachers are contracted for a 182 day work year; however, the school operates an average of 241 days per year. While teachers may work over contract

totaling a maximum of 224 days, this still leaves a minimum of 17 days per teacher where a substitute is required. With a total of 16 teachers, this is a minimum of 272 substitute days. This figure does not account for illness or unforeseen absences and it is rare that any teacher at the site works a 224 day school year. This brings the actual substitute days to a substantially larger figure.

There is any number of methods with which to form a comprehensive discipline strategy for an entire school or a particular class. Presence School has a rigid code of behavior due in part to the correctional nature of the facility. Many freedoms (e.g., unsupervised breaks, movement within the classroom) found in a traditional school are limited here. But, regardless of the specific rules and classroom management strategies used, all are dependent upon clear lines of communication working best between educators who have a consistent working relationship with their subject (Houchins, Shippen, & Cattret 2004). Unfortunately, substitute teachers work from the disadvantage of not knowing their students. Finding students unmanageable, they may not enforce discipline consistently and resort to excluding individuals as a way of maintaining order.

This may support the differential treatment explanation which asserts that although delinquents who are not disabled and those who are disabled engage in comparable behaviors, the police, courts, juvenile corrections, social workers, and others respond very differently to delinquent youth with disabilities (Larson, 1988). For example, odd behavior and poor communication makes interaction frustrating and even intolerable for less understanding figures of authority. This assertion could be extended to teaching staff at juvenile court schools. At juvenile court school, as at many schools, substitutes typically have little knowledge of the students with whom they work. This

rapport is especially important when the students with disabilities in their charge have been found less socially effective and more impulsive.

In order to be effective, the best teachers are those who are well trained and supported by their organization. Unfortunately, funding for certain school programs precludes the hiring or retention of the most qualified individuals. Instances where schools are unable or unwilling to offer a traditional contract for full time teaching employment are not unusual. This may result in the inability to hire the best people for the job. It is critical that consistent teaching staff instruct at our juvenile court schools regardless of the transient nature of the juvenile offender. When substitutes are necessary, it must be recognized some are better than others. I agree with Shippen, who states, "Influential contacts and long term effects can arise from brief encounters" (2004, p. 103).

In summary, research on school suspension in the correctional setting is lacking. Specifically, the effectiveness of school suspensions on reducing disruptive behavior has not been confirmed and requires more analysis. Regardless of the delinquency theory subscribed to, it appears probable that academic problems could foster behavior problems resulting in exclusionary disciplinary practices which remove students from academic instruction. This exclusion could in turn perpetuate a failure cycle in which a student falls further behind academically and receives fewer opportunities to learn appropriate behaviors (Christle, Nelson, & Jolivette, 2004). In this light, teacher practice can be seen as an important variable. Those with less knowledge and experience may be quicker to dismiss students for inappropriate behavior rather than attempt to teach alternative

behaviors. Whether the pathway continues as chronic disciplinary problems in school and leads to delinquency and incarceration requires more study.

## Chapter Three

### Method

To address the research questions, I reviewed publicly available national, state, and county data and examined site level records.

In this chapter, I will first describe the setting and students. Then I will introduce common methods used to measure population totals. Finally, I will discuss the procedure by which comparisons between subgroups were made.

#### *Setting*

The school site under study, which I will refer to as Presence, is a Court and Community school serving students of Via County. It is an accredited school program administered by the Via County Office of Education. Presence serves male and female students being held in detention and commitment. Detention students are wards or dependent youth going through the court process; or, in temporary custody in need of short-term removal from the community and/or awaiting transfer to other jurisdictions or suitable placement facilities. Commitment students are serving court imposed sentences of up to two years.

Via County is northwest of Los Angeles County. Its population of 742,000 makes it the 12th most populated county in the state of California. The median household income in the county consistently exceeds national and state levels at an estimated \$61,944. 63.8% of households in the county have an income of \$35,000 or more. Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores of students in this county have consistently exceeded both State and National averages for the past 10 years.<sup>6</sup> There are three community colleges, a newly established California State University Campus, an

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<sup>6</sup> [www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov)

independent four-year liberal arts and graduate institution, and branch and satellite campus operations of California State University and the University of California located in the county.

The County Office of Education (COE) Special Education Department provides special education services to the 21 school districts in the county. This includes 58 special day classes on 22 different school sites throughout the county. The department serves students with developmental delays and students with emotional disturbances. Each student qualified to receive special education services has an Individualized Educational Program (IEP). This is a plan developed by a team, including the parent(s) of each child, to address that student's individual needs. Additionally, as determined by the IEP team, support services may be provided in the areas of speech therapy, occupational therapy, vision services, nursing services, psychological services, and translation services. Resource Specialist services are provided in the Court and Community School Program.<sup>7</sup>

All classrooms align curriculum goals with the California content standards and participate in state testing programs focusing on the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE). During the period of time studied, there were 14 classrooms with 12 full time general education teachers, two long term substitutes, and two Special Education teachers. The two special education teachers, Resource Specialists, provide services to students on their caseloads in an inclusive "push in" model. Here, instructional inclusion is designed to meet the student's academic IEP goals in the general education setting. This is accomplished by using the standard curriculum with accommodations and

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<sup>7</sup> [www.vcoe.org](http://www.vcoe.org)

modifications and in some special cases using a parallel curriculum. The student's IEP goals are often dovetailed with the standard curriculum being taught.

### *Student Population*

Presence Court School provides educational services to students ranging in age from 10 to 19 years old serving both general education students and those qualified to receive special education services from throughout Via County. During the year under study, the school was 18.2 % female and 81.7 % male. Student grade levels ranged from sixth to twelfth. 3.8 % of students were in grade eight or lower. 8.8 % of students were in grade nine. 17.9 % of students were in grade ten. 25.9% of students were in grade eleven. 43.3 % of students were in grade twelve. Several ethnicities were represented in the student population. Asians represented .002% of the student population. American Indians represented 1.2% of the student population. Pacific Islanders represented 1.7% of the student population. African Americans represented 3.4% of the student population. White Non Hispanics represented 23.5% of the student population. Hispanics represented 69.5% of the student population.

### *Data Sources*

Enrollment and discipline records served as the participatory data set. Data for this study were collected for the 2007-2008 academic year. The data were derived from both publicly available sources and site based records. The first such measure is the California Basic Educational Data System (CBEDS). It is a single annual collection of data from county offices of education and school districts. It occurs the first Wednesday in October each year designated as CBEDS Information Day. The purpose of CBEDS is to collect information on student and staff demographics at school sites throughout the

state. The data describes the staff characteristics, student demographics, and enrollment by grade levels, staffing levels, and other demographic information *on that day*. Data are used by the California Department of Education (CDE) to produce state and federal reports and to compute funding for many programs. After CBEDS data are reviewed and certified, data are available to educational institutions and the general public through the CDE's Data and Statistics Web site.<sup>8</sup>

The second measure is Unduplicated Enrollment. This measure involves a count by the school of the enrollment of a student only once during the academic year regardless of how many times they are reenrolled. For example, a minor commits a crime or violates probation, is booked into the facility, and is enrolled at this school in September. He attends school here for one month before being released. In March, he reoffends, is rebooked into the facility, and is reenrolled at this school. At the end of the school year, this individual student is counted as only 1 enrollment. The individual student is not counted more than once despite how many times they were reenrolled.

The third enrollment measure is Duplicated Enrollment. This measure involves counting by the school each enrollment of a student during the school year. For example, a minor commits a crime or violates probation, is booked into the facility, and is enrolled at this school in September. He attends school for one month before being released. In March, he reoffends, is rebooked into the facility, and is reenrolled at this school. At the end of the school year, this individual student is counted as 2 enrollments. The individual student is in other words counted as many times as they were enrolled.

To gather Suspension Data, the Uniform Management Information and Reporting System (UMIRS) is maintained by the California Department of Education. It collects

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<sup>8</sup> [www.cde.ca.gov](http://www.cde.ca.gov)

federally required suspension, expulsion, and truancy data from local educational agencies (LEAs) using the Consolidated Application (ConApp). The ConApp is used by the California Department of Education to distribute categorical funds from various state and federal programs to county offices and school districts throughout California. It is submitted each June by the County Office of Education and is used by the California Department of Education to assist in the determination and distribution of categorical funds from various state and federal programs to county offices, school districts, and direct-funded charter schools throughout California.

At this site, hard copies of all suspensions are placed alphabetically into a three ring binder in the school office by school year. At Presence, suspension forms are accompanied by an additional Probation Department required incident report. It is completed in detail by the reporting party and given to Probation Department for their records. Student points and levels may be impacted per Probation Department determination.

#### *Procedure*

*Target groups.* Identifying this student population was a necessary first step. To establish who attended this school during the 2007-2008 academic year a record review comparing data from CBEDS enrollment, county unduplicated enrollment, and county duplicated enrollment was conducted.

First, school enrollment figures from CBEDS day 2007 were used to identify the total school population, those qualified for special education services, and the non special education student population. Second, school enrollment figures from county maintained data source, Zangle Front Office, were used to identify the total unduplicated and

duplicated enrollment for the entire school and those qualified for special education services, and the non special education student population (i.e., the two subgroups categories).

The identified subgroup totals, divided by a whole school population reached using the respective accounting method, established the percentage of the entire school population each subgroup represents. Comparing subgroup percentages revealed the difference with which enrollment occurred.

*Suspension.* All suspension offenses occurred during the instructional day and were reported in writing by a teacher. In each instance, the school principal met with the student to discuss the incident and inform him or her of the suspension. Additionally, the student's parents were notified by telephone the same day then sent a copy of the suspension report through the mail.

Suspension data reported on ConApp 2007 was examined. It provided the total number of suspensions school-wide and the category of each suspension offense. The school maintained list of site suspensions identifying: offense, date, person/location reporting, student, and grade level was cross-referenced against enrollment. Table 3.1 describes the suspension offense definitions.

Table 3.1

*Suspension Offense and Description*

<i>Offense</i>	<i>Description</i>
Fighting	Physical injury to another person
Property Damage	Damage to school or private property
Stealing	Stole or attempted to steal school or private property
Obscene act	Committed obscene act, habitual profanity, or vulgarity
Disruption	Willfully defied the authority of school officials
Threat/Intimidation of Student	Against a witness in a school disciplinary proceeding
Sexual Harassment	Committed sexual harassment
Threat/Intimidation of Staff	Against school district personnel

Through this manner, two populations emerged: General Education Suspended and Special Education Suspended. For those receiving special education services, the qualifying disability was documented using site level special education records. These became the subgroups between which proportionality was analyzed determining if those receiving special education services and committing suspension offenses varied from their suspended general education peers.

To determine proportionality, a comparison was made of subgroup suspension percentage in each offense category. Percentages were obtained by dividing the number of suspensions attributed to each subgroup in each suspension offense category by its respective subgroup population total. Comparing percentages revealed the difference with which suspensions were assigned to each subgroup in each suspension offense.

*Suspension Patterns.* Examining each completed suspension form provided the opportunity to identify significant patterns for suspensions. The variables that I analyzed included location of incident, date, and teacher status (i.e., permanent or substitute). These data were cross-tabulated and analyzed to detect patterns in suspensions at the school and across subgroups.

## Chapter Four

### Results

In this chapter I present the results of this study. I first discuss the enrollment data identifying who comprised the Juvenile Court School population at this site during the 2007-2008 year. Second, I present the suspension data as applied to the subgroups of focus. Last, variables which could factor into suspensions are discussed.

*Research Question 1: What is the prevalence of students with and without disabilities at the Juvenile Court School setting?*

This juvenile court school serves a large number of students, both special education and general education, from around the county each year. The reported figures differ depending upon which attendance accounting measure is used. If counting individuals across the school year, the unduplicated measure is most representative of the student population. It counts each individual student enrolled one time. The duplicated measure produces a larger figure because rather than counting individuals, it counts enrollments. When a student returns to the facility and is reenrolled at Presence, they are counted again. The CBEDS measure yields the smallest figure. It serves as a snapshot counting individuals only on one day during the year. These results are depicted in Table 4.1.

The three accounting measures reveal similar general education and special education population proportions as compared to total school population. Both are within three percentage points of each other, with general education around 80% and special education 20% of school population total. But, the actual number of students differs dramatically. The unduplicated total of 1,054 students reveals how many different

individuals attended this school. It is much less than the duplicated total 1,728 enrollments. The difference between these totals represents recidivism resulting in student reenrollment. Regardless of the measure used, the general education to special education proportion remains consistent.

Table 4.1

*Total Youth Educated at Juvenile Hall per Attendance Measure*

Attendance Measure	<i>General Education</i>		<i>Special Education</i>		<i>Total</i>
	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent</i>	
CBEDS	150	79.36	39	20.63	189
Unduplicated	871	83.11	183	17.36	1054
Duplicated	1402	81.13	326	18.86	1728

Number – of students in subgroup  
 Percentage – of total school population

The percentage of various students with disabilities was analyzed using the three combined accounting measures. Table 4.2 depicts the percentage of the total school population.

Both unduplicated and duplicated accounting measures identified students in these six disability classifications. However, the CBEDS accounting measure failed to identify any students eligible under Mental Retardation or Hard of Hearing. While students qualified to receive special education services under these two categories did attend Presence School during the 2008-2009 school year, they were not in attendance on CBEDS day; therefore, their representation is not reflected by this accounting measure. Further, the percentage of students with Emotional Disturbance identified by the CBEDS

accounting measure appears inflated relative to the true percentage over the course of the year. The percentage of individuals served with Emotional Disturbance over the school year is only half the figure reported on CBEDS day.

Table 4.2

*Disability Classifications as a Percentage of Total Juvenile Hall Population per Accounting Measure*

Disability Classification	<i>CBEDS</i>	<i>Unduplicated</i>	<i>Duplicated</i>
Specific Learning Disability	12.16	11.32	12.90
Emotional Disturbance	6.34	3.96	4.05
Other Health Impairment	1.58	1.03	.98
Speech	.5	.37	.23
Mental Retardation	0	.18	.23
Hard of Hearing	0	.09	.05

Next, I analyzed the disability distribution as a percentage of all youth eligible under IDEA at the school. Unduplicated and Duplicated counts are again consistent with one another as they were when viewed as a percentage of Total Juvenile Hall Population. Again, the CBEDS accounting measure presents the population total very differently. The CBEDS data presents the population with emotional disturbance at over 30% of the total population. This is an accurate figure on CBEDS day. But, over the entire school year, only 21% percent of the individuals receiving special education services were classified as Emotionally Disturbed. This is displayed in Table 4.3.

Not displayed, but notable, are the male and female percentages of students receiving special education services identified with Emotional Disturbance. Among the male special education population, 17.5% were qualified as Emotionally Disturbed. Among the female special education population, 60% were qualified as Emotionally Disturbed.

Table 4.3

*Disability Distribution as a Percentage of All Youth Served Under IDEA per Accounting Measure*

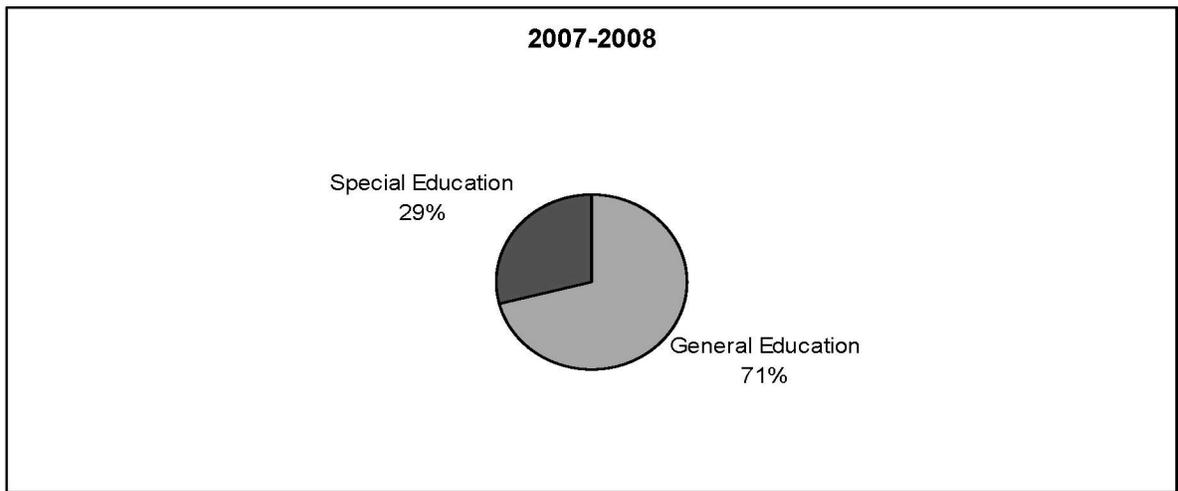
Disability Classification	<i>CBEDS</i>	<i>Unduplicated</i>	<i>Duplicated</i>
Specific Learning Disability	58.97	65.21	68.40
Emotional Disturbance	30.76	21.37	21.47
Other Health Impaired	7.69	5.97	5.21
Speech	2.56	2.17	1.22
Mental Retardation	0	1.08	1.22
Hard of Hearing	0	.54	.30

*Research Question 2: What is the relationship of suspensions between non special education students and those qualified for special education services in this Juvenile Court School setting?*

There were 105 suspensions school wide at this site during the 2007-2008 academic years. 75 of these suspensions were assigned to general education students while 30 of these suspensions were assigned to a student receiving special education services. The percentage attributed to each subgroup is displayed in Figure 4.1. General

education students were involved in 71% of the suspensions at Presence while special education students were involved in 29%. Considering that the highest total school population percentage of special education students using any of the three attendance measures was only 20.63% (CBEDS), the number of suspensions attributed to the special education subgroup is significant.

*Figure 4.1* School Suspensions by Sub Grouping



Suspensions occurred in each of the offense categories displayed in Table 4.4. Both populations offended in three of these suspension offense categories: fighting, disruption/defiance, and threat/intimidation of pupil. In other offense categories, only general education students were involved.

Table 4.4

*Number of Suspensions per Subgroup by Offense*

Offense	<i>General</i>	<i>Special</i>	Subtotal
	<i>Education</i>	<i>Education</i>	
Fighting	50	24	74
Property Damage	1	0	1
Stealing	1	0	1
Obscene Act	3	0	3
Disruption/Defiance	15	5	20
Threats/Intimidation Peers	2	1	3
Sexual Harassment	2	0	2
Threats/Intimidation Staff	1	0	1
Total	75	30	105

The three shared suspension offense categories (fighting, disruption/defiance, and threat/intimidation of pupil) were further examined. Respective to subgroup population as a percentage of the whole school population, students receiving special education services were suspended in greater proportion in each shared suspension category.

A suspension was served for the offense of fighting by an individual qualified for special education services +2.27 times that of a suspended general education student. A suspension was served for the offense of disruption/defiance by an individual qualified for special education services +1.57 times that of a suspended general education student. A suspension was served for the offense of intimidation/threat of a pupil by an individual

qualified for special education service +2.45 times that of a general education student. In all three offense categories, these data clearly indicate that students receiving special education services were subject to exclusionary discipline in greater proportion based on their representation as a percentage of the total school population than their general education peers. Table 4.5 depicts these results.

Table 4.5

*Subgroup Suspension Proportions by Suspension Offense*

Offense	<i>Gen Ed</i>		<i>Sped</i>		Total	Proportion +/-
	#	%	#	%		
Fighting	50	5.7	24	12.97	74	+2.27 Sped
Disruption	15	1.71	5	2.70	20	+1.57 Sped
Intimidation	2	.22	1	.54	3	+2.45 Sped

# number of students suspended  
 % percentage of subgroup suspended  
 + more  
 - less

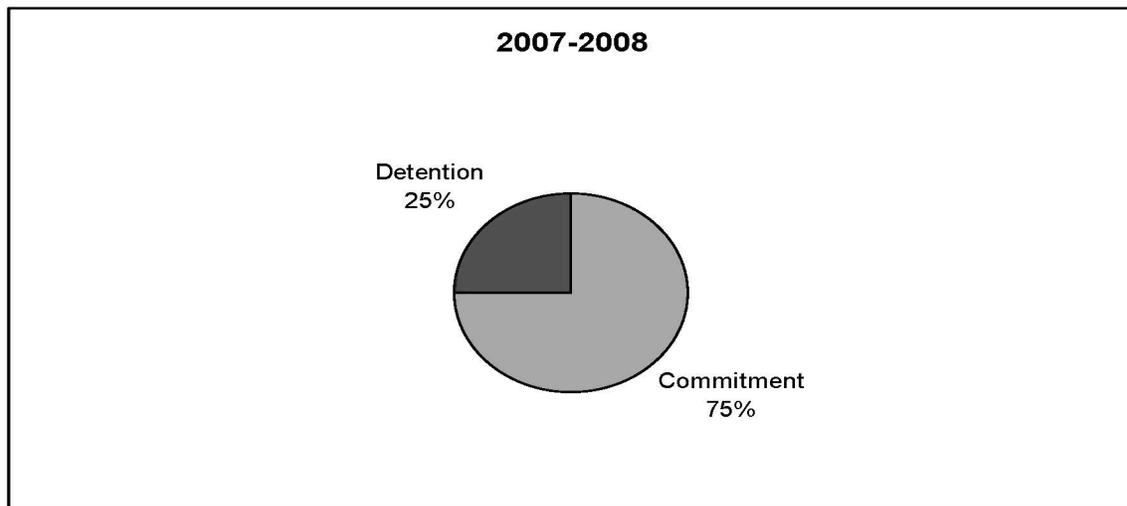
*Research Question 3: What factors, if any, contribute to suspension patterns?*

Understanding that the sample examined comes from a particular slice in time and from a particular institution, it was important to the researcher to explore any patterns which could possibly explain the variances discovered in the enrollment and discipline data.

The first analysis was regarding the location where these suspensions originated. Suspension rates were greater in the commitment units than in the detention units; 75% compared to 25% respectively. Detention units are segregated; that is, individuals

claiming a particular gang are consolidated and housed with one another. This segregation is effective in minimizing disturbances in the detention units. However, upon commitment, the correctional program involves mixing with others. The data reveal it is during the initial commitment period that inappropriate behavior, leading to suspension, occurs in the commitment units. *Figure 4.2* depicts these results.

*Figure 4.2* Suspension Location



Suspension location clearly indicates that commitment classrooms generate more suspensions than detention classrooms. A further analysis of the two types of commitment classrooms, west and south, indicates that west commitment classrooms generate three times the number of suspensions, 54, than south commitment classrooms, 18. Students living in the west unit have just received a sentence and may be having difficulty acclimating to their new living environment. They are potentially mixing with rivals for the first time which creates a volatile atmosphere. Despite understanding that additional time may be applied to one's sentence for discipline infractions, students are engaging in behavior which warrants suspension and jeopardizes a timely release. However, having programmed successfully in the west commitment unit, students in the

south commitment unit have proven their ability to get along, are granted additional privileges, and are closer to a release date which they appear determined to keep. Figure 4.3 depicts these results.

Figure 4.3 Suspensions by Classroom Location



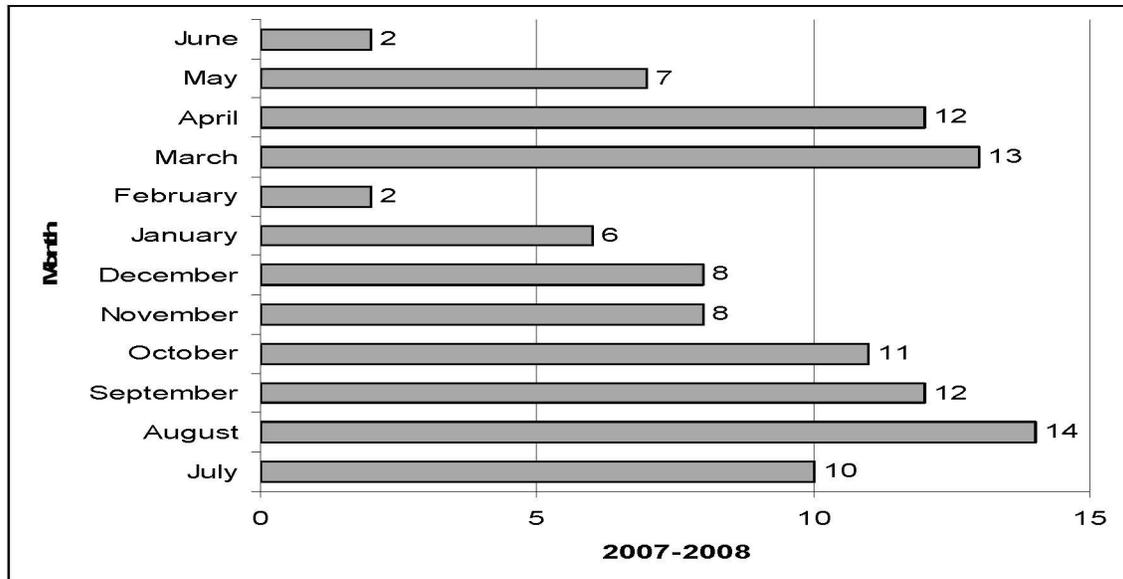
The next analysis examined teacher variables. Each of the long term substitutes in the west commitment units had more suspensions than any other teacher. Together, the two long term substitute teachers combined for a total of 32 suspensions while the two permanent teachers combined for 18 suspensions. A long term substitute works under a temporary contract, typically six months, with no guarantee of extension. Their demand is dictated by student population. The two long term substitutes in this study had been with the school multiple years having received multiple contract extensions. Despite their familiarity with the population and the school, classroom discipline was clearly an area of challenge for both. Itinerate substitutes, those called to fill in the morning of an unforeseen teacher absence, combined for more suspensions in commitment south and detention than any of the permanent teaching staff in those units. These data suggest a higher use of exclusionary discipline by substitutes. These figures are displayed in Figure 4.4.

Figure 4.4 Suspensions by Location & Teacher

Classroom's Location	Teacher Employment Status	Number of Suspensions
Commitment West	Long Term Substitute 1	19
	Long Term Substitute 2	13
	Permanent 1	9
	Permanent 2	9
	Itinerate substitutes	4
Commitment South	Permanent 1	3
	Permanent 2	4
	Permanent 3	2
	Permanent 4	4
	Itinerate substitutes	5
Detention	Permanent 1	2
	Permanent 2	1
	Permanent 3	4
	Permanent 4	6
	Permanent 5	8
	Permanent 6	4
	Itinerate substitutes	8
Total		105

The next analysis is of the months during which suspensions occurred. Juvenile court classes are in session year round with an average of 241 school days each year. ConApp suspension data is recorded beginning the first school day in July and ending June 15 and was analyzed here. Suspensions peaked in August then steadily declined for several months until March and April. These numbers are depicted in Figure 4.5.

Figure 4.5 Monthly Suspension Totals



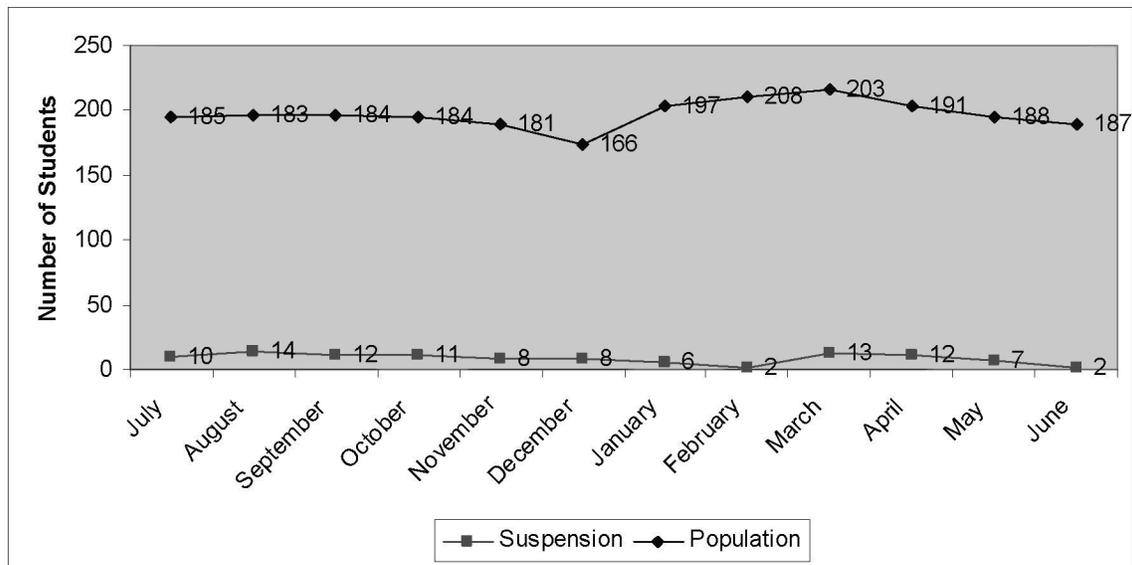
These data raise some questions as to possible reasons for this variability. Could a higher student population result in an increase in suspension warranting behavior? To test this hypothesis, the final analysis is of the monthly population and suspension relationship. From the population and suspension trend displayed in Figure 4.6, an increase in suspensions can not conclusively be connected to population increases. The average monthly population for the year was 188 students. While February was the month with the greatest population (208 students), it was also the month with the fewest suspensions (2). Moreover, the largest number of suspensions (14) occurred in August, a month with below average population (183 students).

The researcher can only speculate why these months saw elevated rates of enrollment. The population of the facility commonly increases during these second semester months due to probation violations; namely truancy. Often, students on formal probation who have managed to maintain appropriate school attendance the first semester

of school as a condition of their probation, return from winter break with the prospect of an entire semester ahead of them as an insurmountable task.

Regarding high suspension months, it may be that teachers are requesting more substitutes. The data have already demonstrated that where there was a substitute there was also a greater incidence of suspension and that permanent staff members suspend less than substitutes. Figure 4.6 depicts these results.

*Figure 4.6 Monthly Population and Suspension Trend*



### *Summary*

The research reported here identifies the percentage of students receiving special education services, the percentage of students served by disability category, and presents the proportionality of suspension assignment between the general education and special education populations at Presence School.

My findings are similar to other studies which found a higher prevalence rate of students receiving special education services in the juvenile corrections population.

However, the figures I present are not as great as those found in the literature. The literature presents numbers four to five times the national average. This data set indicates that at this school the prevalence of students receiving special education services is no more than double that found in the national population.

The study further reveals that at this school the disability distribution among the special education population is greater than is found in the national population. The data reveal that at this school there is a significantly greater representation of students receiving special education services under the eligibility Specific Learning Disability and Emotional Disturbance than is found in the national population.

Finally, this analysis confirms that a greater proportion of suspensions were assigned to students receiving special education services than general education students at this site during the time period examined. Moreover, it was also discovered that the greatest number of suspensions were assigned by specific non-permanent teaching staff in the initial non-segregated commitment location of the facility.

Next, in the final chapter, I discuss policy implications for these findings.

## Chapter Five

### *Conclusion*

My findings are similar to those of other studies which found a high prevalence of students receiving special education services in the correctional setting. Here, it was determined approximately 20% of the student population was qualified for such services. Additionally, it was determined that students receiving special education services were subject to a disproportionately greater amount of disciplinary exclusion than their general education peers. Based on their representation in the total school population, students in the special education subgroup were suspended an amount more than two times that of general education students. Finally, by examining which classrooms the suspensions occurred in, it was clear that classrooms taught by long term substitutes have a greater number of suspensions than those taught by permanent teaching staff.

There are limitations to this study. The research reflects the data of one school during a particular slice of time therefore only limited generalizations should be made. Despite limitations, the results of this study clearly indicate that the percentage of students receiving special education services at this juvenile court school is greater than the percentage found in a traditional school setting. This underscores the importance of maintaining an accurate attendance accounting system at juvenile court school. This could serve as a tool to analyze the number of students, and their demographics, critical for effectively administering a juvenile court school program. Both the unduplicated and duplicated accounting measures yield more useful enrollment information and would serve as such a tool. Unlike the CBEDS accounting measure, which provides only an estimate of the yearly attendance, the unduplicated and duplicated accounting measures

provide numbers of actual individuals and enrollments from which school programming decisions could be better informed. However, combined, all three accounting measures provide the most comprehensive picture of the student body.

The juvenile court school provides a controlled education setting for youth, many of whom are motivated students. However, administering a school program in this unique setting can be a challenge. Students in these programs evidence a wide range of ability and have had varying educational experiences. Also, student movement within the facility may interrupt the student's educational programming. These challenges are compounded by the uniqueness of the correctional setting and the need for security. The facility adheres to strict routines, which may not be ideal in an educational setting. These structural issues are accompanied by social factors that can further limit learning opportunities. Peer pressure among students may discourage participation or achievement in school. Further, juvenile court school principals have varying degrees of cooperation from correctional administrators, especially if Corrections sees education as a threat to the primary functions of security and control.

Regardless of the challenges, the benefits of effective educational programs in juvenile court schools must not be overlooked. Educational programming provides an opportunity to improve the academic and social skills of incarcerated youth so they may successfully, and lawfully, reintegrate into our communities. When we consider the high cost of delinquency to society, it seems educational programs would provide a large payoff to the community in terms of crime reduction and employment opportunities. There is compelling evidence that persons with low education face diminished opportunities and inferior economic and personal well being while better educated

persons pay more in taxes and enable reductions in government spending on health, crime, and welfare (Belfield & Levin, 2007). Therefore, an investment in juvenile court schools is wise public policy.

### *Implications*

Each year, a number of students are suspended while attending this juvenile court school. As this study has highlighted, students receiving special education services are excluded more often than their general education peers. Suspending a student is not a pleasant task, nor a procedure which improves a student's self-esteem or academics. But, something must be done to give the students who are operating within the school rules an opportunity to learn, in an environment free of disruption and disobedience.

Often, disruptive and disobedient students, after many attempts to persuade them to conform, are excluded through suspension. Although suspending a student is not necessarily inappropriate, it may be disjuncting to the learning process, and skills are usually missed or not reviewed properly. School personnel should use strategies that address the full range of school characteristics (i.e., student and family issues, governance and leadership, staff behaviors and characteristics, and structure and programs) (Stage, 1997). Schools wishing to reduce their suspension rates should focus on staff training in the areas of behavior management, engaging instruction, and diversity issues. School and correctional administrators should work collaboratively on facility-wide behavior planning and consistency regarding behavioral expectations and consequences that are suited to the setting. It is important that consideration be paid to behavior support plans included in the Individualized Education Plans of students receiving special education services. Behavioral plans are a valuable resource which offer insight into the individual

student and may contribute to both successful school and correctional outcomes. All substitute, general education, and special education teachers should participate in ongoing training in the behavior management strategies found in IEP behavioral plans. Finally, the assignment of substitutes should be carefully considered. Using a consistent pool of substitutes may foster rapport building and reduce interpersonal obstacles. Also, additional resources such as paraprofessionals should be assigned to assist substitutes during the teaching day. And, to the extent possible, only the most seasoned substitutes should be used in non-segregated classrooms.

### *Future Research*

This study extended the literature on school suspension by accessing site level data. Future examination of similar juvenile court schools may provide more information as to the specific school characteristics that affect suspension rates. Also, comparisons between students' experiences of exclusion as they relate to particular policies and practices pertaining to suspension may prove useful. They may further help define the suspension topic from broad characteristics to manageable, school and student group level issues. Additionally, a longitudinal study on suspension rates across months may prove valuable. Such data could reveal information regarding when and to what extent non permanent staff is used and what behavioral trends result. Providing an explanation of the suspension phenomena within the juvenile court school context may identify areas of improvement for similar schools wishing to reduce suspensions.

Juvenile court schools must reinforce their commitment to students in trouble through strategies that advance, rather than hinder, students' academic and socio-emotional development. Schools and school personnel can offset the many risks that

children are subjected to by providing a positive and safe learning environment; by setting high, yet achievable, academic and social expectations; and by consistently facilitating academic and social success.

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