The Adoption of the Monarch Room as an Alternative to Suspension and Expulsion in Addressing School Discipline Issues Among Court-Involved Youth

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Abstract

Suspension/expulsion is commonly used in schools, yet these practices can adversely affect students’ education well-being and do not improve student behavior. This study assesses the impact of the Monarch Room (MR) intervention, a trauma-informed alternative to school discipline suspension/expulsion policies, among a sample of 719 court-involved girls placed in residential care and enrolled in a public, chartered strict discipline academy over a three year period. MR use significantly decreased reliance on suspension/expulsion in addressing problematic behavior. School mobility and race were significant predictors of MR use, while school absences were not. Implications for policy and practice are also offered.

Key Words: School Discipline, alternatives to suspension/expulsions, education well-being, court-involved youth
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**Background and Introduction**

Out-of-school suspension/expulsion is the most commonly recognized method of addressing conduct infractions by students in middle and high schools across the country. A national study illustrated the use of this method of discipline with students at the preschool level as well, with as many as 7,500 preschool students being suspended between 2011 and 2012, and 2,500 of those being multiple suspensions (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2014). Suspension is generally recognized as the removal of a student from his/her daily academic routine for a temporary period of time (Christle, Nelson, & Jolivette, 2004). This may result in the student being excluded from the school grounds or being placed in a designated campus area such as a classroom or school office. This paper will be exploring this from the perspective of youth who are placed in out-of-home care settings, specifically those who have been placed in a residential treatment center.

The U.S. Department of Education has been compiling and delineating annual suspension statistics since the early 1960s. As recently as 2006 over 3.25 million students nationwide were suspended annually across this country – with over 100,000 of these occurring in Michigan alone (Planty et al., 2009). This national data translates to 7% of the school population missing at least one school day a year due to suspension/expulsion – a figure that has doubled since the 1970s (Wald & Losen, 2003). This out-of-school time, as well as the instability produced from student expulsions, can have an overwhelming impact on educational well-being.

One of the main provisions of the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 (FCSA) was to implement mandatory education-specific case planning
for youth in foster care, as well as funding for school transition costs. This is to promote youth educational stability and well-being by ensuring that youth regularly attend school, avoid unnecessary school mobility, and are transitioned with ease when school changes are unavoidable. Also, a recent amendment to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 through the Uninterrupted Scholars Act of 2013 further promotes foster youth educational well-being by addressing impediments to sharing between schools and child welfare agencies. While schools are encouraged to keep parents engaged in the coordination of services, this policy allows schools to release a student’s records, without parental consent, to the child welfare personnel legally charged with the care of that student.

Despite these measures, the increased and alarming incidences of school violence have prompted legislators to develop school zero tolerance policies for infractions or transgressions that complicate student well-being, through the use of more aggressive suspension/expulsion practices.

**School policies on suspension/expulsion**

Both the federal and state departments of education are charged with creating the framework for policies regarding in-school (ISS) and out-of-school (OSS) suspension as well as expulsion. At the behest of the U.S. Department of Education, the Michigan State Board of Education created a model school code of conduct and required that it be included in each school district’s safe school plans. They went on to provide a comprehensive list of conduct violations and assigned a corresponding recommendation for suspension time. (Michigan State Board of Education, 2014). For example, cheating or academic misconduct is a Level I Violation that may draw any one of a wide variety of interventions that can result in both in-school and out-of-school suspension. Level II Violations (e.g. fighting, gambling or defacing school property) and
Level III Violations (e.g., gambling, drugs and weapons) are punishable by progressively strict guidelines, including out-of-school suspension and expulsion. The most striking element of this information is that nearly any inappropriate behavior can result in time away from the school environment and academics. This research must be considered in light of the knowledge that the habitual administrative response to behavioral infractions is out-of-school suspension.

From a child welfare perspective, this also impacts foster parent recruitment and placement stability. Foster parents may choose to have a child removed from their home rather than risk losing employment due to the need to take off work to accommodate the child’s school suspension or expulsion. Students in foster care are put at a further academic disadvantage by this placement instability. A study of over 600 foster care alumni found an average of 1.4 home placement changes per year. They also found that 65% of foster alumni experienced at least seven school changes from primary school throughout secondary school (Pecora et al., 2005). This can cause significant disruption to students’ abilities to be academically successful (Kerbow, 1996), leading to a greater risk of school drop-out (Rumberger & Larson, 1998). It can also impact academic achievement, behavior, and development of interpersonal and peer relationships (Editorial Projects in Education Research Center, 2004).

Another study conducted by the Kentucky Department of Education assessed the use of out-of-school suspension since the implementation of a statewide ‘zero tolerance’ policy. The researchers found that the use of out-of-school suspension was applied liberally and most often with minority students in response to behavioral infractions (Richart et. al, 2003). They also noted that this interruption of students’ education was counterproductive in that they lost valuable continuity in mastering the curriculum and put them in unsupervised and unstructured situations that often led to further problems. These conditions contribute to the educational trend
impacting disabled and racial minority students across the country: the school-to-prison pipeline. This phenomenon is defined by the criminalization of these students, as well as the aforementioned zero-tolerance and suspension/expulsion policies that systematically push students of color and disabled students out of the classroom (Michigan Council on Crime and Delinquency, 2013). This leaves them vulnerable to a significantly greater likelihood of juvenile justice involvement (Lawrence & Hesse, 2010), as students who were suspended or expelled from school are almost three times as likely to encounter the juvenile justice system in the subsequent year (Fabelo et al., 2011).

Wettich (2009) referred heavily to the findings of the American Psychological Association’s Zero Tolerance Task Force in 2008. The goal of the APA in convening a task force was to determine with some accuracy the validity of claims that out-of-school suspension was beneficial to students and schools as well as to make recommendations based on their findings. Not surprisingly, the American Psychological Association found that there was little data to support any presumption of the effectiveness of out-of-school suspension for any reason.

**Disproportionate use of suspensions/expulsions**

There is evidence that minority, special education, and court-involved students, such as those in foster care and the juvenile justice systems (Sullivan et al., 2010; Zima et al., 2000), are disproportionately suspended – often for less serious and more subjective reasons than their white, non-court involved counterparts (Skiba, 2001). Several studies have confirmed that there is racial disproportionality in the use of school suspension (Costenbader & Marksen, 1994, 1998; Wu et al 1982; Marsh, Price & Hwang, 1992; Rausch & Skiba, 2004; Zurowsky, 2004) and that while white students tend to be suspended for serious violations such as weapons and drugs, African American students are often suspended for minor violations such as disrespect and
appearing threatening (Verdugo, 2002). African American students are suspended at twice the rate of white students (Mendez et al., 2002). Similarly, Fenning et al. (2009) further deduced that students of poverty and in the ranks of special education were more likely to be recipients of punitive discipline than white, middle-class students. One study found that students with disabilities make up only 12% of the student population but represent 20% of total out-of-school suspensions (Sundius & Farneth, 2008). Moreover, Fenning et al. (2009) found that out-of-school suspension is imposed on male students of color at disproportionate rates.

There is ample research to support the proposition that the school environment and culture, the perceptions and training of school staff, and educational biases are attributes of the glaring disparity in suspension statistics (Christle et al., 2004; Gordon et al., 2001; Munn, Lloyd & Cullen, 2000). In an attempt to pinpoint the exact moment when student/teacher interactions resulted in removal from the classroom and ultimately out-of-school suspension (Skiba et al., 1997), researchers of one study concluded that the problem most often occurred when a student challenged the teacher’s authority—a behavior dealt with more harshly than others (Vavrus & Cole, 2002). One reason assigned to this statistical abnormality is that teachers and administrators perceive the behaviors of minority youth to be an aberration of the norm in terms of school behavior (Casella, 2003), and abnormal behavior is more difficult to control therefore making it seemingly more dangerous (Bowditch, 2003; Casella, 2003). It is not unexpected to learn that some research finds black students perceive discriminatory treatment by staff as a matter of quid pro quo (Fenning et al., 2006). This all may be due to the uncompromising school-wide discipline policies that are not designed to meet the needs of today’s students (Balfanz et al., 2003; Bowditch, 1993).

**Academic Impact of Suspensions/Expulsions**
The immediate loss of instruction often further negatively impacts a student’s academic achievement, and often the institution determines if students are permitted to make up work missed during the period of suspension. Missing work translates to lower grades, presenting these troubled youth with even greater challenges for success (Rossow & Parkinson, 1999).

Students who are suspended multiple times experience significant periods of absentia, exacerbating academic deficiencies and wreaking havoc on academic progress. Imposing discipline measures that remove a student from the classroom and school reduces their opportunity to learn, negatively impacts academic achievement, and gains in the learning process (Borman et al. 2003; Brophy, 1988; Brophy & Good, 1986; Carter, 1984; Cooley & Leinhardt, 1980; Fisher et al., 1981; Greenwood, Horton, & Utley, 2002; Hattie, 2002; Reynolds & Walberg, 1991; Stallings, Cory, Fairweather, & Needles, 1978; Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1997). These absences may add up to months, putting students at such an academic disadvantage that they may drop out of school because they are academically disengaged and feel hopeless (Gordon et al., 2001). School exclusion detrimentally effects academic achievement and all-around social adjustment (Christie et al., 2004; Gordon et al., 2001; Skiba and Nesting, 2002). Out-of-school suspensions/expulsions can also be linked to increased high school drop-out rates (Arcai, 2006; Christie et al., 2004).

Cameron (2006) and Brown (2007) found that suspensions are often meted out for minor infractions that violate something as simple as the school dress code, tardiness or truancy, as well as insubordination (Bock, 1998; Skiba et al., 1997). Next, multiple suspensions lead to high rates of absenteeism further alienating a student from school because of feelings of inadequacy and hopelessness (Casella, 2003) impugned by the very institutional personnel charged with the
responsibility of shepherding them successfully through the educational experience (Rausch, 2004).

Atkins et al. (2002) and Mayer & Leone (1999) offer research that correlates school discipline as both a cause and effect of a student’s inappropriate behaviors which submits that for a variety of reasons the school’s environment may contribute to misconduct. Bloomberg (2004) asserts that the immediate answer to a problematic student is his or her removal from the classroom setting to ensure the least disruption of the classroom environment – the administrative response in the form of an out-of-school suspension- is reactive and destructive to a student’s future. This disciplinary tactic is often a first-response for less than violent behavioral infractions such as insubordination and classroom defiance (Mendez et al., 2002).

Bloomberg (2004) references a number of research studies as confirmation of the ineffectiveness of out-of-school suspension (OSS) in improving student conduct. One such example is a survey conducted by Costenbader (1997) whose results from the responses of 252 students who had experienced suspension revealed hostility, anger and a lack of remorse.

Studies have found that students who are suspended do not avoid further incidences of inappropriate behavior (Losen & Skiba, 2011; Morrison et al., 2001). Moreover, there is evidence that out-of-school suspensions/expulsions are used to provide relief to the classroom teacher and does not serve the student’s interests at all (Bock et al., 1998). Out-of-school suspensions are often a reaction to underlying symptoms of a variety of concerns and do not get to the causes of the inappropriate student behavior, which may be caused by trauma or by being placed in out-of-home care. (Verdugo, 2002; Raffaele et al., 2002).

Those who display the greatest need for academic assistance find themselves instead on a path to prison (termed ‘school-to-prison pipeline; Wald et al., 2003). Fenning states that in
today’s reality of state testing being tied to federal dollars, it behooves administrators to remove those children who are incapable of meeting academic performance benchmarks (Noguera, 1995; Sbarra et al., 2001). The implication is that using out-of-school suspension will result in challenged students removing *themselves* from the educational system.

Suspension may exacerbate the discipline problems it has been employed to reduce (Fenning & Bohanan, 2006; Mayer, 1995; Sugai et al., 2002). Moreover, out-of-school suspension has been pointed out by other researchers to be ‘punitive, draconian and at best ineffective’ (Skiba et al., 1999). Academic institutions should not approach problems with this type of one-size-fits-all response in which the simple – and yet worst – reaction is to remove a child from school for any length of time.

Skiba (1999) purports that educational institutions that take a zero tolerance policy stance as a response to creating a school climate that is conducive to learning is short-sighted. Research confirms that the use of exclusionary discipline tactics does not improve learning outcomes. For instance, one investigation determined that there is a negative correlation between suspension rates and achievement scores on math, reading and writing in both elementary and high school levels (Raffaele et al., 2002).

**Psycho-social impact of suspensions/expulsions**

Cameron and Sheppard (2006) reported that conventional school disciplinary policies and practices not only fail to create safe and inviting academic environments but, conversely, have been found to destructively impact not only a child’s academic well-being, but also his/her psychosocial functioning, and has been linked with the development of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety, and aggressive behavior in and outside of school
Cameron and Sheppard (2006) further propose that oppressive school discipline policies have led to suppressed negative emotions (Rothstein, 1984), stigmatization and negative self-image (Hyman, 1990; Hattie, 2002), social rejection (Epp, 1996, 1997) and a loss of interest in both academics and relationships (Costenbader & Markson, 1998). Sekayi (2001) utilized one-on-one interviews and surveys of 37 students as a basis for his final declaration that suspension causes a child to feel ostracized and indignant. (Sekayi, 2001).

Out-of-school suspension can also lead to other mental and physical health safety problems, such as drug addiction, depression, home-life stresses and even suicide ideation (Sundius & Farneth, 2008). The American Psychological Association (2006) has stated that exclusionary school tactics can result in shame, alienation, rejection and an inability to sustain adult bonds. Further, a report developed by the United States Department of Education (2014) described the existence of a negative relationship between the number of out-of-school suspensions and later involvement in a variety of negative outcomes, including criminal acts that result in court interventions up to incarceration.

Alternatives to Suspension/Expulsion Policies

Ohlson (2009) demonstrated the existence and extent of a relationship among school culture, teacher quality and student outcomes- including use of out-of-school suspensions. Perhaps the most interesting finding was that as the years of teacher experience and/or level of collaborative leadership increased, there was an identical and proportional decrease in the number of out-of-school suspensions. Ohlson (2009) attributed this phenomenon to the premise that when there is a sense of collaboration and mutual respect between the administrators and educators there will be a greater willingness to address behavioral concerns before they reach the
severity of requiring a suspension. Moreover, administrators that are accessible are naturally more involved in the school’s life-blood and more likely to be cognizant and proactive to behavioral issues. Finally, the greater perception of shared leadership, the more likely that a student’s behavior became a ‘team’ responsibility with collaboratively developed responses that ultimately benefited the youth.

**Current Study**

The current study uses secondary data to quantitatively measure the impact of the Monarch Room (MR) intervention – a trauma-informed alternative to school discipline suspension and expulsion policies – on the academic well-being of a group of girls enrolled in a public charter school, co-located on the same campus as a large residential placement agency for abused, neglected, and/or adjudicated girls in a Midwestern city in the United States. It directly addresses the absence of evidence-based, trauma-informed models of alternatives to suspension/expulsion available in the literature. Our primary research questions are: (1) Did the intervention reduce the number of suspension/expulsions given? (2) Does frequent school mobility (multiple entries in and out of the school) predict Monarch Room use? and (3) Do racial disparities exist in Monarch Room use?

**Methods**

**Sample Description**

All 620 participants in the study were enrolled between September 2011 and June 2014 at a public charter school, co-located on the same campus as a large child welfare placement agency for girls in a Midwestern city in the United States. This school works exclusively with female, court-involved students, who generally have a history of abuse and neglect and were subsequently placed in residential treatment. In fact, approximately 90% of the on-campus
residents have a mental health diagnosis. The school strives to treat, heal, and educate its students by following a school discipline system that incorporates the students’ treatment goals and strategies. Its emphasis is on reducing student disciplinary issues by providing an effective social-emotional learning environment, teaching self-regulation and social skills, and helping them to control their emotions, make more responsible choices, and get along with others. The vast majority of students served (86%) were current residents, while some (14%) were young women who have returned to community living, but continue to attend the on-campus school.

The young people enrolled in the school over the observation period ranged in age from 14 to 18 years old, and were enrolled in 9th through 12th grades. Seventy percent of the participants in the study were African American, following by White (24%) and Hispanic (3%). The racial make-up of this population is also consistent to national prevalence rates for the disproportionate amount of court-involved youth of color in residential placements (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2013). As the school operates under a single-gender classroom philosophy, all of the students who participated were female. Approximately 44% of participants were court-involved due to juvenile delinquency and the other 56% were placed as a result of abuse and neglect petitions. Fifty-seven percent of the girls in the study were experiencing their first stay in the residential treatment center. However, 43% of the girls experienced multiple stays (range 1-5). The average time per stay was 133 days. Over the observation period, the school experienced a steady decline in enrollment. This is not surprising as there has been a decline in the number of young people placed in residential treatment settings across the state and nation. Those placed in residential treatment during the latter part of the study have been identified by the child welfare authority to have higher needs than students who were placed earlier in the observation period. A pattern was also observed of an increase in
number of absences in the student body over time. This is likely due to the fact that child welfare caseworkers were pulling these students out of school to address mental health and other needs identified in the students’ child welfare case plans. For additional participant and school demographic information, see Tables 2 & 3.

**Description of Intervention**

The Monarch Room (MR) is a school intervention informed by literature that states that student suspensions and expulsions can be counterproductive (Greenwood, 2001; Griffin, 2011), and therefore was designed as an alternative to traditional school discipline policies in efforts to increase the amount of time students are in the classroom and learning. The MR is available throughout the school day and is managed by staff trained in counseling and trauma interventions to provide positive, nurturing support to students while attending school. In the classroom, when a student’s behavior escalates to the point of interfering with the learning of others, the student may self-refer or may be asked by school staff to go to the MR. Once in the MR, various intervention strategies, including problem-solving, talk therapy, and sensory-motor activities are employed to assist students in de-escalating and regulating their emotions so that they may return to the classroom. Staff documents each visit, the reason or trigger associated with the visit, and all intervention strategies used to help the student to de-escalate. This process of assisting the student generally occurs within a short period of time, approximately 10 minutes. Upon returning, to the classroom, the student can demonstrate perseverance and emotional control, thus helping to create a safe and orderly environment where all students are free to learn. Data from staff documentation of student visits is collected and reviewed weekly with the school administration.

**Procedures and Data Collection**
The data analyzed for this study included administrative data collected and maintained by Clara B Ford Academy via PowerSchool®, and the daily Monarch Room tracking logs (which were collected using excel). These records were matched using student name, and then de-identified before being analyzed by independent researchers. Of the 738 total students eligible for participation in the study, 99 students were eliminated due to middle school status, as middle schoolers did not have direct access to the Monarch Room. An additional 19 cases were omitted due to incomplete data that left the files unable to be matched in the Monarch log files, leaving a final sample of 620 student records available for analysis. This study was approved by the University Institutional Review Board at [name deleted to maintain the integrity of the review process] University.

**Independent Variables.** The major independent variable of interest in regards to measuring suspensions and expulsions was use of Monarch room intervention. It was measured using a continuous variable (number of Monarch Room events). Other independent variables included race (African American, White and Hispanic), number of school absences, and residential placement history (assessed by both number of stays in residential treatment and length of time of each stay).

The variables of interest in determining Monarch Room use included race, grade level, and number of stays (entries) into residential treatment.

**Dependent Variables.** There were two outcome measures of interest; history of suspensions/expulsions and history of Monarch Room use. Both of these variables were captured using dichotomized, dependent variables. Suspension/expulsion data was only available for years 2 and 3 of the observation period, Monarch Room use was captured over all three years of program implementation.
Data Analysis

The matched data were entered into SPSS statistical software, version 19, and data were explored using frequencies, descriptive statistics, and bivariate analysis. Significant variables derived from these bivariate tests were controlled for in the final multinomial logistic regression models in addition to the major variables of interest. Two-tailed tests were used in the analysis, and the alpha level was set at .05. Effect sizes were calculated for findings that drew statistically significant results.

Results

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Sample by Intervention use (N=620)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monarch Room Users</th>
<th>Non-Users</th>
<th>X² (df)</th>
<th>P&lt;</th>
<th>r</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>244 (39)</td>
<td>376 (61)</td>
<td>8.81 (3)</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>46 (19)</td>
<td>103 (27)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AA</td>
<td>191 (78)</td>
<td>255 (68)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>7 (3)</td>
<td>16 (4)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Stays</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>111.40 (2)</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>74 (30)</td>
<td>263 (70)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>94 (39)</td>
<td>90 (24)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3+</td>
<td>76 (31)</td>
<td>23 (6)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Suspensions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>43.50 (3)</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>217 (89)</td>
<td>376 (100)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>18 (7)</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>7 (3)</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2 (1)</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Absences</td>
<td>Mean (SD)</td>
<td>Median</td>
<td>Range</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 1 (N= 395)</td>
<td>8.62 (11.42)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0-70</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 2 (N= 296)</td>
<td>11.01 (14.48)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0-83</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 3 (N= 245)</td>
<td>12.82 (15.09)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0-98</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Only 39% of the student body ever used the monarch room intervention (See Table 1). Of those students who used the intervention, the mean use was 10.36 visits over the observation period (or 5 visits per academic year). Race appears to be associated with Monarch Room use. White students make up 24% of the student population, but only 20% of Monarch Room users. African American students make up 70% of the student body, but account for 77% of all Monarch Room users. Hispanic students are proportionately represented in the intervention according to their percentage of the total study body. Students who experience multiple stays in the residential treatment center are also significantly more likely to use the Monarch Room than those who only experience one stay in residential treatment.

Finally, all of the students who experienced suspensions/expulsions were exposed to the Monarch Room intervention prior to being suspended/expelled; meaning attempts were made by the school to address behavioral concerns before resorting to putting students out of school.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year 1</th>
<th>Year 2</th>
<th>Year 3</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Year 1</th>
<th>Year 2</th>
<th>Year 3</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N (%)</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>121 (54)</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>166 (48)</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>85 (42)</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>50 (42)</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** As students were enrolled over multiple years, the total students per grade captured in the table is higher than the unduplicated student count (620)

Year 1 $X^2 = 30.06 (4)$, $P < .001$, $r = .27$

Year 2 $X^2 = 7.66 (4)$, $P < .11$

Year 3 $X^2 = 35.02 (4)$, $P < .001$, $r = .34$

Of the 620 students enrolled at CBF over the observation period, 347 (48%) students were enrolled over multiple years. Ninth graders seem to be the highest users of the Monarch Room intervention (See Table 2).
Table 3: Demographic Characteristics of the Sample by History of Suspensions/Expulsions (N=620)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>History of out-of-school suspensions/expulsions</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>X² (df)</th>
<th>P&lt;</th>
<th>R</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>27 (4%)</td>
<td>593 (96%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AA*</td>
<td>23 (5%)</td>
<td>423 (95%)</td>
<td>2.46 (1)</td>
<td>.117</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4 (2%)</td>
<td>170 (98%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Stays</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>4 (1%)</td>
<td>333 (99%)</td>
<td>17.79 (1)</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 or more</td>
<td>23 (8%)</td>
<td>260 (92%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Absences</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under 10</td>
<td>19 (4%)</td>
<td>503 (96%)</td>
<td>4.05 (1)</td>
<td>.044</td>
<td>.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 or more</td>
<td>8 (9%)</td>
<td>90 (91%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*African American

Table 3 depicts the characteristics of students who experienced suspensions and expulsions during the observation period. African American youth were more likely to be suspended/expelled as compared to their non-African American peers. Students who experienced multiple stays in residential treatment were also significantly more likely to experience out-of-school suspension than youth who experienced a single stay. Students who experienced an average of 10 or more absences over the reporting period were more likely to have a history of suspension/expulsions than students who experienced an average of less than 10 absences.

It is important to note that of the 27 total suspensions experienced over the course of the observation period, 26 occurred in year 2. Many of the students who experienced these suspensions were repeat offenders. Nine students in the sample experienced two or more suspensions during year 2, accounting for a total of 20 suspensions, or 74% of all suspensions given that year. The number of suspensions significantly decreased in year 3 of the observation period, with only one suspension given, and this student who experienced a suspension in that year was not given more than one.
The multinomial regression model for Monarch Room use was tested using Pearson and Deviance tests to determine model fit. These statistics were both non-significant which indicates the model is a good fit. The referent categories for each predictor are equal to zero (non-African American, one stay, and less than 10 absences). Race was a significant predictor of Monarch Room use, $b=-.47$, $Wald X^2 (1) = 6.0$, $p < .05$. The odds ratio tells us that as the race of the students change from non-African American to African American, the change in the odds of Monarch Room use is .62, or 1.6 times more than for non-African American students. Re-entry into residential treatment (as measured by number of stays) also significantly predicted Monarch Room use, $b=-1.34$, $Wald X^2 (1) = 56.58$, $p < .001$. The odds of Monarch Room use are 3.8 times more for students who have experienced multiple stays in the residential treatment center than for students who only experienced a single stay. Number of absences was also a predictor of Monarch Room use, $b=-1.18$, $Wald X^2 (1) = 20.28$, $p < .001$. The odds of Monarch Room use are 3.2 times more for students who experienced an average of 10 or more absences over the observation period. See Table 4.

Table 4: Predictors of Monarch Room Use (N=620)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>$\beta$ (SE)</th>
<th>Lower</th>
<th>Estimated Odds Ratio</th>
<th>95% confidence Interval</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>-1.35 (.25)***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td>.50 (.21)*</td>
<td>.43</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>2.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Stays</td>
<td>1.39 (.18)***</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>2.76</td>
<td>5.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Absences</td>
<td>1.13 (.26)***</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>5.27</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Cox & Snell) .17, (Nagelkerke) .24, Model $X^2 (3) = 121.06$, $p < .001$. *$p < .05$, ***$p < .001$

The multinomial regression model for history of suspensions/expulsions was tested using Pearson and Deviance tests to determine model fit. Deviance statistics were non-significant, however the Pearson was significant, indicating that highlighting the high number of empty cells
due to the limited rate of the occurrence of the dependent variable in the model. A check for over
dispersion was conducted. Findings indicate a value for Pearson of 1.6, which demonstrates that
the data were not over dispersed, and that the model does fit. The referent categories for each
predictor are equal to zero (non-African American, one stay, and less than 10 absences). Total
number of visits to the Monarch Room over the observation period was also added as a covariate
into the model. Re-entry into residential treatment (as measured by number of stays) significantly
predicted a history of suspensions/expulsions, $b = -1.41$, Wald $X^2 (1) = 7.76$, $p<.01$. The odds of
having a history of suspensions/expulsions are 4.2 times more for students who have experienced
multiple stays in the residential treatment center than for students who only experienced a single
stay. The average number of Monarch Room events a student experienced over the observation
period also significantly predicted having a history of suspensions/expulsions, $b=.08$, Wald $X^2
(1) = 42.98$, $p< .001$. As the unit of visits to the Monarch Room increases, the odds of having a
history of suspensions/expulsions increase .92. Race ($b = -.50$, Wald $X^2 (1) = .93$, $p <.33$) and
number of absences ($b = .36$, Wald $X^2 (1) = .56$, $p<.45$) were not significant predictors of
suspensions/expulsions. See Table 5.

Table 5: Predictors of Suspension/Expulsion (N=620)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>$\beta$(SE)</th>
<th>Lower</th>
<th>Estimated Odds Ratio</th>
<th>Upper</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>5.04 (.58)***</td>
<td>.46</td>
<td>1.54</td>
<td>5.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td>.43 (.62)</td>
<td>.46</td>
<td>1.54</td>
<td>5.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Stays</td>
<td>-.81 (.26)**</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>.45</td>
<td>.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Absences</td>
<td>.36 (.49)</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>1.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># monarch room events</td>
<td>-.10 (.02)***</td>
<td>.88</td>
<td>.91</td>
<td>.94</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Cox & Snell) .11, (Nagelkerke) .38, Model $X^2 (4) = 75.04$, $p<.001$. **$p<.01$, ***$p<.001$
Discussion

The data demonstrate that there was an association between the implementation of the Monarch Room intervention and the reduction of suspension/expulsions experienced. Frequent school mobility, defined by repeated entries in and out of the school, predicted Monarch Room use. Also, racial disparities were observed in Monarch Room use, with African American students being more likely to utilize the intervention. It was also observed that 9th graders were more likely to be referred to the Monarch Room than students enrolled in 10th, 11th, or 12th grades.

This study supports the conclusions of previous researchers that purport that alternative interventions to suspension/expulsion can be successfully employed to help address disruptive behavior in the classroom (Wettich, 2009). Harsh, punitive responses to addressing problematic behavior do more harm than good. The idea that forcing seemingly problematic students out of school so that students who do not exhibit externalizing behaviors can learn is a myth, as alternatives such as the Monarch Room can be successfully employed and do not result in chaotic school environments.

The association of school mobility and Monarch Room use is also consistent with findings in the literature, in that students with more school changes were more likely to utilize the Monarch Room intervention. This supports our knowledge of the negative educational outcomes associated with multiple school placements (Editorial Projects in Education Research Center, 2004; Kerbow, 1996; Rumberger & Larson, 1998). This issue is especially salient for court-involved students, who commonly encounter school instability (Pecora, 2005), which may mean that behavioral interventions, such as the Monarch Room, are even more important for addressing their needs in school.
Data on racial disparities in Monarch Room use are also well-aligned with current literature on racially disproportionate use of school discipline. It is unclear as to what specific factors led to the higher likelihood of African American student use of the Monarch Room. This may be due to teacher perception of student behavior or student characteristics that result in higher rates of self-referral among this population. However, the benefit of this discipline strategy is that students step away only briefly from the classroom, rather than being removed for several days and missing out on valuable instructional time. This means that while students of color may be more likely to utilize the Monarch Room, they are not also put at the disadvantage of losing necessary academic instruction due to emotional or behavioral issues.

An additional promising finding, however, was that race was not a significant predictor of suspension/expulsion. Thus, alternatives to suspension/expulsion, like the Monarch Room, can serve to address race disparities that plague current suspension/expulsion statistics. Given previous research that describes the correlation between the suspension of 9th graders and the two fold increase in dropping out (Balfanz, 2013), it is critical that alternatives to suspension and expulsion are employed with this population in particular. In the current study, 9th graders were over-represented in referrals made to the Monarch Room as the first defense in responding to problematic behavior, a practice that is consistent with the evidence that recommends that suspension expulsion be used as the last rather than first line of defense.

**Implications for Policy and Practice**

As suspension/expulsion data is underreported, it seems appropriate for states and school districts to be required to publically report disaggregated data annually, including number of students suspended, number of incidents, reason for out of school suspension, and days of lost instruction. These data should be reported by grade level, race/ethnicity, gender, and disability.
status. Suspension rates should be included as factors used by schools and districts to measure the performance of secondary schools and as early warning systems to target interventions and supports.

These findings also support the idea that public investments should be made in promising interventions supported by research, such as the Monarch Room, to address and improve current systemic approaches to school discipline. As noted above, there is a critical need to find alternative methods to removal from the classroom, and especially removal from the school, when responding to challenging behaviors and emotions, particularly among youth from court-involved backgrounds. Many teachers do not understand these youths’ prior and current life experiences and how those of a traumatic nature may manifest in their daily lives. It can be particularly problematic in the school context where pressures are high to be on task and engaged for many hours at a time, students are in close and constant proximity to a large number of peers and have to negotiate many personality differences, and the student-teacher personality match may be imbalanced. Couple these three conditions with potential academic struggles and the situation is ripe for excessive frustration, misunderstanding/misinterpretation, and use of traditional methods for dealing with behavioral problems, such as suspension. Additionally, suspension, which is often intended to function as a punishment for undesired behavior, may actually function as reinforcement for those youth who have a powerful urge to escape and avoid being pressed to demonstrate academic skill in class. Related to this, it would be wise if resources were allocated to provide teachers with trauma-informed training in addressing classroom management with youth who have come from challenging life circumstances.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research
One limitation of this study is the lack of information collected regarding special education status as it a known variable to be associated with increased suspensions/expulsions. Further study may also be warranted to determine the factors associated with the racial differences observed in this study. Additionally, findings may be different among cross-over, court-involved student populations. Finally, the addition of a comparison group would strengthen the rigor and evidence associated with the impact of the Monarch Room. Future research would benefit from exploring the impact of these variables in relation to alternative school discipline practices.

Conclusions

In response to perceived and actual violent episodes in our public schools, state governments have responded with what have been coined as ‘zero-tolerance’ policies, which in effect allow administrators to exclude children from school for a sweeping range of offenses. Many researchers consider this to be a case of the pendulum swinging too far in the other direction. The rate of out-of-school suspensions has skyrocketed over the past 15 years, and research has determined that this has resulted in a variety of negative consequences.

School exclusion alienates students and exacerbates inappropriate behavior in school, which may result in increased high school dropout and juvenile delinquency rates. Finally, perhaps the greatest consequence of out-of-school suspension is how it is biased negatively toward at-risk student populations, including African-Americans, special education, and court-involved students. It is the express desire of these authors that the information contained herein will be used to keep the doors of our schools open to greater numbers of court-involved students as we vanquish the use of out-of-school suspension from the disciplinary repertoire, and embrace
alternative models, like the Monarch Room, that are trauma-informed and designed to maximize rather than reduce seat time in schools.
References


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