DIFFERENCES IN DISCIPLINARY CONSEQUENCES AND REASONS FOR DISCIPLINARY CONSEQUENCE ASSIGNMENT AS A FUNTION OF GRADE SPAN CONFIGURATION BY STUDENT ECONOMIC STATUS

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Abstract

Examined in this study were the effects of grade span configuration on disciplinary consequence assignments and the reasons for disciplinary consequence assignments by student economic status. Results were statistically significant for each of the two school years examined. A higher percentage of students who were Not Poor, Moderately Poor, and Very Poor and who were enrolled in middle school settings were assigned to a Disciplinary Alternative Education Program placement than were their peers in KG-8 schools. The top three consequences most often assigned were in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, and Disciplinary Alternative Education Program. Code of Conduct violation was the top reason students received disciplinary consequences.

INTRODUCTION

Over 20 years ago, researchers (Anderman & Maehr, 1994; Cook, MacCoun, Muschkin, & Vigdor, 2008; Weiss & Baker-Smith, 2010) studying teaching and learning began reporting the inadequacy of middle schools (Grades 6-8) to prepare students for high school, as was verified by the academic outcomes of Grade 9 students. Several researchers (Eccles, Lord, & Midgley, 1991; Eccles et al., 1993; Sirin, 2005) concluded that the middle school years represented the start of a descending spiral into negative behaviors and attitudes that frequently led to students failing academically and even dropping out of school. Researchers (Hough, 2009; Schwerdt & West, 2013) also noted that middle school students experienced an escalation in discipline referrals, a decline in academic achievement, and a lack of having their learning needs fulfilled.

The preponderance of researchers (e.g., Carolan, Weiss, & Matthews, 2013) who examined the efficacy of middle schools reported that the differences in students' academic development and social development were accelerated significantly during the young adolescent years of middle school. Generally, as students entered middle school, their grades declined substantially (Barber & Olsen, 2004; Schwerdt & West, 2013), and behavior concerns increased considerably (Theriot & Dupper, 2010). This decline in achievement has become a major concern for stakeholders across the nation, especially with heightened concerns among school administrators and educational policy makers generated by the No Child Left Behind Act (2001). Some researchers (Arcia, 2007; Cook et al., 2008) cited student discipline as one of the contributing factors to low student performance across grade levels, especially at the middle school level.

For decades, researchers (Costenbader & Markson, 1998; Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Kinsler, 2013; Mendez, 2003) have identified cause and effect relationships between student discipline and student academic achievement. Kinsler (2013) believed that school discipline directly contributed to the continual achievement gap among student demographic groups. Researchers (Baker et al., 2001; Christle, Nelson, & Jolivette, 2004; Costenbader & Markson, 1998; Maguin & Loeber, 1996) have long documented that students' academic problems may in fact lead to behavioral problems, resulting in disciplinary referrals that further exacerbates academic struggles when students are removed from the classroom setting. Specifically, Maguin and Loeber (1996) wrote, "Poor academic performance is related to the prevalence and onset of delinquency, and escalation in the frequency and seriousness of offending, while better academic performance is associated with desistance from offending" (p. 246). On the contrary, evidence also exists that problem behaviors in school weaken subsequent academic performance (Hoffman, Erickson, & Spence, 2013; Kelly & Pink, 1973; McLeod, Uemura, & Rohrman, 2012). Regardless of whether educators believe that poor student behavior results in poor academic performance or that poor academic performance results in poor student behavior, student behavior ultimately weakens student academic performance (Hoffman et al., 2013; Kelly & Pink, 1973; McLeod et al., 2012).

Some researchers (Brault, Janosz, & Archambault, 2014; Christle et al., 2004; Diamond, Randolph, & Spillane, 2004; Emihovich, 1982; Tenebaum & Ruck, 2007) reported that students who are economically disadvantaged were targeted disproportionally for behavior problems compared to other student groups. Other researchers (Hemphill et al., 2009; Hemphill, Plenty, Herrenkohl, Toumbourou, & Catalano, 2014; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002; Vavrus & Cole, 2002) consistently have documented that students who receive discipline referrals leading to suspension are already underprivileged as they belong to traditionally marginalized racial or ethnic

groups and/or represent a lower economic status. These students typically belong to an ethnic minority or live in poverty. The influence of student economic status on the type and frequency of disciplinary consequences received has been a continual focus of researchers (Hemphill et al., 2014; Rocque & Paternoster, 2011; Theriot, Craun, & Dupper, 2010; Wallace, Goodkind, Wallace, & Bachman, 2008). After examining a number of variables to office referrals, Sullivan (2013) reported that students of low socioeconomic status had a greater chance of receiving discipline referrals that lead to a visit to the office than their middle-class peers.

Evidence exists that certain school factors influenced the rate at which students received office referrals (Chen & Vazsonyi, 2013; Ganao, Silvestre, & Glenn, 2013). School-level factors accounted for 11% of the variance in measures of poor student behavior (Chen & Vazsonyi, 2013). Of interest in this investigation is whether school factors associated with grade span configuration make a difference in the referral rate and/or categories of disciplinary consequences young adolescents who are economically disadvantaged experience in Grades 6-8.

Young adolescents who attended schools with fewer transitions and an extended range of grade levels (e.g., K-8, K-12) experienced better overall behavior and academic outcomes than their peers in traditional grade configurations (Coladarci & Hancock, 2002; Franklin & Glascock, 1998; Irvin et al., 2011; Simmons & Blyth, 1987; Wihry, Coladarci, & Meadow, 1992). In examining the possible effects of transitions on students, Eccles and Roeser (2011) suggested the general decline in motivation that young adolescents experience might be derived from the changes adolescents endure as they transition from elementary school to middle school and then on to high school. As students move from elementary to middle school, they commonly perceive a drop-off in emotional support from teachers and a sense of connectedness to the classroom (Burchinal, Roberts, Zeisel, & Rowley, 2008; Zimmer-Gembeck, Chipuer, Hanisch, Creed, & McGregor, 2006). Accordingly, reducing the number of transitions students experience during their school years could lead to better academic performance and fewer discipline problems.

For well over three decades, researchers (Alspaugh, 1998; Clark, Slate, Combs, & Moore, 2013; Combs et al., 2011; Franklin & Glascock, 1998; Herman, 2004; Hough, 2009) have reported both the academic and the behavioral benefits that students attending K-8 schools experienced compared to that of their peers in traditional middle schools. Essentially, grade span configurations govern the extent to which students face transitions while in school (Schwerdt & West, 2013). In the United States, elementary and middle school-aged students attend schools of various configurations to include Grades K-5, Grades K-8, Grades PreK-5, Grades PreK-2, Grades 5-6, Grades 6-8 and Grades 6-9, and other less notable configurations (Franklin & Glascock, 1996; Jacob & Rockoff, 2012; Irvin, Meece, Byun, Farmer, & Hutchins, 2011; Wihry et al. 1992).

Dating back to the 1970s, Blyth, Simmons, and Bush (1978) proposed that students who attended K-8 schools exhibited more positive attitudes toward self, experienced less obscurity, had a more enthusiastic school experience, and were more active in extracurricular events than their peers in middle school (6-8). In terms of academic achievement, researchers (Alspaugh, 1998; Clark et al., 2013; Combs et al., 2011; Fiaschetti & Slate, 2014; Franklin & Glascock, 1998; Herman, 2004; Hough, 2009; Wilson & Slate, 2014) also concluded that students attending K-8 schools outperformed their counterparts in Grades 6-8 middle schools. Consequently, the movement by school districts to K-8 school configurations should have a positive influence on students academically and behaviorally.

Statement of the Problem

Educational leaders and policymakers have pursued ways to meet the growing needs of adolescent students, specifically those students ages 11 to 13 years old, for several decades, beginning with the establishment of junior high schools (Juvonen et al., 2004). Motivated by the No Child Left Behind Act (2001), various stakeholders, including state education agencies, district administrators, school administrators, teachers, parents, and even students, have demonstrated an intensified interest in students' overall welfare, particularly as it relates to academic performance. Within these categories of stakeholders were those individuals who concluded that students' behavior problems chiefly contributed to their poor academic performance, especially in middle school (Arcia, 2007; Cook et al., 2008). In incidents of disturbing behavior, middle schools surpassed high schools and elementary school (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011). The number of middle schools where bullying occurred at least once per month virtually doubled the number of elementary schools that recorded at least one incident of bullying per month (Gray & Lewis, 2015). Moreover, violent incidents per 1,000 students for middle schools nearly doubled the rate among elementary and high schools.

Researchers who have analyzed the advantages of grade span configuration have focused primarily on how student academic achievement was influenced by the school's configuration and less on how student discipline was influenced (Alspaugh, 1998; Carolan & Chesky, 2012; Clark et al., 2013; Combs et al., 2011; Schwartz, Stiefel, Rubenstein, & Zabel, 2011; Wilson & Slate, 2014). The problem posed in this study was whether Texas public school students in Grades 6-8 who were economically disadvantaged had statistically significant differences in disciplinary consequences they received based on school configuration. A second purpose of the study was to examine the extent to which differences might be present in the reasons for disciplinary consequence assignment as a function of grade span configuration.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine the extent to which disciplinary consequence assignment and the reasons for disciplinary consequence assignment differ as an effect of grade span configuration by student economic status. Specifically, the disciplinary consequence assignment for students by their economic status (i.e., not economically disadvantaged, moderately poor, and very poor) was compared for students in a K-8 setting to students in a middle school (i.e., Grades 6-8) setting. Moreover, reasons for disciplinary consequence assignment were compared by student economic status for students in a K-8 setting to students in a middle school setting. Through analyzing three school years of data, the extent to which trends were present in disciplinary consequence assignment and the reasons students were assigned a disciplinary consequence were ascertained.

Significance of the Study

The rate at which students receive office referrals and subsequent suspension for problem behaviors has increased sharply among young adolescents attending middle school compared to the rate at which students in elementary schools receive office referrals that result in suspension (Arcia, 2007; Hemphill et al., 2009; Mendez & Knoff, 2003). Consequently, stakeholders have

expressed considerable concern about the welfare of young adolescents (Theriot & Dupper, 2010). Results from this study could be used by school leaders to determine the best learning environment for young adolescents and could be beneficial in decreasing the volume of discipline referrals among students ages 11 to 13. Moreover, policymakers and educational leaders might determine the findings from this study useful as they decide which school model is more capable of providing the specific needs for this group of students. Lastly, conclusions from this study could be beneficial to researchers who mainly investigate the influence of grade span configurations on student academic performance, perhaps providing more comprehensive answers to meet the needs of middle school-aged children.

Research Questions

The following research questions were addressed in this study: (a) What is the difference in disciplinary consequences assignment as a function of grade span configuration for students who were Not Poor in Texas schools?; (b) What is the difference in the reasons for disciplinary consequences assignment as a function of grade span configuration for students who were Not Poor in Texas schools?; (c) What is the difference in disciplinary consequences assignment as a function of grade span configuration for students who were Moderately Poor in Texas schools?; (d) What is the difference in the reasons for disciplinary consequences assignment as a function of grade span configuration for students who were Moderately Poor in Texas schools?; (e) What is the difference in disciplinary consequences assignment as a function of grade span configuration for students who were Very Poor Texas schools?; (f) What is the difference in the reasons for disciplinary consequences assignment as a function of grade span configuration for students who were Very Poor in Texas schools?; (g) What trend was present in disciplinary consequences assignment as a function of grade span configuration by student economic status?; and (h) What trend was present in reasons for disciplinary consequences assignment as a function of grade span configuration by student economic status? The first six research questions were repeated for the 2009-2010 and 2013-2014 school years, whereas the last two research questions were repeated for each economic status (i.e., Not Poor, Moderately Poor, and Very Poor). Thus, 18 research questions were examined in this investigation.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A non-experimental, causal-comparative research design (Creswell, 2009; Johnson & Christensen, 2012) was used for this study. In non-experimental, causal-comparative research, no manipulation of the independent variable occurs. Because of the design of the study, the independent variables have already occurred and extraneous variables were not controlled. The independent variables involved in this research were economic status (i.e., Not Poor, Moderately Poor, and Very Poor) and grade span configuration (i.e., traditional school and K-8). The dependent variables were disciplinary consequences and the reasons for disciplinary consequences assignment, both of which had already occurred.

Participants and Instrumentation

For this study, archival data for the 2009-2010 and 2013-2014 school years were requested and obtained from the Texas Education Agency Public Education Information Management System for students in K-8 schools and traditional schools in the state of Texas who were Not Poor, Moderately Poor, and Very Poor. Data from students outside of these grade configurations were not included. Raw data regarding disciplinary consequences and the reasons for disciplinary consequences assignment were analyzed from discipline data utilizing the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software program. The top five disciplinary consequences identified in the data were in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, Disciplinary Alternative Education Program, Juvenile Justice Alternative Education Program, and truancy charges filed. The following reasons were the top 10 reasons for assigning disciplinary consequences: (a) violated local code of conduct; (b) fighting/mutual combat; (c) possession of controlled substance/drugs; d) tobacco use; (e) truancy-3 to at least 10 unexcused absences; (f) truancy-parent contributed to; (g) possession of a non-illegal knife; (h) alcohol violation; (i) assault of a non-district employee; and (j) assault of a district employee.

After the Public Education Information Management System data file was converted into a SPSS data file, labels were given to applicable variables used in this investigation. Students were coded into three groups based on their economic status. Students coded by the Texas Education Agency as not being economically disadvantaged were labeled as being Not Poor. Students who received reduced-price meals were considered as being Moderately Poor. Students determined to be eligible for free meals were regarded as being Very Poor. Per the Food and Nutrition Service (2015), "The free guidelines are at or below 130 percent of the Federal poverty guidelines. The reduced-price guidelines are between 130 and at or below 185 percent of the Federal poverty guidelines" (p. 10). An assumption was made that the data were reliable and accurate because student data were reported to the Texas Education Agency directly from school districts. Moreover, the Texas Education Agency reviews data submissions for accuracy and reliability. For more technical information regarding data reliability and validity, readers are directed to the Texas Education Agency website.

RESULTS

To ascertain whether differences were present in disciplinary consequence assignment and the reason for disciplinary consequence assignment with respect to grade span configuration for students who were Not Poor, Moderately Poor, and for students who were Very Poor, Pearson chi-square analyses were conducted. This statistical procedure was viewed as the appropriate statistical procedure to use because frequency data were present for disciplinary consequence assignment, reason for the disciplinary consequence, and grade span configuration. Moreover, the sample size was sufficiently large to meet the underlying assumption of having five persons available per cell (Field, 2013). As such, chi-squares are the statistical procedure to use when both the independent and dependent variables are categorical (Slate & Rojas-LeBouef, 2011). Therefore, the assumptions for utilizing a chi-square were met. Results are presented by school year for students who were Not Poor, Moderately Poor, and Very Poor.

With regard to disciplinary consequences in the 2009-2010 school year for students who were Not Poor, the result was statistically significant, $\chi^2(4) = 150.42$, $p < .001$, as a function of

grade span configuration. The effect size for this finding, Cramer's V, was trivial, .026 (Cohen, 1988). As can be seen in Table 1, a higher percentage of students who were Not Poor, 5.70%, and who were enrolled in middle school settings were assigned to a Disciplinary Alternative Education Program placement than were their peers who were enrolled in KG-8 school settings, 4.90%. More than 200,000 instances of in-school suspension occurred in both grade span configurations, with a slightly higher percentage that occurred in KG-8 settings, 70.90%, than in 6-8 settings, 70.20%. For both grade span settings, the top three consequences assigned most often were in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, and Disciplinary Alternative Education Program placement. Readers are referred to Table 1 for the descriptive statistics for this analysis.

Table 1

Frequencies and Percentages of Disciplinary Consequence Assignment in the 2009-2010 School Year for Students Who Were Not Poor

Disciplinary Consequence	Grades KG-8 *n* and %age of Total	Middle Grades 6-8 *n* and %age of Total
In-School Suspension	(*n* = 125,735) 70.90%	(*n* = 90,420) 70.20%
Out-of-School Suspension	(*n* = 40,001) 22.60%	(*n* = 29,057) 22.60%
Disciplinary Alternative Education Program	(*n* = 8,629) 4.90%	(*n* = 7,401) 5.70%
Juvenile Justice Alternative Education Program	(*n* = 269) 0.20%	(*n* = 261) 0.20%
Truancy Charges Filed	(*n* = 2,680) 1.50%	(*n* = 1,63) 1.30%

With respect to disciplinary consequences in the 2013-2014 school year for students who were Not Poor, a statistically significant result was yielded, $\chi^2(4) = 136.19$, $p < .001$, as a function of grade span configuration. The effect size for this finding, Cramer's V, was trivial, .026 (Cohen, 1988). Revealed in Table 2 was a higher percentage of students who were Not Poor, 5.90%, who were assigned to a Disciplinary Alternative Education Program placement in middle school settings than their peers who were enrolled in KG-8 school settings, 4.80%. More than 100,000 instances of in-school suspension occurred in both grade span configurations, with a higher percentage being assigned to students in KG-8 settings, 70.20%, than assigned to students in 6-8 settings, 69.60%. Consistent with the 2009-2010 findings, the top three consequences most often assigned were in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, and Disciplinary Alternative Education Program placement for both grade span settings.

Table 2

Frequencies and Percentages of Disciplinary Consequence Assignment in the 2013-2014 School Year for Students Who Were Not Poor

Disciplinary Consequence	Grades KG-8 *n* and %age of Total	Middle Grades 6-8 *n* and %age of Total
In-School Suspension	(*n* = 85,423) 70.20%	(*n* = 60,109) 69.60%
Out-of-School Suspension	(*n* = 28,648) 23.50%	(*n* = 20,095) 23.30%
Disciplinary Alternative Education Program	(*n* = 5,862) 4.80%	(*n* = 5,087) 5.90%
Juvenile Justice Alternative Education Program	(*n* = 79) 0.10%	(*n* = 79) 0.10%
Truancy Charges Filed	(*n* = 1,637) 1.30%	(*n* = 985) 1.10%

Concerning disciplinary consequences in the 2009-2010 school year for students who were Moderately Poor, the result was statistically significant, $\chi^2(4) = 41.62$, $p < .001$, as a function of grade span configuration. The effect size for this finding, Cramer's V, was trivial, .021 (Cohen, 1988). As revealed in Table 3, a higher percentage of students who were Moderately Poor, 6.00%, were assigned to a Disciplinary Alternative Education Program placement in middle school settings than were their peers who were enrolled in KG-8 school settings, 5.10%. More than 55,000 total instances of in-school suspension occurred in both grade span configurations, with a higher percentage assigned in KG-8 settings, 68.40%, than assigned to students in 6-8 settings, 68.10%. The top three consequences assigned most often were in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, and Disciplinary Alternative Education Program placement for both grade span settings.

Table 3

Frequencies and Percentages of Disciplinary Consequence Assignment in the 2009-2010 School Year for Students Who Were Moderately Poor

Disciplinary Consequence	Grades KG-8 *n* and %age of Total	Middle Grades 6-8 *n* and %age of Total
In-School Suspension	(*n* = 39,550) 68.40%	(*n* = 28,038) 68.10%
Out-of-School Suspension	(*n* = 14,492) 25.10%	(*n* = 10,129) 24.60%
Disciplinary Alternative Education Program	(*n* = 2,924) 5.10%	(*n* = 2,462) 6.00%
Juvenile Justice Alternative Education Programs	(*n* = 24) 0.00%	(*n* = 19) 0.00%
Truancy Charges Filed	(*n* = 803) 1.40%	(*n* = 534) 1.30%

Regarding disciplinary consequences in the 2013-2014 school year for students who were Moderately Poor, a statistically significant difference was present, $\chi^2(4) = 32.60$, $p < .001$, as a function of grade span configuration. The effect size for this finding, Cramer's V, was trivial, .022 (Cohen, 1988). A higher percentage of students who were Moderately Poor, 5.80%, were assigned to a Disciplinary Alternative Education Program placement in middle school settings than in KG-8 school settings, 4.90%. More than 17,000 total instances of out-of-school suspension occurred in both grade span configurations, with a higher percentage assigned in KG-8 settings, 26.80%, than in 6-8 settings, 26.20%. Consistent with the previous school year results, the top three consequences assigned most often were in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, and Disciplinary Alternative Education Program placement for both grade span settings. The descriptive statistics for disciplinary consequences in the 2013-2014 school year for students who were Moderately Poor are delineated in Table 4.

Table 4

Frequencies and Percentages of Disciplinary Consequence Assignment in the 2013-2014 School Year for Students Who Were Moderately Poor

Disciplinary Consequence	Grades KG-8 *n* and %age of Total	Middle Grades 6-8 *n* and %age of Total
In-School Suspension	(*n* = 26,036) 67.30%	(*n* = 18,203) 67.10%
Out-of-School Suspension	(*n* = 10,362) 26.80%	(*n* = 7,102) 26.20%
Disciplinary Alternative Education Program	(*n* = 1,887) 4.90%	(*n* = 1,578) 5.80%
Juvenile Justice Alternative Education Programs	(*n* = 5) 0.00%	(*n* = 5) 0.00%
Truancy Charges Filed	(*n* = 409) 1.10%	(*n* = 248) 0.90%

Regarding disciplinary consequences in the 2009-2010 school year for students who were Very Poor, the result was statistically significant, $\chi^2(4) = 491.50$, $p < .001$, as a function of grade span configuration. The effect size for this finding, Cramer's V, was trivial, .025 (Cohen, 1988). A higher percentage of students who were Very Poor, 7.40%, were assigned to a Disciplinary Alternative Education Program placement were enrolled in middle school settings than were their peers who are enrolled in KG-8 school settings, 6.30%. Nearly one-half million total instances of in-school suspension occurred in both grade span configurations, with a higher percentage assigned in KG-8 settings, 61.30%, than in 6-8 settings, 60.90%. Similar to previous results, the top three consequences most frequently assigned were in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, and Disciplinary Alternative Education Program placement for both grade span configurations. Revealed in Table 5 are the descriptive statistics for disciplinary consequences in the 2009-2010 school year for students who were Very Poor.

Table 5

Frequencies and Percentages of Disciplinary Consequence Assignment in the 2009-2010 School Year for Students Who Were Very Poor

Disciplinary Consequence	Grades KG-8 *n* and %age of Total	Middle Grades 6-8 *n* and %age of Total
In-School Suspension	(*n* = 289,208) 61.30%	(*n* = 202,838) 60.90%
Out-of-School Suspension	(*n* = 140,421) 29.80%	(*n* = 97,208) 29.20%
Disciplinary Alternative Education Program	(*n* = 29,532) 6.30%	(*n* = 24,719) 7.40%
Juvenile Justice Alternative Education Programs	(*n* = 870) 0.20%	(*n* = 829) 0.20%
Truancy Charges Filed	(*n* = 11,811) 2.50%	(*n* = 7,647) 2.30%

With respect to disciplinary consequences in the 2013-2014 school year for students who were Very Poor, the result was statistically significant, $\chi^2(4) = 734.71$, $p < .001$, as a function of grade span configuration. The effect size for this finding, Cramer's V, was trivial, .031 (Cohen, 1988). A higher percentage of students who were Very Poor, 7.90%, were assigned to a Disciplinary Alternative Education Program placement in middle school settings than were their peers who were enrolled in KG-8 school settings, 6.50%. More than 225,000 total instances of out-of-school suspension occurred in both grade span configurations, with a higher percentage assigned in KG-8 settings, 31.50%, than in 6-8 settings, 30.90%. Consistent with the results from previous years, the top three consequences most frequently assigned were in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, and Disciplinary Alternative Education Program placement for both settings. Table 6 contains the descriptive statistics for disciplinary consequences in the 2013-2014 school year for students who were Very Poor.

Table 6

Frequencies and Percentages of Disciplinary Consequence Assignment in the 2013-2014 School Year for Students Who Were Very Poor

Reason for Disciplinary Consequence Assignment	Grades KG-8 *n* and %age of Total	Middle Grades 6-8 *n* and %age of Total
In-School Suspension	(*n* = 261,275) 59.40%	(*n* = 182,962) 59.10%
Out-of-School Suspension	(*n* = 138,766) 31.50%	(*n* = 95,655) 30.90%
Disciplinary Alternative Education Program	(*n* = 28,507) 6.50%	(*n* = 24,353) 7.90%
Juvenile Justice Alternative Education Programs	(*n* = 514) 0.10%	(*n* = 491) 0.20%
Truancy Charges Filed	(*n* = 11,155) 2.50%	(*n* = 6,325) 2.00%

Concerning reasons for disciplinary consequence assignment in the 2009-2010 school year for students who were Not Poor, the result was statistically significant, $\chi^2(14) = 365.83$, $p < .001$, as a function of grade span configuration. The effect size for this finding, Cramer's V, was trivial, .036 (Cohen, 1988). Table 7 contains the top 10 reasons students who were Not Poor received a disciplinary consequence. A higher percentage of students who were Not Poor, 94.50%, and who were enrolled in KG-8 school settings received consequences for violation of the code of conduct than their peers, 93.70%, who were enrolled in middle school settings. For controlled substances, a larger percentage of students who were Not Poor, 2.00%, and who were enrolled in middle school settings received disciplinary consequences than their peers in KG-8 settings, 1.40. Detailed in Table 7 are the frequencies and percentages of the reasons for disciplinary consequence assignments in the 2009-2010 school year for students who were Not Poor.

Table 7

Frequencies and Percentages of Top Reasons for Disciplinary Consequence Assignment in the 2009-2010 School Year for Students Who Were Not Poor

Reason for Disciplinary Consequence Assignment	Grades KG-8 *n* and %age of Total	Middle Grades 6-8 *n* and %age of Total
Violated Code of Conduct	(*n* = 156,398) 94.50 %	(*n* = 111,182) 93.70 %
Controlled Substance	(*n* = 2,369) 1.40 %	(*n* = 2,342) 2.00 %
Truancy (Three or More Unexcused Absences)	(*n* = 1,694) 1.00 %	(*n* = 1,309) 1.10%
Truancy (Parent Contribute To)	(*n* = 986) 0.60 %	(*n* = 364) 0.30%
Serious/Persistent Misconduct	(*n* = 923) 0.60 %	(*n* = 837) 0.70%
Assault (Non-district Employee)	(*n* = 759) 0.50 %	(*n* = 715) 0.60%
Non-Illegal Knife	(*n* = 557) 0.30%	(*n* = 347) 0.30%
Alcohol Violation	(*n* = 490) 0.30%	(*n* = 479) 0.40%
Tobacco Use	(*n* = 381) 0.20%	(*n* = 359) 0.30%
Permanent Removal by the Teacher	(*n* = 201) 0.10%	(*n* = 98) 0.10%

With respect to reasons for disciplinary consequence assignment in the 2013-2014 school year for students who were Not Poor, a statistically significant result was yielded, $\chi^2(4) = 414.52$, $p < .001$, as a function of grade span configuration. The effect size for this finding, Cramer's V, was trivial, .045 (Cohen, 1988). Revealed in Table 8 was a higher percentage of students who were Not Poor, 7.90%, who received disciplinary consequences for fighting in middle school settings than their peers who were enrolled in KG-8 school settings, 6.60%. For controlled substances, a greater percentage of students who were Not Poor, 2.30%, and who were enrolled in middle school settings received disciplinary consequences than their peers in KG-8 school settings, 1.70%.

Table 8

Frequencies and Percentages of Top Reasons for Disciplinary Consequence Assignment in the 2013-2014 School Year for Students Who Were Not Poor

Reason for Disciplinary Consequence Assignment	Grades KG-8 *n* and %age of Total	Middle Grades 6-8 *n* and %age of Total
Violated Code of Conduct	(*n* = 106,990) 88.20%	(*n* = 74,107) 86.10%
Fighting	(*n* = 8,042) 6.60%	(*n* = 6,821) 7.90%
Controlled Substance	(*n* = 2,012) 1.70%	(*n* = 1,991) 2.30%
Truancy (Three to at Least 10 Unexcused Absences)	(*n* = 821) 0.70%	(*n* = 646) 0.80%
Truancy (Parent Contribute To)	(*n* = 816) 0.70%	(*n* = 339) 0.40%
Tobacco Use	(*n* = 570) 0.50%	(*n* = 544) 0.60%
Assault (Non-district Employee)	(*n* = 548) 0.50%	(*n* = 503) 0.60%
Non-Illegal Knife	(*n* = 442) 0.40%	(*n* = 260) 0.30%
Alcohol Violation	(*n* = 379) 0.30%	(*n* = 369) 0.40%
Terroristic Threat	(*n* = 212) 0.20%	(*n* = 161) 0.20%

Concerning reasons for disciplinary consequence assignment in the 2009-2010 school year for students who were Moderately Poor, the result was statistically significant, $\chi^2(14) = 91.04$, $p < .001$, as a function of grade span configuration. The effect size for this finding, Cramer's V, was trivial, .031 (Cohen, 1988). As revealed in Table 9, a higher percentage of students who were Moderately Poor, 1.80%, were assigned a disciplinary consequence in middle school settings than were their peers who were enrolled in KG-8 school settings, 1.30%. Detailed in Table 9 are the frequencies and percentages of the top reasons students who were Moderately Poor were assigned a disciplinary consequence in the 2009-2010 school year.

Table 9

Frequencies and Percentages of Top Reasons for Disciplinary Consequence Assignment in the 2009-2010 School Year for Students Who Were Moderately Poor

Reason for Disciplinary Consequence Assignment	Grades KG-8 *n* and %age of Total	Middle Grades 6-8 *n* and %age of Total
Violated Code of Conduct	(*n* = 510,977) 95.00%	(*n* = 359,433) 94.40%
Controlled Substance	(*n* = 723) 1.30%	(*n* = 702) 1.80%
Truancy (Three or More)	(*n* = 525) 1.00%	(*n* = 418) 1.10%
Serious/Persistent Misconduct	(*n* = 315) 0.60 %	(*n* = 261) 0.70%
Truancy (Parent Contribute To)	(*n* = 278) 0.50%	(*n* = 116) 0.30%
Assault (Non-district Employee)	(*n* = 217) 0.40%	(*n* = 181) 0.50%
Non-Illegal Knife	(*n* = 161) 0.30%	(*n* = 70) 0.20%
Alcohol Violation	(*n* = 115) 0.20%	(*n* = 102) 0.30%
Tobacco Use	(*n* = 111) 0.20%	(*n* = 99) 0.30%
Permanent Removal by the Teacher	(*n* = 74) 0.10%	(*n* = 43) 0.10%

Regarding reasons for disciplinary consequence assignment in the 2013-2014 school year for students who were Moderately Poor, a statistically significant difference was present, $\chi^2(14) = 148.12$, $p < .001$, as a function of grade span configuration. The effect size for this finding, Cramer's V, was trivial, .047 (Cohen, 1988). A higher percentage of students who were Moderately Poor, 8.80%, were assigned to a disciplinary consequence for fighting in middle school settings than in KG-8 school settings, 7.50%. Correspondingly, a greater percentage of students who were Moderately Poor, 2.30%, and who were enrolled in middle school settings received disciplinary consequences than in KG-8 school settings, 1.60%. Descriptive statistics for reasons for a disciplinary consequence assignment in the 2013-2014 school year for students who were Moderately Poor are delineated in Table 10.

Table 10

Frequencies and Percentages of Top Reasons for Disciplinary Consequence Assignment in the 2013-2014 School Year for Students Who Were Moderately Poor

Reason for Disciplinary Consequence Assignment	Grades KG-8 *n* and %age of Total	Middle Grades 6-8 *n* and %age of Total
Violated Code of Conduct	(*n* = 34,056) 88.10%	(*n* = 23,374) 86.20%
Fighting	(*n* = 2,890) 7.50%	(*n* = 2,396) 8.80%
Controlled Substance	(*n* = 629) 1.60%	(*n* = 616) 2.30%
Truancy (Parent Contribute To)	(*n* = 205) 0.50%	(*n* = 75) 0.30%
Truancy (Three to at Least 10 Unexcused Absences)	(*n* = 204) 0.50%	(*n* = 173) 0.60%
Assault (Non-district Employee)	(*n* = 167) 0.40%	(*n* = 146) 0.50%
Non-Illegal Knife	(*n* = 151) 0.40%	(*n* = 78) 0.30%
Tobacco Use	(*n* = 112) 0.30%	(*n* = 98) 0.40%
Terroristic Threat	(*n* = 56) 0.10%	(*n* = 46) 0.20%
Assault (District Employee)	(*n* = 54) 0.10%	(*n* = 5) 0.00%

Regarding reasons for a disciplinary consequence assignment in the 2009-2010 school year for students who were Very Poor, the result was statistically significant, $\chi^2(14) = 1{,}248.67$, $p < .001$, as a function of grade span configuration. The effect size for this finding, Cramer's V, was trivial, .041 (Cohen, 1988). A higher percentage of students who were Very Poor, 2.20%, were assigned a disciplinary consequence for controlled substance in middle school settings than were their peers who were enrolled in KG-8 school settings, 1.60%. For violating the Code of Conduct, a greater percentage of students who were Very Poor, 92.60%, and who were enrolled in KG-8 school settings received disciplinary consequences than students who were Very Poor and who were enrolled in middle school settings, 91.60%. Revealed in Table 11 are the top 10 reasons for a disciplinary consequence assignment in the 2009-2010 school year for students who were Very Poor.

Table 11

Frequencies and Percentages of Top Reasons for Disciplinary Consequence Assignment in the 2009-2010 School Year for Students Who Were Very Poor

Reason for Disciplinary Consequence Assignment	Grades KG-8 *n* and %age of Total	Middle Grades 6-8 *n* and %age of Total
Violated Code of Conduct	(*n* = 403,473) 92.60%	(*n* = 280,023) 91.60%
Truancy (Three to at Least 10 Unexcused Absences)	(*n* = 7,712) 1.80%	(*n* = 6,125) 2.00%
Controlled Substance	(*n* = 6,903) 1.60%	(*n* = 6,682) 2.20%
Serious/Persistent Misconduct	(*n* = 4,126) 0.90 %	(*n* = 3,765) 1.20%
Truancy (Parent Contribute To)	(*n* = 4,080) 0.90%	(*n* = 1,516) 0.50%
Assault (Non-district Employee)	(*n* = 2,429) 0.60%	(*n* = 2,223) 0.70%
Non-Illegal Knife	(*n* = 1,505) 0.30%	(*n* = 850) 0.30%
Tobacco Use	(*n* = 940) 0.20%	(*n* = 829) 0.30%
Alcohol Violation	(*n* = 840) 0.20%	(*n* = 774) 0.30%
Assault (District Employee)	(*n* = 807) 0.20%	(*n* = 590) 0.20%

Lastly, with respect to reasons for a disciplinary consequence assignment in the 2013-2014 school year for students who were Very Poor, the result was statistically significant, $\chi^2(44) = 2{,}102.73$, $p < .001$, as a function of grade span configuration. The effect size for this finding, Cramer's V, was trivial, .053 (Cohen, 1988). As recorded in Table 12, a larger percentage of students who were Very Poor, 9.20%, were assigned a disciplinary consequence for fighting in middle school settings than were their peers who were enrolled in KG-8 school settings, 8.20%. For controlled substances, a higher percentage of students who were Very Poor, 2.90%, and who were enrolled in middle school settings received a disciplinary consequence for this reason than did students who were Very Poor and who were enrolled in KG-8 school settings, 2.10%. Table 12 contains the descriptive statistics for the reasons for a disciplinary consequence assignment in the 2013-2014 school year for students who were Very Poor.

Table 12

Frequencies and Percentages of Top Reasons for Disciplinary Consequence Assignment in the 2013-2014 School Year for Students Who Were Very Poor

Reason for Disciplinary Consequence Assignment	Grades KG-8 *n* and %age of Total	Middle Grades 6-8 *n* and %age of Total
Violated Code of Conduct	(*n* = 371,150) 84.70%	(*n* = 255,704) 82.90%
Fighting	(*n* = 35,765) 8.20%	(*n* = 28,371) 9.20%
Controlled Substance	(*n* = 9,217) 2.10%	(*n* = 8,901) 2.90%
Truancy (Three to at Least 10 Unexcused Absences)	(*n* = 5,638) 1.30%	(*n* = 4,690) 1.50%
Truancy (Parent Contribute To)	(*n* = 5,485) 1.30%	(*n* = 1,615) 0.50%
Assault (Non-district Employee)	(*n* = 2,804) 0.60%	(*n* = 2,505) 0.80%
Tobacco Use	(*n* = 1558) 0.40%	(*n* = 1,428) 0.50%
Non-Illegal Knife	(*n* = 1,546) 0.40%	(*n* = 819) 0.30%
Alcohol Violation	(*n* = 1,082) 0.20%	(*n* = 1,039) 0.30%
Assault (District Employee)	(*n* = 1,018) 0.20%	(*n* = 677) 0.20%

DISCUSSION

Examined in this study were the effects of grade span configuration on disciplinary consequence assignments and the reasons for disciplinary consequence assignments for students in Texas schools who were Not Poor, Moderately Poor, and Very Poor. Two years of statewide data were obtained and examined for participants enrolled in traditionally configured middle schools (i.e., Grade 6 through Grade 8) and KG-8 schools. The results were statistically significant for each of the two school years examined for disciplinary consequence assignments and the reasons for disciplinary consequence assignments for students with respect to economic status.

Disciplinary Consequences Assignment

In each of the two years of data analyzed, a higher percentage of students who were Not Poor, Moderately Poor, and Very Poor and who were enrolled in middle school settings were assigned to a Disciplinary Alternative Education Program placement than their peers in KG-8 school settings. The largest difference, 1.40%, was recorded during the 2013-2014 school year for students who were Very Poor. The total number of students who were Very Poor and who were assigned a Disciplinary Alternative Education Program placement decreased from the 2009-2010 school year to the 2013-2014 school year by 35.95% in middle school settings and by 35.47% in KG-8 school settings. In addition, the number of students who were Very Poor and who were assigned to a Disciplinary Alternative Education Program decreased by 3.47 percentage points for students enrolled in KG-8 school settings, and decreased by 1.47 percentage points for their peers who were enrolled in middle school settings. Students who were enrolled in KG-8 school settings were assigned to in-school suspension and to out-of-school suspension at a higher rate than were their peers who were enrolled in middle school settings. The top three consequences most often assigned were in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, and Disciplinary Alternative Education Program.

Reasons for Disciplinary Consequences Assignment

In the 2009-2010 school year, the top three reasons students received a disciplinary consequence assignment were violating the Code of Conduct, controlled substance, and truancy (three or more unexcused absences). For the 2013-2014 school year, the three leading reasons for students receiving a disciplinary consequence assignment were violating the Code of Conduct, fighting, and controlled substance. In each of the two school years, the percentage of students who received a disciplinary consequence assignment for Code of Conduct violation was highest among students enrolled in KG-8 school settings. Fighting did not appear as a disciplinary consequence assignment for the 2009-2010 school year. However, fighting was the second highest reason for a disciplinary consequence assigned 2013-2014 school year and was highest among students enrolled in middle school settings. Similarly, truancy (three or more absences) was highest among students who were enrolled in middle schools.

From the 2009-2010 school year to the 2013-2014 school year, the percentage of students receiving a disciplinary consequence assignment for controlled substance decreased. The decrease was highest among students who were Moderately Poor and who were enrolled in middle school settings, 93.50 percentage points. The lowest decrease was recorded among students who were

Very Poor and who were enrolled in KG-8 school settings, 8.01%. Fighting, truancy, and controlled substance were highest in middle school settings for each of the student groups being investigated.

Connection to Existing Literature

Disciplinary consequences assignment and the reason on for disciplinary consequences assignment has been a major concern among policymakers, educators, and other stakeholders (Theriot & Dupper, 2010). Middle school students experience a stark increase in the rate of office referrals that resulted in out-of-school suspension (Arcia, 2007; Kinsler, 2013; Mendez & Knoff, 2003). Reducing the number of disciplinary consequence assignments that remove students from classrooms is important because of the negative relationships between academic performance and discipline (Costenbader & Markson, 1998; Gregory et al., 2010; Kinsler, 2013; Mendez, 2003). Student behavioral problems weaken subsequent academic performance (Hoffman, Erickson, & Spence, 2013; Kelly & Pink, 1973; McLeod, Uemura, & Rohrman, 2012).

Results from this study were consistent with researchers (Cook et al., 2008; Franklin & Glascock, 1998; Hirst, 2005; Hough, 2009; Theriot & Dupper, 2010) who concluded that students in KG-8 schools experienced a decrease in disciplinary concerns. Specifically, as it relates to the more severe disciplinary consequence assignment, students enrolled in middle school settings were more likely to receive a Disciplinary Alternative Education Program placement than were their peers in KG-8 settings. Regarding out-of-school and in-school suspension, the findings from this study were not commensurate with previous researchers (Cook et al., 2008; Franklin & Glascock, 1998; Hirst, 2005; Hough, 2009; Theriot & Dupper, 2010) who concluded that student discipline would occur less often in KG-8 schools compared to student discipline in middle schools.

Implications for Policy and Practice

An intensified interest for the academic success of all students resulted from the No Child Left Behind Act (2001). Efforts to reduce the number of student behavioral concerns would boost student performance (Gregory et al., 2010; Kinsler, 2013; Mendez, 2003). By examining the disciplinary consequences assignments students receive and by examining the reasons for disciplinary consequence assignments, school and district officials could reduce the loss instructional time students experience when they are absent from the learning environment because of student discipline. Revealed in this study was that students enrolled in middle schools were awarded disciplinary consequences for more severe reasons than were students in middle schools. Consequently, an implication of this study is for school and district leaders to examine factors that contribute to the disparities between middle schools and KG-8 schools with respect to why students receive disciplinary consequences assignment. Moreover, discovered in this study was that Disciplinary Alternative Education Program placement occurred at a higher rate for students enrolled in middle school settings than for students enrolled in KG-8 school settings. Therefore, educational leaders might examine variables that influence students' placement into a Disciplinary Alternative Education Program.

Recommendations for Future Research

Investigated in this study were differences in disciplinary consequence assignment and reasons for disciplinary consequence assignment for students who were Not Poor, Moderately Poor, and Very Poor as a function of grade span configuration. The findings from this study could be used to launch further studies with respect to the influence of grade span configurations on student discipline. Ensuing researchers could investigate the disparity between students being assigned to a Disciplinary Alternative Education Program in middle school settings and KG-8 school settings. Discovered in this investigation was that the percentage of students being assigned in-school suspension and out-of-school suspension was higher in middle schools than in KG-8 schools. Accordingly, researchers could conduct studies regarding possible reasons for these differences to reduce the number of students being removed from classrooms for disciplinary infractions. Lastly, the KG-8 participants for this research included students below the middle school grades (i.e., KG-5). However, the middle school participants only included Grades 6-8. Thus, conducting research that only included Grades 6-8 in the KG-8 school settings and in middle school settings might render different and more conclusive results.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to determine the extent to which disciplinary consequence assignment and the reasons for disciplinary consequence assignment differ as an effect of grade span configuration by student economic status. Two years of statewide data were obtained and examined for participants enrolled in traditionally configured middle schools (i.e., Grade 6 through Grade 8) and KG-8 schools. The results were statistically significant for each of the two school years examined for disciplinary consequence assignments and the reasons for disciplinary consequence assignments for students with respect to economic status. In each of the two years studied, a higher percentage of students who were Not Poor, Moderately Poor, and Very Poor and who were enrolled in middle school settings were assigned to a Disciplinary Alternative Education Program than their peers in KG-8 school settings. The top three consequences most often assigned were in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, and Disciplinary Alternative Education Program. The top reasons students received a disciplinary consequence assignment were violating the Code of Conduct, controlled substance, fighting, and truancy (three or more unexcused absences). Fighting, truancy, and controlled substance were highest in middle school settings for each of the student groups investigated.

Results from this investigation were consistent with other researchers (Cook et al., 2008; Franklin & Glascock, 1998; Hirst, 2005; Hough, 2009; Theriot & Dupper, 2010) who concluded that students in KG-8 schools experienced a decrease in disciplinary concerns. Specifically, as it relates to the more severe disciplinary consequence assignment, students enrolled in middle school settings were more likely to receive a Disciplinary Alternative Education Program placement than were their peers in KG-8 school settings. Regarding out-of-school and in-school suspension, the findings from this study were not congruent with other researchers (Cook et al., 2008; Franklin & Glascock, 1998; Hirst, 2005; Hough, 2009; Theriot & Dupper, 2010) who concluded that student discipline would occur less often in KG-8 schools than in middle schools.

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PREFERRED CITATION

Wilson, R., Moore, G.W., Bustamante, R., & Slate, J.R. (2017). Differences in disciplinary consequence assignment as a function of grade span configuration by student economic status. *Journal of Ethical Educational Leadership, 4*(1), 1-24. Retrieved from: http://www.cojeel.org.

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