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Detention Is Not the Answer

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### Abstract

School discipline is used in schools across the United States. It is used to help with controlling students and maintaining behaviors. Also, it helps maintain order in the school. School discipline varies due to the behavior and actions that the students are exhibiting as well as the school context. Detention is one of the most common punishments in schools. Detention usually means that a student remains in school during a certain time and reports to a certain room as a punishment. This literature review will examine various studies conducted on school discipline, particularly those focused on detention, and explore options that are effective for all involved.

### Detention Is Not the Answer

Detention has been used to make students aware that they are not completing or doing their work, displaying correct behavior in various situations, not behaving or completing task, or having the appropriate actions in given situations. Detention is one of the most common punishments in United States. Usually this is where a student reports to a certain area or room for a certain period afterschool to work on homework and/or complete tasks assigned to the students.

According to Allman and State (2011) behaviors of students in school is not new: teachers have reported behavior problems since the early beginning of public school system. The consequences of unwanted behavior could be verbal reprimands, corporal punishment, after-school detention, in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, and even fines. Researchers have expressed concern over the removal of students from the general education classroom because these methods encouraged poor behavior and did not address the students' behaviors at all.

The history of school discipline has not followed a straight path due to different attitudes toward various discipline and approaches that have been presented over time. The most common means of discipline in schools early on was corporal punishment. When a child was in school, the teacher was expected to act as a parent. This was cause for concern because if not monitored it could be open to abuse and there was growing opposition as this continued through the years. This was abolished over time. Then modern educationalists urged corporal punishment not to be used and suggested learning needs more positive reinforcement with encouragement to the students. Later on, the Quincy Movement was introduced. It was a system of learning that supported learning through play. This system was less rigid. These developments look at connections between education and discipline and considered teacher roles in creating productive

learning environments for students. When the positive reinforcement does not work, this is where a variety of punishments might be given from detention, suspensions, or expulsion for the student. What other alternatives could be used that would be more effective? Some of the options would include lunch detentions, school behavior plans, and other programs to diminish detentions. Discussion about the different strategies such as Positive Behavioral Intervention Systems (PBIS), and other strategies that are an effective choice. This paper will recount the history of detention, effects on students with detention, and the various options rather than the “traditional” detention for punishment.

### **Literature Review**

Spaulding et al. (2010) conducted a nationwide study of office referrals in 1,500 schools. The study found that office referrals in elementary schools led to detention 13% of the time. The study also found that detention was the single most common response to office referrals in middle and high school with detentions being the response in about 26% of middle school and 28% of high school.

Blomberg (2003) examined the research findings on the application and effectiveness of in-school and out-of- school suspensions. The author proposed that educators need to decide which type of strategy best benefits the students in the long run. Furthermore, it was suggested that schools need to make informed decisions and consider which choice will be the most beneficial for the emotional and long-term health of the student. It was concluded that it was ineffective. He stated, “Research has to move in this direction if the discipline consequences that we choose for students are to act as an ultimate benefit” (Blomberg, 2003, p. 8).

### **Studies Supporting Detention**

A study that was conducted by Infantino and Little (2005) looked at students' perceptions of behavior and effectiveness of different discipline methods. The authors surveyed 350 students in the school. The results demonstrated that "talking out of turn" was a behavior looked at by teachers and students to be most troublesome and frequent. Deterrents seen as most effective included a trip to the office, detention, and report/note sent home. It was concluded that teachers and students need to know current studies and strategies being used so that they can develop an effective plan and devise strategies that get the best results (Infantino & Little, 2005).

Atkins (2002) also investigated whether detentions and suspensions were effective. He compared students that received detention or suspension in the fall with those who received detention or suspension in the fall and spring. It was found that the number of referrals over the year increased for the group who had had both fall and spring group. They concluded students who received these consequences in both the fall and spring were ineffective. With having more consequences than the other group, the groups showed an increase of behavior issues in the area of being disruptive and aggressive, the study highlighted that detention/suspension acted as more of a reward instead of a form of punishment. Therefore, it was suggested the need to explore other alternatives.

### **Studies Opposing Detention**

Some studies have shown that there are negative effects to the use of detention. A study by Fabelo et al. (2011) followed seventh graders in 2001, 2012, and 2013. Findings demonstrated that students in detention were much more likely to be held back, drop out, or be involved in criminal activity. It also concluded that the use of detention varied widely, even in schools with

similar demographics. It was found that detention did not improve academic performance (Fabelo et al., 2011).

There have been studies on detention and links to student's future actions. Monahan, Derhei, Bechtold, and Cauffman (2014) studied the impact of mandated leaves of absence from school on the likelihood of arrest for juveniles. Findings displayed that youth are more likely to be arrested on days that they are suspended from school, often as the result of a so-called three strikes policy. The increased likelihood of arrest is strongest among youth who do not have a history of criminal behavior.

Morrison (2014) discussed a survey of students ages 11-16 at a school in England to discern their attitudes about punishments and rewards. It was discussed how detentions did not make children behave any better. Students may learn that bad behavior have consequences, but they are not learning to behave any better. This was a pilot study, and further research is needed.

### **Alternatives**

One option that seemed beneficial instead of a "traditional" detention was a lunch detention. Grazale (2013) described that a lunch detention was when a child has some form of disciplinary issue that are minor in school. The child serves the time with the principal or another teacher at lunch time. During that time the kids share and talk about what is going on in their life to each other- this could be minor or major such as weekend plans to hearing about a trend that the children are doing. It builds a relationship and some children look forward to this time but, it also connects the adult with the child. Grazale concluded that lunch detentions at the middle school level proved to be beneficial for several reasons. Lunch detention was a good opportunity for teachers and administrators to connect with the students. It was a time that they could discuss various items such as grades, attendance, and activities in school. The teachers or

administrators made a connection with these students with emotion or social issues that they had at home or at school. Support was given to these students to monitor their instructional process and follow and track their progress. Everyone included in the process worked together for positive outcomes that were beneficial.

Another suggestion from Holcomb (2016) was an intervention system. The program that was suggested was Positive Behavior Intervention System (PBIS). This was a program that was used to encourage and promote correct behavior and good choices. Holcomb (2016) described the positive effects of this program. Some of the program's elements included setting expectations, teaching positive behaviors, building relationships, having peer mediators, presenting creative rewards, matching students with mentors, developing behavior contracts with students input, teaching social and emotional skills, and working through minor incidents. PBIS was viewed as an alternative to the "traditional" detention.

Meditation was another option that seemed beneficial. Walton (2016) shared benefits that tells about how mediation and mindfulness can offer children many benefits. Firstly, meditation increases attention. The author shared a study in 2013 that showed boys with ADHD in an eight-week training reduced hyperactivity and improved concentration. It also affected their attendance and grades went up. Secondly, meditation improves and maintain mental health. Thirdly, meditation helps with self- awareness and self- regulation. If students were aware of their thought process and reactions, they were likely to be better in charge of their emotions and behaviors. They were likely to have the skills to deal with different situations. Lastly, meditation develops social-emotional skills, being kind to one another in and out of the classroom. The children with more social skills could deal with various situations. Walton



(2016) emphasized that kids who use meditation practices build skills regarding attention, self-awareness, self-management that may lead to better developed decision-making and social skills.

### **Discussion**

In school discipline, it is critical to know that detention is making a difference and is effective. To be effective that would mean that students are receiving less forms of discipline and referral and detentions are declining due to the student's behavior. In the study by Blomberg (2003) application of in-school and out-of-school suspension was found ineffective and the strategies were not consistent with all the group studies.

Looking at Spaulding (2010) findings on office referrals it was shared that most of the time at the elementary level office referrals was because peer-directed behavior, in the middle school it was because of interaction between the student and adult, and for the high school level the referral was for being tardy or not showing up at school. Some studies such as Fabelo et.al., (2011) and Monahan et.al., (2014) show that there are serious consequences that follow school discipline that often grow into larger negative issues for the child in the future such as school suspension, grade retention, drop-out and juvenile arrest.

### **Limitations of These Studies**

The inconsistencies of Bloomberg (2003) can be from the equity of the new program or not dealing with all students in the same manner. Another limitation was variations of style and methods of in-school suspension need to be effectively compared to see the value of each model. It was also founded that out-of school suspensions were inappropriately used against minorities. The demographic limitation such as urban versus rural areas that were studied. For Spaulding (2010) the study had only the detentions following an office referral. So, the number is misrepresented. In many cases teachers, can give a detention without an office referral.

**Equality limitations.** Blomberg (2003) shared that studies about the equity of the new program had flaws. Not all in-school suspension and out-of-school suspension programs were equal. The application was not consistent. Three of the schools in the study were unfairly suspending African American students versus other ethnic groups. This can create problems for the students at home and running with peer groups when not in school. It was reported that OSS (out of school suspensions) were ineffective at helping with better future behavior of students. It was shared about the means to hire a full-time staff member to operate the in-school-suspension room and funding. In both in-school and out-of-school suspensions the student was missing instructional time. This was a limitation of the case studies when looking at the data.

**Demographic limitations.** Blomberg (2003) reviewed studies of OSS (out-of-school suspensions) in the area of racial lines. It was founded that black males were most frequently suspended of the sub group. In the middle and high school, black males were more than twice as likely as white males to receive as OSS. It is often assumed that due to their low socio-economic status that this leads to disruptive behavior and more suspensions. Hispanic males also had a higher percentage of suspension than whites.

### **Conclusion**

School discipline needs to be looked at very closely. There are some who are for various types of discipline and some who are against it. Detentions are one form of discipline that is used in schools. With given a detention there are consequences that are associated with that. Based on research, there are serious consequences that will affect the child for the rest of their life if detention happens to become a pattern. This should not be looked at lightly. After researching detention, administrators and teachers need to see and examine if that is the best form of discipline to use. There are many other options instead of detention that result in more of a

positive effect for the student that the results are more favorable. There needs to be a consensus about what works for the child and school system. The options that are available must best fit the student, teacher, and the school. The outcome for all involved must be a positive experience instead of a negative one. It must instill values that a student can apply now and in the future.

## Annotated Bibliography

**Blomberg, N. (2003). Effective discipline for misbehavior: In-school vs. out- of-school suspension. *Concept, 27*.**

The author looks at the effectiveness of in-school and out-of-school suspension. The data shows that out of school suspension is not applied fairly and does not improve future behavior. Blomberg discusses about the various forms of in-school suspensions and how they are not all the same in areas and with minorities. He concludes that the effects of these suspensions vary due to the inconstancies.

**Monahan, K. C., VanDerhei, S., Bechtold, J., & Cauffman, E. (2014). From the school yard to the squad car: School discipline, truancy, and arrest. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 43(7), 1110-1122*.**

The researchers looked at zero-tolerance policies and what effect these policies had on students. They did a study to test and see if certain characteristics and various factors affected the outcome of the students. The findings were school discipline action places youth at risk.

**Spaulding, S., Irvin, L., Horner, R., May, S., Emeldi, M., Tobin, T., & Sugai, G. (2010). Schoolwide social-behavioral climate, student problem behavior, and related administrative decisions: Empirical patterns from 1,510 schools nationwide. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions, 12(2), 69-85*.**

They looked at office discipline referral data and it showed most office referrals at various grade levels were related to various behaviors or issues. Also discussed was the consequences of the discipline with different ages of students.

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