Mental Health and Discipline in California Community Schools

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Mental Health and Discipline in California Community Schools

A Dissertation by

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Irvine, California
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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
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You are appreciated.
ABSTRACT

Mental Health and Discipline in California Community Schools

by Damien Phillips

Purpose: The purpose of this mixed method study was to determine if there is a difference in achievement, absenteeism, graduation rates and suspension for students enrolled in community schools that do and don’t have access to school-based mental health services. In addition, it was the purpose to identify and describe the practices most effective in improving attendance, reduction of suspension, achievement and graduation as perceived by community school employees.

Methodology: This mixed-method dissertation attempted to determine the difference between California county community schools for expelled students who have had access to school-based mental health and those who do not as it pertains to rates of chronic absenteeism, achievement, suspensions, and graduation rates data collected by The California Department of Education School Dashboard.

Findings: The examination of mixed methods data from California School Dashboard and the 25 interviews indicated a variety of findings. The first three findings are that there is a difference or significant difference in rates of attendance, graduation, and suspension rates for schools that offer mental health. Fourth, the single best way of improving rates of attendance is having an attendance officer. Further finding had to do with how building and maintaining strong relationships assist in attendance, achievement and graduation rates, and conversely the schools that focus on security had the lowest rates of attendance. The last finding was about the importance of transition planning.
**Conclusions:** This study concluded that making attendance and achievement a priority will increase attendance and achievement, and schools that have transition plans have increases in graduation rates. It further concluded that schools that emphasize the importance of relationships and make mental health a part of the school culture will see improvement in all areas.

**Recommendations:** Further research is recommended to replicate this study with a population of high school students or to determine the importance of relationship development in improving graduation rates, and to complete a cost/benefit analysis of the use of an attendance officer. Further research is also recommended in the development of transition plans and how that relates to graduation rates.
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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The ideal goal of every school is to do the best they can for every student, and to be as efficient a school as possible (Anfara 2005). Alternative schools are no different. According to California Education Facts, which is a section of the California Department of Education (2019), California has 73 community schools where students attend who have been removed from their traditional school of residence. This number has decreased from 283 county community schools in the last five years. There are many schools in California that do amazing things for their students and there are schools in California that are on the low end of underperforming. Again, California community schools are no different. This dissertation seeks to determine if there is a significant difference in California community schools for expelled students based on whether those schools have access to school-based mental health and those who do not. This dissertation also seeks to determine if there is a statistically significant difference by utilizing the data collected by The California Department of Education, and also to identify and describe what key signature practices are most effective in reducing chronic absenteeism, improving achievement, improving graduation rates and reducing school suspensions from interviews with school employees who work at California community schools. California Education Facts (2014) also states that California community schools, the schools used in this study, have 100% of their population that has been removed from school and are designated to serve students who have been expelled, referred by a School Attendance Review Board (SARB), by a county probation department, and other high-risk use that can include students who have been released from incarceration and are deemed inappropriate to return to their district of residence school.
Carroll (2011) and Weissman (2015) argue that when students are removed from the educational system they get involved in activities that are more likely to bring them into contact with law enforcement. Ultimately, students who are excluded from the school system have a higher likelihood of entering the juvenile justice system (Shah 2012, Weissman 2015). Shah (2012) and Weissman (2015) go on to argue that when students finish high school with a diploma they have lower rates of getting involved in the criminal justice system. The association between graduation rates and crime rates has been studied at length.

A study by Columbia, Princeton, and Queens reported an association between an increase in graduation rates and a 20 percent reduction of violent crimes (Kim and Losen, 2010). Collins (2014) also found a positive correlation between high school dropout rates and crime rates. In the UCLA Law Review written by Carroll (2011), it examined students whose right to education was taken away through expulsion. Carroll (2011) noted that students who are expelled have a higher rate of entering the juvenile justice system and dropping out of school permanently. This correlation is known as the school to prison pipeline that Weissman (2015) discusses at length in Weissman’s book Prelude to Prison. Henderson and Thisse (2004) claimed that communities with increased high school graduation rates have lower crime rates. It is good for the community not only to have less crimes, but also to have the economic advantage because the cost of housing an incarcerated individual is much higher than the cost of educating a student. Henrichson and Delaney (2012) stated that the average annual cost to taxpayers per single inmate in California is $47,421 while according to the California Department of Education (2014) the average cost of sending a single student to school for a year is $8,867. This clearly
shows, in addition to the individual benefit of educating a child for the child’s own sake, it is also beneficial to the whole of society economically to keep a student in school and out of the criminal justice system. While many lawmakers are tackling the problem of what to do with students who have committed an act resulting in removal from school, many educators are tackling the problem of how to decrease those behaviors in the first place (Hughes & Crothers 2008). Public educators are committed to decreasing behaviors and educating all students (Knoff 2012, Meyer & Evans 2012, Shriberg 2013).

Schools have a responsibility to educate all students both academically and socially (Smith 2011). Smith argued that a school is not to just educate the academically gifted or the emotionally intelligent ones, but to educate all students. For certain students, their mental health needs get in the way of their learning, and it is the duty of school employees who provide mental health support to advocate for their students’ social emotional health and wellbeing (Davis 2005). School-based mental health education and assessing which students could benefit from increased mental health support is a way to reduce behavioral incidents in schools, and increase academic success (Shriberg 2013, Hughes & Crothers 2008). Many education, policy, and local leaders have recognized the benefits of school-based mental health services and advocate its wider use in public schools (Knoff 2012, Meyer & Evans 2012, Shriberg 2013, Hughes & Crothers 2008).

The need for mental health being provided in the school setting is because it does not remove the student from school, makes transference of skills being taught more likely, and is easier for all personnel working with the student in need to work together as they are closer in proximity and see the student in a similar setting (Knoff 2012).
Shriberg (2013) notes that the research is clear in that schools who utilize mental health services and school-wide positive behavior support have decreased behavioral incidents in schools. Adelman and Taylor (2010) talk about how mental health education benefits the entire school population and not just those students who have a diagnosable mental illness. Adelman and Taylor (2010) and Hughes and Crothers (2008) site the benefits of school-based mental health in its role in reducing behaviors in school, antisocial acts, and assisting with mental health problems. Adelman and Taylor (2010) and Hughes and Crothers (2008) also state that using disciplinary measures that push students out of school lead to an increase in behaviors, negative attitudes by students towards school, and higher dropout rates.

**Background**

**Right to Public Education**

The right to education is something that could be easily taken for granted, but the right to education has not always been present in the United States. Community schools in the United States operate in part due to the legal obligation districts have to educate all its students (Weissman 2015). The right to education started with laws requiring students to attend school. These early compulsory education laws were not enforced equally, and black students were not educated at the same rate as their white counterparts (Belgrave & Brevard 2014). This discrepancy in education has never equalized (Weissman 2015).

Segregation in schools continued until the landmark Supreme Court case of Brown v. Board of Education in 1954 where the court’s unanimous decision made segregation in schools illegal (Balkin 2001). The Supreme Court expanded the right to education in the 1975 case of Goss v. Lopez where the court ruled that students have a
property right to education that cannot be denied without a hearing, and without due process (Hinchey 2001). The rights of students with disabilities to attend school is also an issue that has been fought in the courts.

**Exclusion Due to Disability**

Yell, Rodgers, and Lodge (1998) discuss the 1919 Wisconsin Supreme Court case of Beattie v. Board of Education where the court ruled in favor of a school district that refused to educate a disabled child who drooled because his actions “nauseated teachers” (p. 220). Winzer (1993) states that disabled students were all too often institutionalized in asylums for “the deaf and dumb, the blind, the feebleminded, and the neglected, vagrant, and delinquent” (p. 146). These students were not removed from the general population because they committed an act against school rules, but rather because of the disabilities within them. This all changed when advocates for the disabled could fight in court that “separate but equal is inherently unequal” (p. 168) as written by Chief Justice Earl Warren in Brown v. Board of Education (Goldstein 2014). Osgood (2008) and Rothstein (2014) discuss how the 1971 court case of Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children v. The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania argued that segregation of students with disabilities was just as unequal as segregation of students based on race. The U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania agreed, and later the Supreme Court agreed in the case of Mills v. Board of Education of the District of Columbia which argues the same right of inclusion for disabled students (Osgood, 2008, & Rothstein, 2014). Both cases state that a student cannot be removed from school without due process, but as school safety moves to the forefront of the public’s consciousness that due process becomes less of a hurdle (Hinchey 2001).
Exclusion Due to Discipline

In the 1980s the trend towards inclusiveness began to erode as the Supreme Court began making a series of decisions that focused more on school safety than a student’s right to education (Hinchey 2001). The Supreme Court made rulings that weakened the standard required to search students (Persico 1998 & Hichey 2001) and decreased a student’s right to free speech (Haynes 2003, & Hinchey 2001). The rationale for these decisions was stated to be that the need for security in schools is of paramount importance (Hinchey 2001). The pendulum continued to swing more towards school security and away from the right to education in the 1990’s.

Kafka (2011) talks about the trend towards inclusiveness being further eroded in the mid 1990’s through the adoption of zero tolerance policies. Zero tolerance began with the specific objective of keeping guns out of schools when in 1994 President Clinton signed the Gun-Free Schools Act which made it mandatory for schools to expel any student found in possession of a gun for one calendar year, and to refer those students to the criminal justice system (Kafka 2011). Kafka (2011) goes on to say that zero tolerance policies led to sharp increases of suspensions and expulsions across the country and this was exacerbated by states and local school districts who included such offenses as disrespectful acts, disruption, possession of tobacco, truancy, and even tardiness into the popular notion of having zero tolerance. In the 1990’s policies like zero tolerance removed students from schools under the notion that school safety was more important than a student’s right to education.

In 1999 the school shooting at Columbine High School preceded a wave of school suspensions and expulsions (Ferrell, Hayward, Morrison, & Presdee, 2004). Hinchey
(2001) states that in one school district in Pennsylvania within 10 days of the school shooting in Columbine not less than 20 students in that district were suspended, expelled, and/or turned over to the police. As some lawmakers are trying to make schools safer by removing students who may pose a threat to others are attempting to accomplish the same goal by providing mental health services to all students who need them instead of just a mandated few (Knoff 2012, Meyer & Evans 2012, Shriberg 2013, Weissman 2015, Hughes & Crothers 2008).

**Right to Mental Health**

Dupper (2003) states that the federal Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) law contains 13 specified categories of disabilities, and one of these is the disability category of emotional disturbance. Hardman and Drew (2011) go on to say that when this law was passed congress put in an exclusionary part that stated, “does not include children who are socially maladjusted, unless it is determined that they are seriously emotionally disturbed” (p. 182). The reason the terms emotionally disturbed and socially maladjusted are so important is because even though the similarities between these two classifications are blurry the school’s requirement in providing services to these students is clear (Hughes & Crothers 2008). Students who have the disability classification of emotionally disturbed are entitled to stringent legal protections held by all special education students that students who are socially maladjusted do not, and students who are classified as emotionally disturbed are entitled to services that students who are socially maladjusted are not (Hughes & Crothers 2008). One of these services is school-based mental health.
Mental Health as an Alternative to Discipline

Mathison and Ross (2008) state the IDEA of 2004 called for the consideration of Positive Behavior Interventions and Support (PBIS) for students whose behavior impacts the learning of themselves and others. Sailor, Dunlap, Sugai, and Horner, (2008) state that PBIS “provides an effective, positive, strength-based, relevant, and efficient technology to assist persons requiring specialized behavioral support and services” (p. v). A key component of PBIS are support teams that include psychological counseling services (Cook, Takersley, & Landrum, 2014). Counseling and school-based mental health services are used not only in a reactive fashion after a student commits an offense, but preferably proactively prior to a student committing any offense at all.

Impact Mental Health Has on Discipline

Hughes and Crothers (2008) state that mental health treatment is essential in assisting students who have behavioral issues and should be provided to all students who need this service whether they are emotionally disturbed or socially maladjusted. Shriberg (2013) also notes a reduction of disruptive behaviors in the classroom in schools that use school-based mental health. Lean and Colucci (2013) state that the benefits of providing students with mental health services stretch beyond the students receiving those services. They go on to explain how the entire class will benefit when the class is free from disruption and how classes free from disruption give the teachers more time to teach and students more time to learn (Lean & Colucci, 2013).

Statement of Research Problem

The problem with school-based mental health is that in times of budgetary constraints proprietary funding goes to school discipline services and personnel to
administrator those services instead of school-based mental health. Weissman (2015) talks about how a culture of high stakes testing, in the early 2000’s, to improve achievement on standardized test scores led to more cuts in school-based mental health over personnel that are responsible for administering school discipline. Although there is research that shows the impact school-based mental health has on student discipline (Shriberg 2013) and on student achievement (Lean & Colucci 2013) there are no studies that examine discipline data gathered by the California Department of Education’s Dashboard for those schools that have access to school-based mental health against those who do not.

Mental health services have been shown to reduce office referrals, suspensions, and expulsions (Shriberg 2013), and although these things will save time for administrators who deal primarily in student discipline a determination on the statistically significant difference between schools that offer school-based mental health, and those who offer neither has never been done.

Many school administrators whose primary responsibility is handling student discipline think they do not have the time or expertise to take the added responsibility of providing mental health (L. Weller, & S. Weller, 2002). As these administrators feel their job is to put out metaphorical fires all day it is easy to see how they would not be willing to take time away from putting out those fires to be proactive without clear data showing its benefits. When an administrator is so mired in the day to day operations of the school it is difficult to build programs for the future without compelling evidence. Since congress has called for the implementation of some kind of positive behavior
interventions to be used in schools (Mathison & Ross, 2008) schools have grappled with what this implementation might look like and how it will affect the school budget.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this mixed method study was to determine if there is a difference in achievement, absenteeism, graduation rates and suspension for students enrolled in community schools that do and don’t have access to school-based mental health services. In addition, it was the purpose to identify and describe the practices most effective in improving attendance, reduction of suspension, achievement and graduation as perceived by community school employees.

**Research Questions**

1. Is there a difference in attendance of community school students who have access to mental health services and those who do not?
2. Is there a difference in achievement as measured by scores on state standardized tests of community school students who have access to mental health services and those who do not?
3. Is there a difference in graduation rates of community school students who have access to mental health services and those who do not?
4. Is there a difference in suspension rates of community school students who have access to mental health services and those who do not?
5. What are the practices used by community school employees that are most effective in improving attendance?
6. What are the practices used by community school employees that are most effective in improving achievement?
7. What are the practices used by community school employees that are most effective in improving graduation rates?

8. What are the practices used by community school employees that are most effective in decreasing suspensions?

**Significance of Problem**

There is an abundance of research on the benefits of mental health as it pertains to academic achievement and a reduction in behavioral incidents (Sailor, Dunlap, Sugai, & Horner 2008, Cook, Takersley, & Landrum, 2014, Hurwitz and Weston, 2010, Hughes & Crothers 2008, Shriberg 2013, Lean & Colucci 2013). The gap in the research is determining the significance of the difference between California community schools that offer school-based mental health for the majority of their students and have that service available for the majority of the time. An additional gap this study will also attempt to address is identifying and describing the key signature practices used by county community school employees to reduce chronic absenteeism, improve achievement, improve graduation rates, and reduce the rates of suspension. This information combined with the quantitative data will allow school administrators and school-based mental health providers to know where to focus their efforts to improve the areas they deem to be most important to their particular student populations.

In addition, this study will add to the body of knowledge on the impact of school-based mental health in schools, primarily focusing on schools who currently house a population excluded from general education by their districts of residence and those students who are well past the label of “at-risk”. There is a great deal of research on the effects of providing mental health services in schools both academically and
behaviorally, but not around schools specifically dealing with expelled youth. This study will also add to the body of knowledge on which particular key signature practices are best at reducing chronic absenteeism, achievement, increasing graduation rates and reducing school suspension from the point of view of school-based mental health providers actually delivering those services. By identifying and describing which key signature practices are most effective as perceived by people delivering those services, and then having the quantitative data to support those assertions school administrators will have additional data when making decisions on how to allocate resources to assist their populations.

Definitions

Theoretical Definitions

- *Montessori Theory of Education*– The Montessori theory of education, designed by Dr. Maria Montessori, is a child-centered approach where the student’s own choice guides their education (Mooney 2013). Mooney (2013) goes on to explain that the underlying belief of Montessori education is that children want to learn and care about their education and their surroundings.

- *Critical Pedagogy* – Critical pedagogy, or critical learning theory, is the belief that education is fundamental to the success of any democratic society, and that an electorate that can implement a critical analysis of its officials is imperative (Grioux 2011). A critical pedagogy of education educates students to seek knowledge, be critical and self-reflective, and to make moral judgements and hold its leadership to those moral judgements (Grioux 2011).
• **Radical Behaviorism** – Radical behaviorism is the educational belief pioneered by B.F. Skinner that states the actions of any organism, even humans, have behaviors that can be explained by environmental factors (Pablos & Tennyson, 2013). Pablos and Tennyson (2013) summarize the pedagogy of radical behaviorism by stating it adheres to two fundamental laws: the law of conditioning that states an action that is reinforced is more likely to happen again, and the law of extinction that states a response that is not reinforced is less likely to reoccur.

• **Mastery Learning Theory** – Mastery learning theory, also referred to as learning for mastery, was originally proposed by Benjamin Bloom where it is suggested that if a student has sufficient time and a nurturing environment that student can master the subject matter (Goskey 2010). Goskey (2010) goes on to emphasize the importance of frequent checks for understanding, ongoing formative feedback, and differentiated instruction.

• **Meaningful Learning Theory** – Meaningful learning theory is the philosophy that students need to make prior connections to the material instead of just memorizing information (Akdeniz 2016). Meaningful learning theory states that teachers should present the most general ideas of a subject and then differentiate these concepts so that each student can make connections from previously presented information, and without those prior connections lasting retention is not possible (Akdeniz 2016).

• **Constructivism** – Constructivism, or constructivist learning theory, is the idea that students construct meaning through personal experiences and their reflection of those experiences by themselves or with others (Harasim 2011). Harasim (2011)
goes on to explain that people who take a more active role in the learning process by engaging in personal, real world activities, and then working with others to apply that learning is how knowledge is moved into long term memory.

- **Humanistic Learning Theory** – Humanistic learning theory states that all individuals have a desire to grow, and that all individuals are unique (Bastable 2006). One of the most famous humanists is Abraham Maslow who stated that despite everyone’s desire to grow to the point of self-actualization a person’s ability to get there is dependent on them meeting more basic level physiological needs, safety needs, the need for love and belonging, and the need for self-esteem (Bastable 2006). Pastorino and Doyle-Portillo (2010) state that Maslow updated his hierarchy of needs to include additional needs including the need for understanding and enhancement of one’s cognition. This hierarchy also has a level above self-actualization which is labeled transcendence. Pastorino and Doyle-Portillo (2010) state that in this amended peak level Maslow moves from being the best one can be as self-actualized to transcending one’s self and giving to loved ones, the human population, nature, and even the cosmos.

**Operational Definitions**

- **California county community schools** – California county community schools are defined by the California Department of Education (2015) as schools that “provide an education to students who are expelled from their regular schools, referred by SARB, or by probation, on probation or parole and not attending any school, homeless, or enrolled at the request of the student’s parent or guardian.”
• **School discipline** – School employees who are engaged in school discipline are engaged in the process of utilizing coercive power to deter negative behavior that can be grounds for suspension or expulsion defined by California Education Code 48900 (Appendix A).

• **Mental health** – Mental health is defined as “the successful performance of mental function resulting in productive activities, fulfilling relationships, with other people, and the ability to adapt to change and cope with adversity” (U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001; Skalski & Smith, 2006, p. 13).

• **School-Based Mental Health** – School-based mental health is the treatment of mental health disorders, and the building of coping skills to deal with life challenges offered within the school setting so that schools can accomplish their mission of educating every student (Christner & Mennuti 2009).

• **School-Based Mental Health Providers** – For this study mental health providers in the school setting are defined as individuals who possess a Pupil Personnel Services (PPS) credential, a Board-Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA), a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist (LMFT), or possess a degree in psychology, counseling, or social work and who work at a California community school for expelled students and who provide social/emotional support.

• **Chronic Absenteeism** – The California Department of Education defines this term as any student who misses at least ten percent of their instructional days of the school in which they were enrolled. In this study every California community school had a school year that consisted of 180 school days so a student is considered chronically absent if they miss 18 or more days of a school year.
Delimitations

The study has the delimitations of county community schools in California for high school students and may not be generalizable to general education schools or schools outside the geographic area of California. California has 73 county community schools as stated by California Education Facts, which is a section of the California Department of Education (2019). Community schools operated by school districts were not used in this study so there is the delimitation of only using community schools operated by county offices of education. All the students who attend these schools have either been expelled from their neighborhood school of residence, referred to the school by a School Attendance Review Board (SARB), referred by county probation, or who have been released from incarceration and ordered not to return to their school of residence because their presence there could pose a danger to the student body. These students have also chosen not to enroll in a charter school as an alternative to attending a community school for expelled high school students. This study cannot be generalized to schools within California that do not have these specific populations and cannot be generalized to any schools outside of California.

Organization of Study

This dissertation begins with an overview of the problem, the significance of the problem of the lack of research concerning the difference between California community schools that offer school-based mental health for the majority of their students and have that service available for the majority of the time. Chapter two reviews the historical right to education, how that right has been taken away from some groups of students, and what has been done to ensure legal protections for the right to education. Chapter two
continues with a look at mental health in schools, school discipline, and the impact mental health has on school discipline. Chapter three contains the research design, population and participant sample, methods of data collection, its analysis, the anticipated limitations of the study, the study’s validity and reliability, and an examination of ethical considerations. Chapter four contains the findings of the study, and how those findings were analyzed. Chapter five includes the summary of the findings, the implications that can be drawn, and the recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Overview

The first section of this chapter has the review of literature where the right to public education is examined from a historical perspective. The right to a free public education in this country and the legal cases and laws ensuring those rights is explored. Laws removing students from education as well as laws forbidding certain students from obtaining any type of education south of the Mason-Dixon Line, and the aftermath of post-civil war laws for those same students are shown to impact students even today. This chapter ends by examining the rights certain students have to mental health, the impacts of mental health, and ultimately the price of failing these students.

Review of Literature

This dissertation examines the relationship between preventative therapy in the form of school-based mental health, and punishment in the form of disciplinary procedures in a population of students who have already been removed from their general education school of residence for breaking the rules. These rules could be as serious as felonies defined by the California penal code, or as innocuous as habitually ditching school. In either case once the student is removed from their general education school of residence, they move to a community school for expelled students in what some have referred to as the school to prison pipeline (Weissman 2015). As this dissertation examines a group that has been excluded from going to school it is imperative to understand what right to education these, and all other students, have in the United States.
Right to Free Public Education

In Virginia in 1779 Thomas Jefferson proposed the revolutionary idea of providing three years of free education for all white children regardless of income (Conant 1967, Hallinan 2011). This proposal proved to be too radical for Virginia to accept at the time, but this did not sway Jefferson and in this same year Jefferson authored a bill entitled “A Bill for the More General Diffusion of Knowledge” (Conant 1967, Shuffelton 2009). This bill stated that the grammar schoolhouse “shall contain a room for the school, a hall to dine in, four rooms for a master and usher, and ten or twelve lodging rooms for the scholars.” This school would provide free room and board for those selected students whose parents could not afford the annual tuition. Jefferson’s commitment to educate students regardless of the wealth of parents is something that still eludes the United States as shown by the increase in student removal from school being correlated with the student’s income where students from more affluent homes are much less likely to be removed from school as compared to their less affluent counterparts (Weissman 2015). In 1647 a law was created by the General Court of the Massachusetts Bay Colony stating that every town with 50 or more families needed to have a school and if a town had 100 or more families then that town needed to have a school that taught Latin (Conant 1962). Conant (1962) goes on to say that a growing American population meant this lead to the creation of many new schools and provided an educational opportunity for many student who otherwise had no access to school. Altenbaugh (1999) and Conant (1962) state that the reason for these rules to teach Latin to the youthful masses was to ensure that the growing Puritan population could read the Bible.
In 1787, the United States government passed The Northwest Ordinance that although did not mandate the formation of schools it did state that, “Religion, morality, and knowledge, being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged” (Chase, 1833, p. 82). Benjamin Rush, a signer of Declaration of Independence stated in his Plan for the Establishment of Public Schools in 1786 that universal education for all benefits all (Fife 2013). He spoke of how an educated populace benefited everyone as they could do the most to ensure a healthy democracy. This bill was not passed. James Madison attempted to pass the bill several more times without success until a much-watered down version was passed into law in 1796 as the “Act to Establish Public Schools” (Wagoner 2004).

As Thomas Jefferson and James Madison worked on education reform in Virginia, the Pennsylvania state legislator was working on their own reforms to make education more inclusive (Ali-Williams 2008). Ali Williams (2008) goes on to say that in 1790 the Pennsylvania state constitution became the first state in the union to mandate free public education for poor families. This law made education free for the poor but more affluent families that had school aged children were still expected to pay for that education. This was a major step in providing education for those individuals who would normally have spent their youth working in factories or farms.

Copeland (2003) states that the Massachusetts Public School Act of 1827 made public education for all students free of charge. This law was not revolutionary in its own right but the impact it had in the United States was great. This move to free public education caught on and all states north of the Mason-Dixon Line soon followed suit providing free public education to all (Copeland 2003).
opportunity to have a free and appropriate public education (FAPE), but more children than ever before had access to an education that in many instances could be life changing.

As the trend to make education available to all grew in the north, states below the Mason-Dixon Line began codifying laws forbidding the educating of slaves to read and write (Rodriguez 2007). Rodriguez (2007) gives some examples of these laws are as follows:

In Georgia, if a white teach a free negro or slave to read or write, he is fined 500 dollars, and imprisoned at the discretion of the court; if the offender be a colored man, bond or free, he is to be fined or whipped at the discretion of the court. In Louisiana, the penalty for teaching slaves to read or write, is one year’s imprisonment. (p. 616)

Rodriguez (2007) also takes note of the preamble to a North Carolina law that states, “teaching slaves to read or write tends to excite dissatisfaction in their minds, and to produce insurrection and rebellion” (p. 616). The laws about the education of slaves, or lack thereof, are among the first to specifically exclude a class of people from the growing inclusiveness of education. Belgrave and Brevard (2014) state that education laws in this country were specifically made to keep rates of white and black students in the United States as different as possible and that legacy has remained where even now the rates for black and white students have never been equalized even after laws excluding students based on race and disability were deemed unconstitutional. Weissman (2015) emphasizes this point even more when stating that districts with higher minority populations have a higher correlation of schools dedicated to teaching students who have been removed from their school of residence for disciplinary reasons through the process of expulsion.
Hunt (2010) states that Massachusetts became the first state in the union to pass a compulsory attendance law in 1852. Hunt (2010) goes on to say that this law was highly controversial with both Americans who believed compulsory education was anti-family and removed the sovereignty of parents to decide what is best for their own children, and with the teachers’ associations at the time. Hunt (2010) states that this push to mandate education was seen as a solution to the problem of “ignorant and immoral parents” (p. 206) who wanted to pass along this ignorance and immorality to their own children. By passing this law Massachusetts wanted to educate the students both academically and to instill a stronger moral fiber than they would receive from their own parents.

When education became mandatory the problem of what to do with students who either refused to go to school or students who broke school rules came into view. School rules in the 1800s were quite a bit different than they are today, and breaking of the school rules was handled quite a bit differently also. Parkerson and Parkerson (2001) state that for infractions as minor as a child raising their voice during recess those children could be met with humiliation like sitting on, or under their desk. For major infractions of the time, like questioning the teacher’s authority, the penalty could be for students to be beaten with long birch whips until their skin was broken and they began to bleed in front of the rest of the classroom. The problem of what to do with students who break school rules is one that persists today although the consequences for such actions has changed quite a bit. The students of today who are seen as rule breakers are not beaten until bleeding in front of their peers with birch whips, and are instead removed from a general education school through a process of expulsion, and then sent to an alternative school where their education is more likely to be substandard and where they
have an increased likelihood of entering the justice system as juveniles, and staying in the criminal justice system as adults (Weissman 2015). Weissman (2015) discusses this trend in the book *Prelude to Prison* where he looks at what occurs before a student becomes a repeat adult offender and spends much of their adult life incarcerated.

One year prior to the law of compulsory education being passed Massachusetts opened a school in Lowell dedicated to educating juveniles who could not or would not attend their school of residence (Katz 1968). Katz goes on to say that in 1862 Massachusetts passed a state truant law mandating that each town provide “suitable accommodations” (p. 167) for students deemed to be habitually truant and who repeatedly refused to attend school. Ironically, truancy or the willful refusal to attend school was a punishable offense two years prior to the passing of compulsory education (Katz 1968). Katz (1968) goes on to say that these truancy laws did a lot to get students into the classroom who grew up in an environment that did not put a high priority on education, but these truancy laws were not enforced for all children.

Prior to the conclusion of the United States Civil War in 1865 African Americans were excluded from public education in accordance with the laws of the southern states. Even in the northern states were blacks were freed black children were either excluded entirely from going to public schools, or were sent to segregated schools that were far inferior to those of their white counterparts (Klarman 2007, Tischauer 2012). Klarman (2007) and Tischauer (2012) state that in the 1830’s the courts in the north said that black children were unfit associates to white children and were not to attend schools that educated whites. The discrepancies in education were immense, but it didn’t stop with students from wanting an education. Teachers of white schools had higher salaries than
those of black schools, and there was a belief that black teachers were only qualified to teach black students where a white teacher could teach both races if that teacher was so inclined (Goldstein 2014).

Beiter (2006) states that in 1948 the Organization of American States created The American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man, and in Article XII of that proclamation was the right to education where it stated that every person had the right to an education to acquire a decent life and to raise their standard of living and be useful members of society. Beiter (2006) goes on to say that this law was passed when segregation was the norm in both the southern and northern parts of the United States. During this time the quality of schools for white students and students of color was still vastly different.

Klarman (2007), Tischauser (2012) and Goldstein (2014) state that the United States Supreme Court ruled that “separate but equal” access to everything from railroad cars to schools was constitutional in the case of Plessy v. Ferguson in 1896. This Supreme Court case stated outright that segregation was acceptable, while only one of the nine justices, Justice Harlan, brought up the point that the disguise of equal accommodations would not mislead anyone, and that this decision would be seen as a wrong done to an entire class of people (Goldstein, 2014). Goldstein (2014) goes on to say that this became the law of the land until this decision was overturned in Brown v. Board of Education where Chief Justice Earl Warren wrote in his decision that “separate but equal is inherently unequal” (p. 168) in the courts majority decision that put an end to segregation in schools. From the Brown v. Board of Education decision in 1954 the courts continued their move toward more student inclusiveness in the 70’s and early 80’s
(Balkin 2001). The case of Brown v. Board of Education was a decision handed down by the Supreme Court that had a substantial influence on the inclusiveness of schools specifically outlawing segregation and granting a right to education, but other court cases expanded and outlined this right even further.

Hinchey (2001) and Hanks (2004) state that in 1975 this American right to education was upheld by the United States Supreme Court in the case of Goss v. Lopez. Lopez was a student who was suspended without being told the reason of the suspension, without a hearing, and with no due process of any kind (Hinchey 2001). In this case many students were participating in a political demonstration and Lopez, along with many other students in the area were suspended, but Lopez was never able to argue the case that he was an innocent bystander and not participating in the demonstration at all (Hinchey 2001). Hinchey (2001) and Hanks (2004) state that the Supreme Court held that students have a property right to education, and that suspensions affect a student’s right of liberty because this mark on their permanent record can affect their ability to do things later in life. This right to education does not say that students have a right to be taught social emotional or specific academic skills so that they may access their education but simply that they have a property right to attend school that cannot be removed without due process. When examining the right to mental health the courts have not ruled that students have a right to mental health unless those students have a disability and qualify for an IEP or 504. Students who do not have a legal document like an IEP or 504 plan do not have a right to mental health services even if these services will reduce behaviors that ultimately can get students excluded from school through due process.
Once those students are excluded they have a higher propensity to drop out of school entirely and enter the criminal justice system (Weissman 2015).

**Excluded Groups**

**Exclusion Due to Disability**

By the end of the 19th century most students with disabilities were not sent to school, and those that were sent to school were separated from the general population (Rothstein & Johnson, 2014). Rothstein and Johnson (2014) goes on to say that segregation of these students was done with the primary focus of relieving stress from the teachers and non-disabled students in the class and had nothing to do with what was best for the students with disabilities in the class. Winzer (1993) states that disabled students were all too often institutionalized in asylums for “the deaf and dumb, the blind, the feebleminded, and the neglected, vagrant, and delinquent” (p. 146). These students were not removed from the general education population because they committed an act against any school rules. These students were not loud, disrespectful, disobedient, or rude. These students were removed because of the disabilities within them and how these students did not affect them, but rather impacted others.

The most decisive case against the segregation of disabled students had nothing to do with students who were disabled. In the United States Supreme Court case of Brown v. Board of Education Chief Justice Earl Warren wrote in his decision that “separate but equal is inherently unequal” (Goldstein, 2014, p. 168) in the courts majority decision that was intended to put an end to racial segregation and made no mention of students with disabilities at all. Osgood (2008) and Rothstein (2014) discuss how the 1971 court case of Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children v. The Commonwealth of
Pennsylvania argued that segregation of students with disabilities was just as unequal as segregation of students based on race. The U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania agreed, and later the Supreme Court agreed in the case of Mills v. Board of Education of the District of Columbia which is a case arguing the same right of inclusion for disabled students as those granted to students of different races (Osgood, 2008, & Rothstein, 2014).

Rothstein (2014) states in the conclusion of the Mills decision that congress recognized that states will have difficulty “implementing the constitutional requirements” (p. 14) and passed the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) of 1975. Rothstein (2014) goes on to say that in 1990 this law was amended and the title was changed to the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA), but the basic provisions remained the same. These provisions are that all students must be given an education, it must be provided in the least restrictive environment (LRE), education is to be individualized, education is to be free, and all special education students must have procedural safeguards. These procedural safeguards make it illegal for a disabled student to be removed from the general education without just cause, and without due process (Rothstein 2014). These protections are more stringent than those of non-disabled students because of the history of exclusion disabled students went through prior to that point (Hughes & Crothers 2008).

**Exclusion by Means of Discipline**

Hinchey (2001) states that in the 1980s the trend towards inclusiveness began to erode as the Supreme Court began making a series of decisions that focused more on school safety than a student’s right to due process. Hinchey (2001) and Persico (1998)
cite the 1985 case of Jersey v. T.L.O. where the Supreme Court ruled that the standard to search a student was reasonable suspicion which is less stringent than the standard of probable cause used for everyone other than students while attending school. This means that a school official has the authority to search a student’s belongings than a police officer who works at that same school. The rationale for this decision was stated to be that the need for safety and security in schools is of paramount importance (Hinchey 2001). Haynes (2003) and Hinchey (2001) site the 1986 case of Bethel v. Fraser where the Supreme Court found that a student’s right to free speech was less important than the school’s right to provide “essential lessons of civil, mature conduct” (p. 35). In this case a student was suspended for “lewd and obscene” (p. 35) speech when he made a speech with sexual double entendres at a school assembly (Hinchey 2001). Hinchey (2001) argues that schools need to balance a student’s property right to education, the due process when that right is taken away, and the overall effectiveness and security of the school. Although this case did not deal specifically with physical safety of a student body it did increase the rights of school districts to remove students from an educational setting. The pendulum continued to swing more towards school security and away from the right to education in the 1990’s.

Kafka (2011) talks about the trend towards inclusiveness being further eroded in the mid 1990’s through the adoption of zero tolerance policies. Kafka (2011) states that the term zero tolerance was borrowed from the United States Customs Service’s anti-drug policies of the 1980s, and used to refer to the discipline policies adopted by schools. As the name implies zero tolerance means that some offences are so serious in nature that schools are under no obligation to offer leniency when handing down a consequence for
undesirable behavior (Kafka 2011). Zero tolerance began with the specific objective of keeping guns out of schools when in 1994 President Clinton signed the Gun-Free Schools Act which made it mandatory for schools to expel any student found in possession of a gun for one calendar year, and to refer those students to the criminal justice system (Kafka 2011). This mandatory minimum took discretion out of the hands of school officials and made some consequences requirements. Weissman (2015) states that this was done despite the data and research showing that school crime and violence were “on the decline even prior to the enactment of the 1994 Safe and Gun-Free Schools Act” (p 532). This law was expanded at the discretion of state legislators to include other weapons, as was the intention of the Gun-Free Schools Act that was meant to empower schools to be able to remove unwanted and dangerous students who might pose a threat to the general student population (Kafka 2011, & Schoonover 2009). Kafka (2011) and Weissman (2015) state that zero tolerance policies have been shown to be ineffective in countering recidivism as students who have been suspended are more likely to be suspended again. Kafka (2011) goes on to say that zero tolerance policies led to sharp increases of suspensions and expulsions across the country and this was exacerbated by states and local school districts who included such offenses as disrespectful acts, disruption, possession of tobacco, truancy, and even tardiness into the popular notion of having zero tolerance, thus removing some students from school entirely because those same students did not want to attend school. Reyes (2006) and Kafka (2011) state that the gap between how school discipline is imposed between races has increased since the passage of the Gun-Free Schools Act and policies like zero tolerance. Schools with higher minority rates and schools with a lower parent income have higher rates of
suspension and expulsion than schools who serve more affluent and less diverse populations.

In the 1990’s policies like zero tolerance removed students from schools under the notion that school safety was more important than a student’s right to education, even though the data is clear that the trend towards school violence was in a decline, but in the next decade students were being removed from schools as a direct result of a Presidential program called No Child Left Behind (NCLB) (Weissman 2015). Weissman (2015) goes on to say that despite the discretion to school officials that zero-tolerance instituted the discretion they do have can determine whether a student gets in school suspension or out of school suspension, and can determine whether a student is expelled at all due to the discretion held by hearing officers. Weissman (2015) states, “this discretion has had the result of increased racial disparities in the harshest form of school discipline – placement in an alternative school” (p 651).

The NCLB Act of 2001 further eroded special education students being included in mainstream education (Smith 2010). NCLB had the stated goal of narrowing the achievement gap between minority groups and their white and Asian-American counterparts through high stakes testing as a way to hold schools accountable for what they were teaching (USDE, 2001). An unintended byproduct of this act became that low performing students were removed from school at a much higher rate so their test scores wouldn’t bring down the scores of higher performing students (Weissman 2015). Weissman (2015) further illustrates this point by stating that low performing students were removed at peak times that correlated with the actual high stakes testing periods. Students being removed from school is something that has been studied since the 1970s
to see if certain segments of the population are being treated fairly or being discriminated against.

The research done by Petras, Masyn, Buckley, Ialongo, and Kellam (2011) state that in 1974, 1.7 million (or 3.7% of all students) in U.S. schools were subject to suspension at least once. This number rose to more than 3.3 million (or 6.8% of all students) in 2006 when 102,077 students were expelled as cited by the latest civil rights data. This steady rise in school suspensions is confirmed by other researchers as well (Losen 2011). In addition, the suspension rate did not rise equally among students of different races. Kafka (2011) states that in 1973 African American students had a suspension rate of six percent while the suspension rate of their white counterparts was below four percent, and in 2006 African American students had a suspension rate of 15 percent while the suspension rate of their white counterparts was less than a third of that percentage at five percent. Even though these suspensions rates are greatly disproportionate they pale in comparison to what occurs in this country after infamous school shootings that gain national attention and which occur with greater frequency than they did prior to the mid to late 90’s.

In 1999 the school shootings at Columbine High School and Littleton Colorado preceded a wave of school suspensions and expulsions (Ferrell, Hayward, Morrison, & Presdee, 2004). Hinchey (2001) states that in one school district in Pennsylvania within 10 days of the school shooting in Columbine not less than 20 students in that district were suspended, expelled, and/or turned over to the police. In the name of safety school officials have since suspended students for the crimes of having blue hair, having tattoos, body piercings, and even one incident in Florida where a student was suspended for
having nail clippers on her desk (Hichey 2001). In these cases, this was in response to school safety and not to a decades old practice of having strict dress codes or rules against certain types of expression. This was a result of implementing zero tolerance policies where the original intent was safety, but that goal had morphed into policies to help achieve a certain school climate that removed students from their educational environment for mere dress code infractions. Hichey (2001) cites another example of a school in Ohio that suspended students for contributing to a gothic themed website while outside of school. One student of nine who was a fan of martial arts was suspended after writing a fortune cookie that stated, “You will die an honorable death” (Garrett, 2001, p. 66). As some lawmakers are trying to make schools safer by removing students who may pose a threat to school safety or a desirable school climate others are attempting to accomplish the same goal through means other than exclusion (Knoff 2012, Meyer & Evans 2012, Shriberg 2013). Knoff (2012), Hurwitz and Weston (2010) and Christner and Mennuti (2009) argue that school-based mental health services are one of the alternatives to policies of exclusion that make schools safer while simultaneously keeping students in school.

**Mental Health Services in Schools**

Currently, the U.S. Surgeon General defines mental health as “a state of successful performance of mental function, resulting in productive activities, fulfilling relationships with other people, and the ability to adapt to change and to cope with adversity” (Hurwitz and Weston, 2010). Mental health in schools were first identified in The Northwest Ordinance of 1787. This ordinance stated that the purpose of schools stated that schools are houses to teach “Religion, morality, and knowledge” (Chase, 1833,
p. 82) which is more akin to teaching mental health illustrated best in a humanistic learning theory.

The humanistic learning theory that was made most popular by Abraham Maslow views educational growth as something that does not happen in a vacuum (Noddings 1992, Zimbardo 2008). Maslow illustrates this hierarchy of needs in the form of a pyramid. These sections of needs, from most essential up, are Physiological, Safety, Belongingness and Love, Esteem, Cognitive, Aesthetic, Self-Actualization, and Transcendence.

Maslow (1968) goes on to say that each section of the pyramid below must be met before a higher section can be reached. The humanistic view states that a student, or any person, must have their physiological needs met and feel safe before academic instruction can successfully occur (Noddings, 2002). The need for this type of safety that mental health attempts to provide is foundational in a student’s learning because no learning can occur without the feeling of safety being met (Noddings, 2002). The humanistic learning theory states all students, and indeed all people, have a desire to advance up the steps of the pyramid Abraham Maslow describes, and that all individuals are unique (Bastable 2006). Maslow (1968) states that despite everyone’s desire to grow and advance to the point of transcendence a person’s ability to get there hindered at every step based on the level below. Every person is dependent on meeting more basic needs of safety, security, love and belonging, and self-esteem before transcendence can be achieved (Bastable 2006). Teaching of the whole child is not just a teaching of academics, but also a teaching of moral development (Chase, 1983).
Nord and Haynes (1998) argue that moral education is taught in all areas of academics at school, but acknowledge that specific standards do not exist for assisting students with mental health needs. Johnson (2015) further argues the case against teaching specifically to standards by stating that for teachers to teach creativity and confidence they need to go beyond the standards provided by the state. This feeling of needing to go beyond the standards to teach mental health skills, behaviors, and strategies is not sufficient for some who believe that behavior and mental health education should be a requirement for schools (Mathison & Ross, 2008).

School-based mental health is defined as mental health services that occur on a school campus, within a school day, for students at that school by professionals either employed by or contracted by the school whose purpose is providing mental health to the student body of that school. For this study mental health providers in the school setting are defined as individuals who possess a Pupil Personnel Services (PPS) credential, a Board-Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA), a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist (LMFT), or possess a degree in psychology, counseling, or social work and who provide social/emotional support to students at the school.

Using the definition of mental health provided by the United States Surgeon General one could argue that the history of compulsory education was more to meet the need of providing mental health services than academic rigor through a specific set of standards. To fully understand the purpose of mental health in schools a historical perspective provides additional insight that shows how mental health in schools has evolved to focus more on treating the whole child and not just a child’s academic needs. In 1957, the Soviet Union launched Sputnik into space taking an early lead in the space
race between the Soviet Union and the United States (Powell, 2007). Powell (2007) states that this event was a focusing event for the United States leading to major education reforms, particularly in the areas of science, math, and technology. A lesser known area of growth was in the area of school counseling. Wittmer (2000) states that the number of school counselors in the United States tripled within 10 years of the launch of Sputnik. Gysbers (1990) states that during this time of growth guidance moved away from being just vocational and educational placement by personnel who often held a pupil personnel services credential, to include school counselors that were tasked with providing mental health in schools. The term guidance was also expanded from just vocational and educational placement to include the guidance of a student’s social and emotional development.

Gysbers (1990) states that in the 1970’s there began a movement in the United States towards greater school accountability. In the 1980’s and 90’s Gysbers (1990) states that there was a real fear of school counseling and school-based mental health becoming irrelevant as schools moved towards a more standards-based educational model. In response to this pressure the American School Counselor Association that was formed in 1952 took a more active role and created a vision with three core domains: Academic, Career, and Personal/Social (Gysbers, 1990). In 1993, the American School Counselor Association and the American Counseling Association put forth legislation that eventually became the Elementary School Counseling Demonstration Act of 1995 (Paisley & Borders, 1995). This legislation provided additional funding for schools to expand school counseling programs. These programs encouraged cooperation between the roles of counselors, school psychologists, and social workers (Baker, 2000). Baker
(2000) goes on to state that this legislation set forth standards with a student-counselor ratio not to exceed 250:1, and for at least 85% of a counselor’s time to be spent working directly with students and not doing administrative or office tasks which was common place prior to the Elementary School Counseling Demonstration Act.

In 2001, the educational act known as No Child Left Behind had the stated goal of narrowing the achievement gap between minority groups and their white and Asian-American counterparts (USDE, 2001). In actuality, the high stakes testing environment created by the No Child Left Behind Act made the job of school administrators quite difficult because their success as an administrator was measured by how well their student body did on math and English standardized tests. When the survival of a school or one’s ability to stay in their administrative position is based on standardized test scores for math and English then funding for those areas increases, and funding in other places gets a thorough re-examination (Kafka, 2011). School boards, superintendents, principals and other educational leaders needed to ensure students performed well on these tests and allocate resources to increase school performance in these areas (Kafka, 2011). Kafka (2011) states that it is natural for schools to give the most attention, scrutiny, and resources to the areas in which they are being held to account. Programs like art, music and vocational education decreased in schools that were worried about school performance on these high-stakes tests. For many schools the option of providing school-based mental health for at-risk students was severely reduced in favor of adding classes to assist students performing below the threshold of passing the math and English tests (Carroll, 2011).
In 2004 the IDEA called for the consideration of Positive Behavior Interventions and Support (PBIS) for students whose behavior impacts the learning of themselves and others and to enhance schools climate and culture (Mathison and Ross, 2008). PBIS provides a positive and effective strength-based model that is both relevant and efficient for students in need of behavioral support (Sailor, Dunlap, Sugai, and Horner, 2008).

**Climate and Culture**

PBIS is a program that promotes prosocial behaviors for all students but is especially beneficial for students deemed at-risk (Losoff and Broxterman 2017). PBIS utilizes a multi-tiered system of supports where all students benefit and are part of the base level of supports and is meant to improve a schools culture. The climate and culture of a school are both important to its success, but a school’s climate is easier to change and is based on perceptions whereas a school’s culture takes longer to evolve and is based on values and beliefs (Gruenert and Whitaker 2015). The culture of a school can be seen in what the school choses to value in its outward appearance and in the actions of its members. Gruenert and Whitaker (2015) argue that when school staff react to students in an expected manner, either positively or negatively, they are in fact expressing a commitment to that schools cultural values. When a leader is trying to change the culture of an organization trust and relationships are key (White, Harvey & Fox 2016). White (2016) goes on to say that if a leader wants to improve the culture of an organization the people need to see that leader as trusting and dependable. This is true for a CEO of an organization, a dean of a university, the superintendent or principal of a school, or the teacher of a classroom. White (2016) identifies 10 strategies the leader of an organization can use to build trusting relationships that are needed if one wants to
enhance the culture of an organization. These 10 strategies are: show caring, demonstrate respect and interdependence, be responsible, create transparency, create clarity, practice accountability, listen and ask questions, keep commitments, extend trust, and be trustworthy (White 2016). Transforming education at every level is the job of the leader of the organization at that level. A teacher is responsible for the culture of the class, a principal for the culture of the school, a superintendent for the culture of the district, the governor of the educational culture of the state, and the President of the educational culture of the country. Building a culture of high achievement and success has been sought by all. In the early 2000’s the presidential initiative of No Child Left Behind sought to improve schools with the use of accountability through the use of high stakes testing. This initiative was very unpopular with school administrators as well as teachers (Weissman 2015).

Due to push back from the failed implementation of the stated goals of No Child Left Behind the pendulum of providing access to school-based mental health took a big swing in the opposite direction due to the Local Control Funding Formula and the accountability system that included a dashboard measuring climate and discipline.

In 2013, the state of California enacted a program entitled Local Control Funding Formula. The California Department of Education (2017) states that the Local Control Funding Formula replaced the kindergarten through grade 12 finance system that had been used by school districts for approximately 40 years. The CDE (2017) goes on to say that the Local Control Funding Formula creates base, supplemental, and concentration grants in place of revenue limits, general purpose block grants, and a myriad of categorical programs that previously were in effect. When a district or charter school
creates a Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP) they put down how they will use the money granted to them through the Local Control Funding Formula and for the first time can provide school-based mental health to fulfill one of the state priorities that must be addressed in the schools Local Control Accountability Plan. From the time compulsory education first started in this country mental health was seen as something that was important, although not always given the resources or attention to make the goals of educating the whole of a child a reality. This problem of a requirement for mental health education has been addressed for students with disabilities, but not for those students who do not qualify under IDEA (Mathison & Ross, 2008).

Rights to Mental Health

Dupper (2003) states that the federal IDEA law contains 13 specified categories of disabilities, and one of these is the disability category of emotional disturbance. Hardman and Drew (2011) give the IDEA definition of emotional disturbance as:

A condition exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree that adversely affects a child’s educational performance:

- An inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors.
- An inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers.
- Inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances.
- A general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression.
• A tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems. (p. 182)

Hardman and Drew (2011) go on to say that when this law was passed congress put in an exclusionary section that stated that an emotional disturbance “does not include children who are socially maladjusted, unless it is determined that they are seriously emotionally disturbed” (p. 182). Hughes and Crothers (2008) state that the term “socially maladjusted” first comes up in the 1975 special education law, and was put into place with the specific purpose of avoiding providing special education services to socially maladjusted children. Hughes and Crothers (2008) point out that not only has the term “socially maladjusted” never had an agreed upon definition, but it has also not been changed as an exclusionary clause to the disability of emotionally disturbed.

The reason the terms emotionally disturbed and socially maladjusted are so important is because even though the similarities between these two classifications are blurry, the schools’ requirement in providing services to the students that fall into one of these categories is clear (Hughes & Crothers 2008). Students who have the disability classification of emotionally disturbed are entitled to stringent legal protections held by all special education students that students who are socially maladjusted do not, and students who are classified as emotionally disturbed are entitled to services that students who are socially maladjusted are not (Hughes & Crothers 2008). One of these services is school-based mental health.

School-based mental health can be a required service in the individual education plan (IEP) for emotionally disturbed students, and has been shown to reduce behaviors in students and increase their ability to access their education (Hughes & Crothers 2008).
Students who may have similar behaviors of students classified as emotionally disturbed receive the same educational benefit from school-based mental health but do not benefit from the right to have those mental health services, and often if a service is not a legal requirement then schools have been resistant to provide those services. Hughes and Crothers (2008) state that the difference between students who are emotionally disturbed and students who are socially maladjusted is a blurry distinction, and services to assist students in developing skills to function in school is only mandated to one group although it is clear that the services can benefit both.

**Mental Health Used as Alternative to Discipline**

Mathison and Ross (2008) state the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004 called for the consideration of Positive Behavior Interventions and Support (PBIS) for students whose behavior impacts the learning of themselves and others. Mathison and Ross (2008) go on to say that this is in direct response to the increased rate of suspension and expulsion under policies like zero tolerance passed in the mid 90’s. Kafka (2011) and Weissman (2015) state that zero tolerance policies have been shown to be ineffective in countering recidivism as students who have been suspended are more likely to be suspended again and ultimately end up in what has been called the school-to-prison pipeline. Sailor, Dunlap, Sugai, and Horner, (2008) state that PBIS “provides an effective, positive, strength-based, relevant, and efficient technology to assist persons requiring specialized behavioral support and services” (p. v). A key component of PBIS are support teams that include psychological counseling services (Cook, et al, 2014). Counseling and school-based mental health services are used not
only in a reactive fashion after a student commits an offense, but preferably proactively prior to a student committing any offense at all.

**School Discipline**

A six-year longitudinal study conducted by the Council of State Governments Justice Center and the Public Policy Research Institute of Texas A&M state school discipline in the form of student removal from schools in the form of suspension and expulsion is an increasingly common practice in the United States (Fabelo, Thompson, Plotkin, Carmichael, Marchbanks & Both 2011). The most common cause for student removal from the classroom is due to disruptive behavior (95%) which could include anything from a dress code violation or displays of affection that are against school rules or the complete disruption of a classroom that make it nearly impossible for their students to benefit from the classroom environment (Fabelo et al., 2011). Fabelo et al. (2011) goes on to say that only 5% of suspensions and expulsions are due to drugs, violence or weapon charges. Fabelo et al. (2011) also states that 6.8% of all students in the United States are suspended annually, and that the distribution of suspensions and expulsions does not have an even distribution within the population. Clough (2014) states that suspensions for disruption and defiance are the most common reason for suspensions and further states that removal from school due to disruption and defiance has the most disproportionality of any suspension section of the California Education Code.

In 2014, California Governor Jerry Brown signed assembly bill 420 which eliminates suspension for “willful defiance” for any student below the 4th grade (Clough 2014). Clough (2014) goes on to say that this law comes after new federal guidelines were issued for states to find new ways to administer discipline in non-discriminatory
ways. California has become the first state to take such a large step in changing suspension practices in such a drastic way by forcing schools to come up with other ways to change student behavior other than their removal from the educational setting.

The research is clear that students of color, students who come from low socio-economic backgrounds and students with disabilities are the most negatively impacted by disciplinary policies that result in their removal from the classroom by means of suspension or expulsion (Losen & Skiba 2010, Weissman 2015). In 1968, the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Civil Rights has tracked disciplinary statistics concerning the removal of students due to suspension and expulsion. Hawley and Ready (2003) state that in the Office of Civil Rights’ report it was clear that African American, Latino, and disabled students were removed from school due to suspension and expulsion at a much higher rate than their white peers. Morgan et al. (2009) state that students of color, students of low socio-economic backgrounds, and students with disabilities have a higher rate of suspensions and expulsions. Resmovits (2014) reports that African American students are three-and-a-half times as likely as white students to be suspended or expelled. The research is clear that as students are removed from the classroom due to discipline the odds of these students dropping out of school or being incarcerated goes up (Morgan et al. 2009).

Shah (2012) states that as students are removed from their general education school of residence they are moved to alternative education schools where they receive substandard education in academics and enhanced education in the skills of criminality. Weissman (2015) discusses the findings presented at the Harvard Civil Rights Project and Northeastern University School of Law’s School-to-Prison Pipeline Conference where it
was found that states with higher rates of suspension had higher rates of both juvenile and adult incarceration.

In the years since the Columbine School shooting in 1999 law enforcement officers have joined the ranks of school staff across the country (Eckes & Russo, 2012). According to Eckes and Russo (2012) and Weisman (2015) school resource officers spend the majority of their time in their role as law enforcement officer as opposed to the roles of teacher or counselor. This means that most of the money school’s spend on school resource officers is being used on school discipline. Losen (2015) states that increases in security on school campuses should be considered a last resort due to the harmful effects presented in data citing the correlation between high levels of school security and higher levels of suspension. Some of the options that Losen (2015) discusses before a school reaches the “last resort” is an increase in the adoption of school-based mental health.

The average salary for a school counselor in California is $68,000 according to indeed.com (2015). According to the 2012 School Health Policies and Practices Study collected by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention the highest rated mental health service was counseling for emotional or behavioral disorders which is a national mandate through IDEA for students who have the special education classification of emotionally disturbed. Those students who may benefit from these services, but do not have a legal requirement to have them are all too often denied these services due to competing school resources and fiscal priorities (Teich, Robinson & West, 2007).

Teich et al. (2007) go on to argue that school districts around the country report an increase in the need for school-based mental health services, but a decrease in funding
available to provide these services. “Many districts cited competing priorities for the use of funds, such as the need to document increases in academic achievement, as a major impediment to providing mental health services in schools” (Teich, et al., 2007, p. 19).

The need for mental health services may be clear, but in the face of such competing priorities schools need to know the impact of mental health services on school discipline, and the fiscal impact on one service to another.

**The Price of Failure**

The link between dropping out of high school and an increased rate of criminality and incarceration has been well documented (Shah 2012, Wilson 2011). The University of California at Santa Barbara’s Dropout Research Project estimated that one year of high school dropouts cost the state of California over 24 billion dollars in criminal justice, incarceration, and victim costs (Wilson 2011). Wilson (2011) goes on to say that this research project estimates that one year’s worth of California high school dropouts will commit 113,954 violent crimes.

A study done of 11 Texas school districts found that the annual cost to educate a student in an alternative education program was almost three times as much as the average cost of educating that student in their school of residence (Freeman 2012).

Freeman (2012) went on to say that the cost of security and monitoring services in the form of school resource officers went up in every district studied even though “student support services would prove far more beneficial in addressing the root causes of student misbehavior.” (p. 35).

In the years since the Columbine School shooting in 1999 law enforcement officers have joined the ranks of school staff across the country (Eckes & Russo, 2012).
The cost of a school resource officer is negotiated between school districts and the agency in which they contract, but between a third and half of the cost of the officer is commonly taken on by school districts across the country (Green, R. Lynch, & S. Lynch, 2013). Eckes and Russo (2012) state school resource officers spend the majority of their time in the role as law enforcement officer as opposed to the roles of teacher or counselor. More school security is associated with an increase in school suspensions and an increase in the disparity between suspension rates for black and white students (Losen, 2015). It is further stated by Losen (2015) that increases in security should be considered as a last resort due to the harmful effects presented in the data citing the correlation between high levels of school security and higher levels of suspension, and discrepancies in school discipline by race. Some of the options that Losen (2015) discusses before a school reaches the “last resort” is an increase in the adoption of school-based mental health.

**Mental Health**

Kutash, Duchnowski, and Lynn (2006) state the term school-based mental health is a phrase that is commonly used by people involved in education circles, but often the nuance is easily misunderstood. For this study the term “school-based mental health” or “mental health” is meant to define any mental health services provided in a school setting. The school setting can be a general education school, special education school, or school for incarcerated youth within a correctional facility. The U.S. Surgeon General defines mental health as “a state of successful performance of mental function, resulting in productive activities, fulfilling relationships with other people, and the ability to adapt to change and to cope with adversity” (Hurwitz and Weston, 2010). School-
based mental health is defined as the treatment of mental health disorders, and the building of coping skills to deal with life challenges offered within the school setting so that schools can accomplish their mission of educating every student (Christner & Mennuti 2009).

The 2012 School Health Policies and Practices Study collected by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention state that nationwide 43.6% of school districts have an employee who oversees or coordinates mental health services in schools. This same study states that 26.4% of elementary schools, 28.1% of middle schools, and 32% of high schools have a specified ratio of school counselors to students. The 2012 School Health Policies and Practices Study collected by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention state nationwide 77% of schools have a school guidance counselor who works a minimum of part time at the school site. This same study asked districts what types of mental health services they provided in their schools from a list of 20 specified categories. The highest rated mental health service, with a rate of 44.1% of districts providing this service, was counseling for emotional or behavioral disorders which is a national mandate through IDEA for students who have the special education classification of emotionally disturbed.

School districts around the country report an increase in the need for school-based mental health services, but a decrease in funding available to provide these services (Teich, Robinson & West, 2007). “Many districts cited competing priorities for the use of funds, such as the need to document increases in academic achievement, as a major impediment to providing mental health services in schools” (Teich, et al., 2007, p. 19). But funding for mental health services is only part of the equation. Once the funding has
been set aside the issue of what type of mental health will be delivered in a school setting becomes the top priority.

**Practices of School-Based Mental Health Providers**

Schools hold a key role in providing mental health to students as school-age children in primary and secondary school are more likely to receive mental health services if they are offered them within the school as opposed to another setting (Stein, Sontag-Padilla, Osilla, Woodbridge, Kase, Joycox, D’Amico, Cerully, Eberhart, and Golan, 2012). As school administrators look to implement school-based mental health the question of how to do this comes into play. Fazel, Hoagwood, Stephan and Ford (2014) did an article in the Lancet Psychiatry entitled “Mental Health Interventions in Schools 1”. When looking at what type of mental health to provide in schools the student population needs to be examined so the most appropriate services can be provided (Fazel et al., 2014). Elementary school students from 4-10 years of age are more likely to need mental health support in the areas of separation anxiety and oppositional defiant disorder where middle and high school students from 11-18 years of age are more likely to need mental health support in the areas of generalized anxiety, conduct disorder, and in the areas of depression (Fazel et al., 2014). Fazel et al. (2014) go on to say that having a systematic needs assessment is essential as an early warning device. Doing screenings poses the risk of over-identification or under-identification, but both these risks are reduced significantly with proper systems in place performed by trained staff (Fazel et al., 2014).

When implementing school-based mental health services, schools tend to fall into two categories (Stein et al., 2012). These categories are either to provide specific mental
health services focusing on perceived areas of need like behavioral issues, substance abuse, or suicide prevention or to try and impact the climate of the entire school most often through a tiered approach. In a tiered approach is where approximately 80% of students will fall into tier 1, while approximately 15% of students will fall in tier 2 and approximately 5% of students will fall into tier 3.

Hannigan and Hannigan (2015) discuss examples of the purpose and implementation of the three tiers. Tier 1 are school-wide interventions and climate expectations that are given to all students and adults. They include creating a school climate where behavioral expectations are defined and taught, reward systems are used for appropriate behavior, there is a continuum of consequences for unacceptable behavior, and data is continuously collected to drive decision making (Hannigan & Hannigan, 2015). Students are identified as tier 2 when the tier 1 system of supports are insufficient at meeting their needs. Tier 2 students receive all the services and supports of tier 1 as well as universal screenings, progress monitoring, increased structure to assist with predictability, increased contingent adult feedback, and an increase in home/school communication (Hannigan & Hannigan, 2015). Students are identified as tier 3 when tier 1 and tier 2 supports are insufficient at meeting their individual needs. Tier 3 students receive all the services and supports of students in tier 1 and 2 as well as looking at a possible functional behavioral assessment, a team-based comprehensive assessment, linking academic and behavioral supports and most importantly individualized interventions based on assessment information through all the students’ team members (Hannigan & Hannigan, 2015).
Mental health interventions in schools should use a tiered approach where all students receive a base level of intervention, fewer are given additional support, and a select few in the top tier are given intensive supports (Fazel et al., 2014, Cook, et al, 2014, Shriberg 2013). Unfortunately, there still exists stigma around people including children receiving mental health supports and some parents are reluctant to grant permission for their child to receive mental health support. When a school is implementing universal supports where all students are receiving services then that stigma is eliminated. When the stigma is eliminated, and all students have access to school-based mental health then the impacts of these interventions can be seen (Fazel et al., 2014).

**Impact Mental Health Has on Schools**

Hughes and Crothers (2008) state that mental health services are an integral part in assisting students who have behavioral issues. Hughes and Crothers (2008) advocate that mental health treatment should be provided to all students who need this service whether they are emotionally disturbed or socially maladjusted. Shriberg (2013) states that schools that implement PBIS with an active component of mental health see a reduction of disciplinary referrals and overall reduction of suspensions and expulsions. Shriberg (2013) also notes a reduction of disruptive behaviors in the classroom in schools that use school-based mental health. Lean and Colucci (2013) state that the benefits of providing students with mental health services stretch beyond the students receiving those services. Lean and Colucci (2013) state that not only do the students receiving mental health services benefit academically, emotionally, and socially, but this can have a “multi-ripple effect” (p. 34) on the entire class that can benefit in the same manner. They
go on to explain how the entire class will benefit when the class is free from disruption and how classes free from disruption give the teachers more time to teach and students more time to learn (Lean & Colucci, 2013).

School attendance is a behavioral issue that starts before students step onto the school grounds, and is a key factor in the success of students (Kearney 2019). Sprick (2019) states that a student who has poor attendance will have an increased likelihood of having poor academic outcomes, poor behavioral and social-emotional outcomes, and is much more likely to get into legal trouble outside of school. Sprick (2019) states that if one were to look at the attendance records alone of a student body, it would show that students who have more absences also have decreased test scores, and in early elementary grades would even be a grade or more below in reading. According to Kearney (2019), attendance poses a unique issue where mental health professionals see attendance problems as within the realm of school-based professionals, and school-based professionals see attendance problems as within the realm of mental health professionals. Both school-based professionals and mental health professionals see the problem of attendance as ultimately a problem that occurs at home. Kearney (2019) also states that the attendance problem seen by schools consists of deficient parenting skills, low expectations for a child’s school performance or attendance, overly permissive or authoritarian parenting styles, poor communication or relationships with school officials, poor supervision of the child, and school dropout among parents. Sprick (2019) states that effective ways to combat absenteeism in schools is to have regular meetings of a team specifically designated to tackle the problem of absenteeism. This team needs to
examine school data, develop plans to address concerns, and specifically to allocate responsibilities and resources to solve the problem.

When schools can replace their normal systems of punishment with mental health services students can learn to recognize their own symptoms of escalation and loss of control. Therefore, students can decrease their own instances of rule breaking (Lean & Colucci, 2013). If this holds true, then teachers and ultimately administrators can spend less time dealing with disruptive behaviors. The question in this study is not merely if this phenomenon holds true but rather if there is a statistically significant difference in rates of chronic absenteeism, achievement, and rates of suspensions between California community schools that offer school-based mental health and those who do not.

**Summary**

In this chapter a review of literature was examined with a look at the rights of public education in the United States from before its founding. This chapter looked at the legal cases and laws that outlined what rights students had to education as well as the laws mandating students go to school. Laws were examined in different parts of the country both before and after the civil war with particular attention to how non-white students were excluded from an education similar to their white counterparts. This chapter examined how the cases providing equal access to non-white students impacted students who had been excluded from education due to their disability. The property right of education was reviewed as well as what due process must occur prior to a school taking away that right to education for students in violation of school rules. This chapter examined how different programs and court cases established and then eroded students’ rights to education and how to remove students who break school rules. Specifically this
chapter looked at the program of zero tolerance and No Child Left Behind and what impact those programs had on schools in the United States. The price of failure was examined and a look at what awaits many students who are excluded from education and what that means for the societies that house those individuals was reviewed. The chapter ended with mental health in schools and a look at its benefits, its impacts, and the practices of mental health providers for students.
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Overview

This chapter describes the methods and procedures that were used in this study. This dissertation attempted to determine the difference between California county community schools for expelled students who have had access to school-based mental health and those who do not as it pertains to rates of chronic absenteeism, achievement, suspensions, and graduation rates data collected by The California Department of Education School Dashboard. This chapter describes the research questions used in this study, as well as the population and sample used.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this mixed method study was to determine if there is a difference in achievement, absenteeism, graduation rates and suspension for students enrolled in community schools that do and don’t have access to school-based mental health services. In addition, it was the purpose to identify and describe the practices most effective in improving attendance, reduction of suspension, achievement and graduation as perceived by community school employees.

Research Questions

1. Is there a difference in attendance of community school students who have access to mental health services and those who do not?

2. Is there a difference in achievement as measured by scores on state standardized tests of community school students who have access to mental health services and those who do not?
3. Is there a difference in graduation rates of community school students who have access to mental health services and those who do not?

4. Is there a difference in suspension rates of community school students who have access to mental health services and those who do not?

5. What are the practices used by community school employees that are most effective in improving attendance?

6. What are the practices used by community school employees that are most effective in improving achievement?

7. What are the practices used by community school employees that are most effective in improving graduation rates?

8. What are the practices used by community school employees that are most effective in decreasing suspensions?

**Research Design**

A mixed-method, causal comparative research design was used in this study to determine if there was a difference between California community schools for expelled students when that school offers school-based mental health for the majority of their students for the majority of the time as it pertains to attendance, achievement, graduation rates, and rates of suspensions. According to McMillan and Schumacher a mixed-method design is preferable if the researcher wants to both show the “result (quantitative) and explain why it was obtained (qualitative)” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 25). A “mixed method” study refers to an emergent methodology of research that improves the systematic integration, or “mixing”, of both qualitative and quantitative research within a single sustained program of inquiry or single investigation. The premise of using a
mixed method study as a methodology is that this type of integration allows for a more complete utilization of data than either the single use of qualitative or quantitative data has on its own. Glatthorn and Joyner (2013) state that “Causal-comparative studies are designed to determine the possible causes of a phenomenon” (p. 42) to determine a relationship between -1.0 and 1.0. These studies are also called ex post facto research because they are often done after an impact has already occurred and the researcher is looking for a relationship between variables even though no variable is being manipulated during the study (Glatthorn and Joyner 2013). Johnson and Christensen (2008) state that causal-comparative research can establish what degree of relationship two variables have, but despite the name causal-comparative research does not establish causation that one variable has on another. A causal-comparative design is a research design that seeks to find relationships between independent and dependent variables after an action or event has already occurred. The researcher’s goal is to determine whether the independent variable affected the outcome, or dependent variable, by comparing two or more groups of individuals. There are similarities and differences between causal-comparative research, also referred to as ex post facto research, and both correlational and experimental research. In this research the independent variables are the scores reported on the California Dashboard the dependent variables are if those schools have offer mental health to the majority of their students for the majority of the time.

This study examined how variables, and access to school-based mental health services impacts the school performance as reported on the California School Dashboard data collected by the California Department of Education. The California School Dashboard collects the following discipline data:
• Chronic Absenteeism
• Suspension Rate
• English Learner Progress
• Graduation Rate
• College/Career Readiness
• English Language Arts Performance
• Mathematics Performance

A descriptive research design was ruled out as descriptive research does not attempt to determine a relationship or make a prediction about the variables being studied (Lunenburg & Irby, 2008). Since none of the variables will be manipulated this also excludes experimental research designs as they require the manipulation of one of the variables studied (Lunenburg & Irby, 2008).

Roberts (2010) states that the approach for a qualitative study is one which has a focus on a person’s experience. Roberts (2010) goes on to say that qualitative data typically comes in the form of interviews, observations, or by reviewing a variety of artifacts and documents. For the qualitative portion of this mixed method study interviews were conducted with multiple school employees from community schools in four counties throughout California. Seidman (2015) states that in-depth interviews are the best way to truly understand a subject’s story and life experience. This study interviewed school employees at California county community schools to determine what key signature practices are most effective when tackling chronic absenteeism, achievement, graduation rates, and school suspensions in a population of students who have all already been through the expulsion process at their school of residence. After
the interviews were conducted the transcripts were evaluated to ascertain what patterns exist to find what key signature practices are utilized by school employees to lower chronic absenteeism, increase test scores, increase graduation rates, and lower rates of suspensions.

**Population**

Population is defined as a group that meets a specific criterion that can be researched (McMillan & Schumacher 2010). The population for this study is California county community schools. According to the California Education Facts website which is a section of the California Department of Education (2019) there are 73 county community schools in California that are designated to serve students who have been expelled, referred by SARB, by a county probation department, and other high-risk use that can include students who have been released from incarceration and are deemed inappropriate to return to their district of residence school. The most recent data from the California Department of Education last reviewed on June 11, 2019 goes on to say that the county community schools in California reported an enrollment of 15,263 students in October of 2018, but the demographic reports for prior school years indicated that the “total number of students served by these schools over the entire year averaged over 30,578.” The reason for the discrepancy between the 15,263 students enrolled on a single date, and an average of over 30,578 students served at California community schools is due to the high turnover of the student population within a single year and the low attendance rate.
Target Population

A target population for a study is the entire set of individuals chosen from the overall population for which the study data are to be used to make inferences. The target population defines the population to which the findings are meant to be generalized. It is important that target populations are clearly identified for the purposes of research study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). It is typically not feasible, due to time or cost constraints, to study large groups; therefore, the peer researchers chose population samples from within a larger group. The target population for this study is California county community schools. All California community schools were contacted by email and by phone and a convenience sampling of seven schools from around the state were interviewed that can be generalized to the greater population of community schools in California. These seven county offices of education community schools represented schools from the most populous, second most populous, third most populous and bottom 20% most populous counties in the state. Forty-three percent of these counties were coastal and fifty-seven percent of the counties were inland. Fifty-seven percent of the counties were in northern California and forty-three percent were counties in southern California. These schools represent a cross-section of county community schools across California.

Sample

A sample within the total population that can be researched where generalizations might occur is referred to as a target population (McMillan & Schumacher 2010). The target population for the quantitative portion of this mixed method study were all California community schools. The sample population are the seven California
community schools where a site visit was conducted and who had multiple school employees interviewed. All California community schools were contacted by email and phone and the seven community schools that agreed to be toured by the researcher and allowed the researcher to conduct multiple interviews with school employees were from varied urban/rural, as well as varied geographic locations. Archival data from the California Department of Education was gathered for all schools that participated in the qualitative portion of this study. The researcher was then able to determine if there was a difference in achievement, absenteeism, graduation rates and suspension for schools that offered school-based mental health for their students as compared to students that did not. This researcher contacted all 73 California community schools in the target population to determine if they provided school-based mental health for the majority of their students for the majority of the student’s time. School-based mental health providers are defined as individuals who possess a Pupil Personnel Services (PPS) credential, a Board-Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA), a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist (LMFT), or possess a degree in psychology, counseling, or social work and who work at a California community school for expelled students and who provide social/emotional support. The schools that were selected for tours had multiple employees interviewed including administrators, teachers, para-educators, mental health providers, and three other employees that did not fit into any category including a school librarian, occupational therapist, and specialist who does counseling but does not have the requirements needed to qualify as a school-based mental health provider by the definitions of this study. Those schools were then compared to determine if there was a difference in achievement, absenteeism, graduation rates and suspension for their students had access to school-
based mental health services and those who did not. In addition, it was the purpose to identify and describe the practices most effective in improving attendance, reduction of suspension, achievement and graduation as perceived by those employees. This method of sampling is called “Purposive Sampling”. Patten (2018) states purposive sampling is used when a researcher will contact individuals who have relevant information to the topic being studied.

**Instrumentation**

The instrumentation of this study was based on the humanistic learning theory that states all individuals need their physiological and safety needs met before they can concentrate on cognitive development. For the quantitative portion of this study archival data was utilized. The California Department of Education’s California School Dashboard data collection is public information and public documents can be used to “provide data about a sample or population” (Creswell, 2012, p. 152) that can be considered instrumentation for the purposes of research. The examination of data from federal data sources was easily obtained for this study. The determination of whether schools had access to school-based mental health was done by contacting each of the schools and requesting that information from the school’s staff.

The California Department of Education’s California School Dashboard distributes the data it collects on its official website [https://www.caschooldashboard.org/](https://www.caschooldashboard.org/). The California School Dashboard collects the following data:

- Chronic Absenteeism
- Suspension Rate
- English Learner Progress
• Graduation Rate
• College/Career Readiness
• English Language Arts Performance
• Mathematics Performance

This archival information combined with whether the schools studied have access to school-based mental health for the majority of their time students for the majority of the time was used to answer the research questions:

1. Is there a difference in attendance of community school students who have access to mental health services and those who do not?

2. Is there a difference in achievement as measured by scores on state standardized tests of community school students who have access to mental health services and those who do not?

3. Is there a difference in graduation rates of community school students who have access to mental health services and those who do not?

4. Is there a difference in suspension rates of community school students who have access to mental health services and those who do not?

5. What are the practices used by community school employees that are most effective in improving attendance?

6. What are the practices used by community school employees that are most effective in improving achievement?

7. What are the practices used by community school employees that are most effective in improving graduation rates?
8. What are the practices used by community school employees that are most effective in decreasing suspensions?

**Validity and Reliability**

This study used secondary, or archival data collected from the California School Dashboard which is a section of the California Department of Education and can be accessed at [https://www.caschooldashboard.org/](https://www.caschooldashboard.org/). That data was used to answer the first four research questions of this study. The California School Dashboard reports on how schools do in the areas of: chronic absenteeism, suspension rates, English learner progress, graduation rates, college and career readiness, English language arts, and mathematics. For this study the interviewees were asked to report on the key signature practices that county school employees use that are perceived as being most effective in improving the areas of absenteeism, achievement as measured by scores of standardized tests, suspensions and rates of graduation. When surveys are used, pilot testing the instructions to those surveys is necessary before the pilot is distributed to the panel of experts (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The only data used in this study not obtained from the California School Dashboard and the California Department of Education for the quantitative portion of this study was obtained during interviews and on tours of the seven community schools that participated in the qualitative portion of this study. The definition of school-based mental health will be provided so there is no misunderstanding on what qualifies as meeting that qualification. The definition of school-based mental health is: mental health providers in the school setting are defined as individuals who possess a Pupil Personnel Services (PPS) credential, a Board-Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA), a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist (LMFT), or possess a degree in
psychology, counseling, or social work and who work at a California community school for expelled students and provide social/emotional support.

The validity of an instrument is determined by how accurate that instrument measures what it is intended to measure (Patten, & Newhart, 2017). The California Department of Education School Dashboard reports that ultimately the validity and reliability of the data depends on the accurateness of the districts reporting the data.

Creswell (2003) states to increase the content validity of an interview protocol an expert panel should review interview questions to assess their validity. If a researcher uses their own instrument, then that instrument needs to be reviewed by a panel of experts (Roberts 2010). For this study, a panel of experts reviewed the interview questions. The criteria for the expert panel included a minimum of two of the following:

- Doctorate and experience in conducting mixed methods research
- California credential: special education, school psychology, school counseling or school administration
- A minimum of five years’ experience working in a county community school, juvenile detention center, or at a county special education school serving students identified as emotionally disturbed.

The panel of experts reviewed the interview questions that came directly from the research questions and made recommendations. Feedback reviewed by the panel resulted in minor changes to the interview questions.

**Field testing**

Pilot studies are often conducted by researchers to get preliminary information on how measures work (Creswell, 2004; Patten, 2012). Two pilot tests were conducted prior
to the interview procedures taking place and prior to the start of the research interviews. An alignment table (Appendix C) was completed to align the interview questions with the research questions of this study. The researcher conducted two sample interviews. One person interviewed was a school psychologist who provided school-based mental health support, and the other was an administrator at a school that transitioned from no school-based mental health support to having a school-based mental health provider on staff all the time. These interviews were not included in this study to gain feedback. An experienced interviewer reviewed the recorded interviews to provide feedback regarding tone, and overall interview style for the purpose of refining the interviewer’s style and to limit any potential bias on the part of the interviewer. The interview process was adjusted based on the feedback received to enhance future interview procedures and practices during data collection.

**Data Collection**

Prior to collecting data for this study permission from the Institutional Review Board at Brandman University was obtained (Appendix D). Approval was sought and ultimately approved by submitting the following documents for review: the letter of invitation (Appendix E), consent for the qualitative data collection process (Appendix F), and the participant bill of rights (Appendix G). All participants who were interviewed for this study were provided their specific rights including the right to privacy in the participant bill of rights (Appendix G). The interview protocol (Appendix B) for all qualitative interviews was also given to the Institutional Review Board.

For the quantitative portion of this study archival data was collected from the California School Dashboard which is a section of the California Department of
Education. The only quantitative data needed for this study not retrieved from the California Department of Education was retrieved by contacting each of the California community schools individually to determine if the school had access to school-based mental health for the majority of their students for the majority of the time. This study did not use human subjects for the quantitative portion of its data collection and no information could be linked to specific individuals which means this study did not need to seek informed consent of human subjects (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). This dissertation does constitute a publication of generalizable knowledge and therefore still needs permission from the university’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) (Gall, Gall & Borg 2007).

The participants for the interviews were contacted by first contacting the principal for each community school in California. The principals were provided the definitions of school-based mental health, and school-based mental health provider used in this study. They were then asked if their school could provide a tour for the interviewer and if granted the interviewer would tour the school and contact various school employees from different community schools within those counties and interview school employees to determine best practices for reducing chronic absenteeism, achievement, increasing graduation rates, and decreasing incidents of school suspensions.

Data Analysis

To analyze the quantitative results of this study a t-test was used. This type of analysis is appropriate because two groups are compared against each other. The first four research questions examining the data provided by The California Department of Education’s School Dashboard was independently analyzed to determine if there was a
difference in the means based on whether a school had access to school-based mental health for the majority of their students for the majority of the time. The groups measured in this analysis were:

Group 1: Schools that had access to school-based mental health for the majority of their students for the majority of the time.

Group 2: Schools that did not have access to school-based mental health for the majority of their students for the majority of the time.

All groups were analyzed to determine if school-based mental health and rates of attendance, achievement, rates of graduation, and suspensions were statistically significant.

To analyze the qualitative results of this study the recorded interviews were sent to an online platform (REV, 2016) for transcription. When the transcripts were completed they were analyzed for accuracy and to ascertain if themes or patterns exist. The transcripts were entered in NVivo which is a coding program to analyze themes in transcripts. Patten (2002) suggests analyzing the content of transcripts through a coding program to assist with the findings of themes or patterns.

**Intercoder Reliability of Data**

When the data collection is completed by the researcher, the data is then transcribed, coded, and then validated. Intercoder reliability is the utilization of a third-party evaluator to analyze, verify, and determine the same conclusions for the data collected (Patton 2015). For this study, the researcher provided a peer researcher with one of the twelve transcribed interviews and after the thematic researcher completes the verification of the data, the researcher looked for the level of intercoder reliability.
Lombard, Synder-Duch, and Campanella Bracken (2004, p. 3) establish intercoder reliability as, “coefficients of .90 or greater are nearly always acceptable, .80 or greater is acceptable in most situations, and .70 may be appropriate in some exploratory studies for some indices.” The process of cross checking the data with an independent researcher created a level of reliability (Patton, 2015). Upon completion of this study a member of the panel of experts who has experience with qualitative doctoral dissertations did an independent review of the collected data and created independent codes to analyze the data. After both individuals analyzed data a subsequent conversation was had to compare the two perspectives to hone the existing codes which resulted in more robust and descriptive themes. Patton (2015) states that intercoder reliability is achieved when a third-party evaluator reads and compares data and reaches the same conclusions as the original researcher. The next chapter discusses the themes that were finalized from that collaboration and what emerged from both the interviews or qualitative data and the causal-comparative quantitative data garnered from The California Department of Education.

**Limitations**

For this study California community schools were contacted to determine if the schools had access to school-based mental health for the majority of their students for the majority of the time. Only California county community schools were contacted and only seven of the 73 county community schools in California were used in this study. Community schools were chosen because 100% of the population at community schools has been removed from their general education school of residence due to behaviors at those schools. Some of these behaviors could be as relatively minor as chronic
attendance violations to offenses that remove them from general education and take them into incarceration. The data gathered may not be able to be generalized to general education high schools where the overall student population will have less history of school discipline issues. The community schools surveyed enroll mostly students in ninth through twelfth grades so generalization may be even less applicable to general education elementary and middle schools. No schools outside California were contacted, and therefore generalizations to outside populations could also vary.

Summary

This study used a mixed-methods approach. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected and analyzed in this mixed-method approach to ascertain if there is a statistically significant difference in rates of chronic absenteeism, achievement, and rates of suspension in California community schools for expelled high school students depending on if those schools have had access to school-based mental health for the majority of their students for the majority of the time, and what key signature practices school-based mental health providers utilize. This chapter showed the purpose of this dissertation, the research questions driving the study and explained the methodology used. This chapter showed the research design, the total population and the sample population used in the study. The instrumentation used, how the data was collected and analyzed, and the limitations of the study were also illustrated. The methodology for this dissertation was designed to answer the research questions presented so that the data collected can be analyzed and interpreted in a way to determine if a significant difference exists between the different research questions and to determine if future assumptions can be made based on that data. Chapter IV follows with the results of the findings and a
detailed description of both the quantitative and qualitative data analysis. Chapter V concludes the study with a descriptive analysis of the data, what the significant findings of the study were, its conclusions, and recommendations for further research.
CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH, DATA COLLECTION, AND FINDINGS

Overview

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this mixed method study was to determine if there is a difference in achievement, absenteeism, graduation rates and suspension for students enrolled in community schools that do and don’t have access to school-based mental health services. In addition, it was the purpose to identify and describe the practices most effective in improving attendance, reduction of suspension, achievement and graduation as perceived by community school employees.

Research Questions

1. Is there a difference in attendance of community school students who have access to mental health services and those who do not?
2. Is there a difference in achievement as measured by scores on state standardized tests of community school students who have access to mental health services and those who do not?
3. Is there a difference in graduation rates of community school students who have access to mental health services and those who do not?
4. Is there a difference in suspension rates of community school students who have access to mental health services and those who do not?
5. What are the practices used by community school employees that are most effective in improving attendance?
6. What are the practices used by community school employees that are most effective in improving achievement?
7. What are the practices used by community school employees that are most effective in improving graduation rates?

8. What are the practices used by community school employees that are most effective in decreasing suspensions?

**Research Methods and Data Collection Procedures**

A mixed-method, causal comparative research design was used in this study to determine if there was a difference between California community schools for expelled students that offer school-based mental health for the majority of their students for the majority of the time and those who do not as it pertains to absenteeism, achievement, graduation rates, and rates of suspensions. According to McMillan and Schumacher a mixed-method design is preferable if the researcher wants to both show the “result (quantitative) and explain why it was obtained (qualitative)” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 25). A “mixed method” study refers to an emergent methodology of research that improves the systematic integration, or “mixing”, of both qualitative and quantitative research within a single sustained program of inquiry or single investigation. The premise of using a mixed method study as a methodology is that this type of integration allows for a more complete utilization of data than either the single use of qualitative or quantitative data has on its own. Glatthorn and Joyner (2013) state that “Causal-comparative studies are designed to determine the possible causes of a phenomenon” (p. 42) to determine a relationship between -1.0 and 1.0. These studies are also called ex post facto research because they are often done after an impact has already occurred and the researcher is looking for a relationship between variables even though no variable is being manipulated during the study (Glatthohorn and Joyner 2013). Johnson and
Christensen (2008) state that causal-comparative research can establish what degree of relationship two variables have, but despite the name causal-comparative research does not establish causation that one variable has on another.

A descriptive research design was ruled out as descriptive research does not attempt to determine a relationship or make a prediction about the variables being studied (Lunenburg & Irby, 2008). Since none of the variables will be manipulated this also excludes experimental research designs as they require the manipulation of one of the variables studied (Lunenburg & Irby, 2008).

Roberts (2010) states that the approach for a qualitative study is one which has a focus on a person’s experience. Roberts (2010) goes on to say that qualitative data typically comes in the form of interviews, observations, or by reviewing a variety of artifacts and documents. For the qualitative portion of this mixed method study 25 interviews were conducted at seven California community schools. Seidman (2015) states that in-depth interviews are the best way to truly understand a subject’s story and life experience. This study interviewed administrators, teachers, para-educators, school-based mental health and three other employees that did not fit into any category including a school librarian, occupational therapist, and specialist who does counseling but does not have the requirements needed to qualify as a school-based mental health provider by the definitions of this study. These employees at California county community schools where interviewed to determine what key signature practices are most effective when tackling chronic absenteeism, scores on standardized tests, school suspensions, and graduation rates in a population of students who have all already been through the expulsion process at their school of residence. After the interviews were conducted the
transcripts were evaluated to ascertain what patterns exist to find what key signature practices are utilized by school staff to lower chronic absenteeism, achievement, and lower rates of suspensions.

**Population and Sample**

The population for this study included all 73 California Community Schools. The characteristics of this population are schools that are run by county offices of education and have populations of students that are exclusively expelled from their districts of residence, referred from SARB for non-attendance, or released from incarceration and are denied the ability to enter their district of residence without first being successful at a county community school.

This study used a purposeful sampling method. Every California community school was contacted by phone and the administrator listed in the California Department of Education’s school directory was contacted by phone and by email requesting participation in the study. Few schools responded to those initial requests so additional contacts by phone and in-person were done to get schools that are representative of California as a whole. The criteria for additional contacts by the researcher included having a mix of schools that offered school-based mental health and those who did not, a mix of schools with varied demographic information, and schools that were in different parts of California. From the target population seven schools were chosen that had varied demographic information. Schools were chosen from urban areas of California as well as very rural area. Schools were chosen from coastal areas as well as Northern California, Central California, and Southern California. Schools were chosen that had populations of majority African American, majority Hispanic, and majority Caucasian. Archival data
was examined for each school that participated in the qualitative portion of this study by using the information each school reports to the California Department of Education School Dashboard.

Interviews were conducted in December of 2019 to March 18th, 2020. It was the intention of the interviewer to continue school site visits and do staff interviews for the remainder of the 2020 school year, but every community school in California closed down due to the outbreak of Coronavirus in California and the subsequent closure of non-essential businesses.

**Demographic Data**

The participants of this mixed method study consist of a varied group of California community schools. Between three and five staff members were interviewed at each school site for a total of 25 interviews. A total of four school-based mental health providers were interviewed, seven general education teachers, two special education teachers, five para-professionals, four administrators of the schools, and three other employees that did not fit into any category including a school librarian, occupational therapist, and specialist who does counseling but does not have the requirements needed to qualify as a school-based mental health provider by the definitions of this study. This study defines school-based mental health providers as individuals who possess a Pupil Personnel Services (PPS) credential, a Board-Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA), a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist (LMFT), or possess a degree in psychology, counseling, or social work and who work at a California community school.
Table 1

*Position/role in the school of interviewees*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School-based Mental Health Provider</th>
<th>Administrator</th>
<th>General education Teacher</th>
<th>Special education Teacher</th>
<th>Para-professional</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School #1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School #2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School #3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School #4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School #5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School #6</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School #7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2

*Gender of interviewees*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School #1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School #2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3

Amount of school-based mental health offered to students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School #1</th>
<th>School #2</th>
<th>School #3</th>
<th>School #4</th>
<th>School #5</th>
<th>School #6</th>
<th>School #7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Schools that offer school-based mental health for the majority of their students for the majority of the time.

Schools that do not offer school-based mental health for the majority of their students for the majority of the time.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School #3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School #4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School #5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School #6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School #7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

28% 72%
Table 4
Schools where students passed through a metal detector or were scanned

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School #</th>
<th>Schools where students were scanned with a metal detector upon arrival</th>
<th>Schools where students were not scanned with a metal detector upon arrival</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School #1</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School #2</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School #3</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School #4</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School #5</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School #6</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School #7</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5

*Schools where students were greeted by name as they entered the school*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Schools where students were greeted by name upon entry</th>
<th>Schools where students were not greeted by name upon entry</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School #1</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School #2</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School #3</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School #4</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School #5</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School #6</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School #7</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6

*School Urban/Rural divide*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Schools in the 20% most populous counties</th>
<th>Schools in the 20-40% most populous counties</th>
<th>Schools in the 40-60% most populous counties</th>
<th>Schools in the 60-100% most populous counties</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School #1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School #2</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 7

**School location**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School #1</th>
<th>School #2</th>
<th>School #3</th>
<th>School #4</th>
<th>School #5</th>
<th>School #6</th>
<th>School #7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Schools in counties on the coast</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schools in inland counties</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schools in the northern half of California</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schools in the southern half of California</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| 43% | 57% | 57% | 43% |
Table 8

Racial make-up of the schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School #1</th>
<th>School #2</th>
<th>School #3</th>
<th>School #4</th>
<th>School #5</th>
<th>School #6</th>
<th>School #7</th>
<th>14.3%</th>
<th>42.9%</th>
<th>14.3%</th>
<th>28.6%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The student demographic information for this table used archival data retrieved from the office of civil rights at ocrdata.ed.gov.

Presentation and Analysis of the Data

This section contains a detailed description of the data presented for each research question independently. Twenty-five in-depth interviews were conducted face-to-face at seven school sites with varying demographics and from varying locations around
California. A rich body of data was gathered that necessitated a thorough and consistent analysis.

**Data Analysis**

In mixed method studies that have a large component of qualitative data derived from interviews, the evidence can be difficult to analyze as there is no set formulas that can be used (Lichtman, 2006). Even though this is true, there are accepted procedures that assist in a comprehensive analysis that allow the findings of interviews to be presented in a consistent and meaningful layout. One of these steps is the use of inductive reasoning. The inductive approach to analyzing data has the researcher organizing data into different groups where those groups have common traits within allowing the researcher to discover patterns that emerge from the data (Creswell, 2015). This allows the researcher to interpret and explain the data needed to answer the research questions.

As different groups are organized certain themes and codes are identified. For the qualitative portion of this study, codes were identified manually so connections between those interviewed could be tracked to discover patterns and common threads. When themes are identified the qualitative data can be analyzed and presented in a way where the answers to the research questions can be shown (Creswell, 2009). Maguire and Delahunt (2017) state that there are six steps in completing a thematic analysis. These steps are: Step 1: Become familiar with the data, Step 2: Generate initial codes, Step 3: Search for themes, Step 4: Review themes, Step 5: Define themes, Step 6: Write-up.
**Interrater Reliability**

The analysis of qualitative data can be a subjective process requiring interrater reliability by cross-checking codes developed by different researchers who independently look at the same data (Creswell, 2009). This process ensures the reliability of the qualitative research and reduces bias. Creswell (2009) states that interrater agreement is reached when two or more researchers have an agreement level in their coding of at least 80%. To increase reliability and consistency of the study each interview participant was provided a copy of the questions that would be asked and then the researcher asked the same questions that were provided so that no unintentional rephrasing could change the participants’ understanding or influence them in anyway. For this study an experienced researcher with a doctorate and dissertation chair reviewed 12% of the interviews and had an interrater reliability of greater than 80%. The other researcher identified similar themes and reached the same conclusions as those identified by the primary researcher.

**Findings Associated with the Research Questions**

This study sought to answer eight questions in two main groups which were 1) Community schools that offered mental health to the majority of their students for the majority of the time and 2) community schools that did not offer mental health to the majority of their students for the majority of the time. The findings are presented in relation to each of the eight questions and whether the community school for expelled students offered school-based mental health for the majority of their students for the majority of the time and those who do not. The first four questions rely on ex post facto information. Ex post facto research was done as the researcher was analyzing an impact that had already occurred and the researcher looked for a relationship between variables
even though no variable was being manipulated during the study (Glatthohorn and Joyner 2013). Johnson and Christensen (2008) state that causal-comparative research can establish what degree of relationship two variables have, but does not establish causation that one variable may have on another. Each community school in California was contacted by phone and by email to determine if the school offered school-based mental health by a school-based mental health provider using the definition set forth in this study. For this study a school-based mental health provider is defined as a mental health providers in the school setting who possess a Pupil Personnel Services (PPS) credential, a Board-Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA), a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist (LMFT), or possess a degree in psychology, counseling, or social work and who work at a California community school for expelled students and who provide social/emotional support.

**Research Question 1**

Research Question 1 asked: *Is there a difference in attendance of community school students who have access to mental health services and those who do not?*

For the quantitative analysis this researcher used the sample population consisting of only the community schools in which interviews were conducted. For this question, six of the seven community schools where interviews were conducted reported chronic absenteeism information to the California Department of Education that was presented on the CDE Dashboard. Chronic absenteeism is defined by the California Department of Education as any student who misses at least ten percent of their instructional days of the school in which they were enrolled. In this study every California community school had a school year that consisted of 180 school days so a student is considered chronically
absent if they miss 18 or more days of a school year. The three schools where students have access to mental health services had reported chronic absenteeism rates of: 35.3%, 56.9%, and 0.0%. The three schools where students did not have access to mental health services had reported chronic absenteeism rates of: 81.6%, 66.7%, and 75.0%.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Offered Mental Health</th>
<th>Did Not Offer Mental Health</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>30.733</td>
<td>74.433</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard Deviation</td>
<td>28.724</td>
<td>7.466</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard Error</td>
<td>16.584</td>
<td>4.311</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The P value and statistical significance results had a two-tailed P value equal to 0.0633. The difference is considered to be not statistically significant. The population was so small that a statistically significant difference could not be determined.

**Research Question 2**

Research Question 2 asked: *Is there a difference in achievement as measured by scores on state standardized tests of community school students who have access to mental health services and those who do not?*

For the quantitative analysis this researcher used the sample population consisting of only the community schools in which interviews were conducted. For this question, only two of the seven schools reported results to the CDE Dashboard. According to the CDE’s Dashboard State Indicators FAQ page (2019), in order for a school to be mandated to report to the CDE Dashboard the school must have 11 or more students in that category reported upon. For all but two of the community schools interviewed the school populations were less than 100, and all schools interviewed stated how little a
focus testing was in their schools. Since only 11\textsuperscript{th} grade students take the state tests that means only one grade out of four are being reported upon. Due to the lack of reporting data no findings could be reported upon for this question.

**Research Question 3**

Research Question 3 asked: *Is there a difference in graduation rates of community school students who have access to mental health services and those who do not?*

For the quantitative analysis this researcher used the sample population consisting of only the community schools in which interviews were conducted. For this question, all three of the schools that offered mental health reported graduation data to the California Department of Education that was presented on the CDE Dashboard, but only one of the schools that did not offer mental health reported this data due to the low number of students in that category being below eleven. To be able to perform a T-test at least two data points must be entered in each category so all three of the remaining schools were contacted to get the number of students who graduated in four or five years and the total number of students in the graduating class as this is the method used by the department of education in calculating graduation rates by the California Department of Education. One school returned that information that could be used in this study. The three schools where students have access to mental health services had reported graduation rates of: 92.9\%, 58.7\%, and 70.8\%. The two schools where students did not have access to mental health services had reported graduation rates of: 28.8\% and 33.3\%. 

86
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Offered Mental Health</th>
<th>Did Not Offer Mental Health</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>74.133</td>
<td>31.050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard Deviation</td>
<td>17.342</td>
<td>3.182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard Error</td>
<td>10.012</td>
<td>2.250</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The P value and statistical significance results had a two-tailed P value equal to 0.0455. The difference is considered to be statistically significant. The population was so small that a statistically significant difference could not be determined.

**Research Question 4**

Research Question 4 asked: *Is there a difference in suspension rates of community school students who have access to mental health services and those who do not?*

For the quantitative analysis this researcher used the sample population consisting of only the community schools in which interviews were conducted. For this question, all seven community schools where interviews were conducted reported suspension rates to the California Department of Education that was presented on the CDE Dashboard. The three schools where students have access to mental health services had reported suspension rates of: 1%, 3.3%, and 14.8%. The four schools where students did not have access to mental health services had reported suspension rates of: 10.7%, 9.4%, 23.8%, and 26.8%.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Offered Mental Health</th>
<th>Did Not Offer Mental Health</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>6.367</td>
<td>17.675</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The P value and statistical significance results had a two-tailed P value equal to 0.1358. The difference is considered to be not statistically significant. The population was so small that a statistically significant difference could not be determined.

**Research Question 5**

Research Question 5 asked: *What are the practices used by community school employees that are most effective in improving attendance?*

**Combined Results**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Building Meaningful Relationships</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informing Parents of Absence</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a Safe Educational Environment</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pick the students up and bring them to school</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Care for the students or Love the students</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helping students with home situations preventing them from getting to school</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing breakfast or snacks</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Supporting them with problems or providing mental health support | 3 | 6
Having an individual instructional program | 3 | 4
An educational program consisting of Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) | 3 | 3
Referrals to the Student Accountability Review Board (SARB) | 2 | 4
Consistency of the educational program | 2 | 3
Letting probation know of the absence and having them take care of it | 2 | 3

All 25 participants answered the question related to research question five. The theme that was mentioned by the most participants was about building meaningful relationships. This word or phrase was mentioned 19 times by 9 participants. Informing parents of student absences was the second most common theme that was mentioned 11 times by 8 participants. The third most common theme was about providing a safe educational environment that was mentioned six times by six participants. The top three themes had a huge discrepancy between schools reporting on these themes that offered mental health to their students and those who did not.

Schools that Offer Mental Health Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building Meaningful Relationships</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pick the students up and bring them to school</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting them with problems or providing mental health support</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helping students with home situations preventing them from getting to school</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having an individual instructional program</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All 12 participants representing schools that offer mental health to the majority of their students answered questions related to research question five. The leading theme by far that was mentioned 15 times by 7 participants was about building meaningful relationships. Relationships was mentioned by more than half of the employees interviewed in this category and by every interviewee in a supervisory role in schools that offered mental health. Supervisors stated things like, “Students come to school because of the relationships they have with the adults, and that’s very clear for some of our students.” Other supervisors stated, “A relationship, a connection, to students is most important because they feel seen and heard. They come because of that connection.” The employees in these schools stated similar things that were said by management. A teacher at one of these schools stated, “Relationships is the most important thing. Once you build a relationship with a student then kids want to come.” When talking about the importance of relationships a school psychologist stated, “You’re going to want to spend the time at the place where you feel most cared for and loved, and I think that is
definitely one of the things that is most important.” All the above quotes talking about the importance of relationships relates to the importance of the Humanistic Learning Theory detailed in chapter two by Maslow.

The second and third most popular theme was mentioned by only two participants with picking students up and bringing them to school being mentioned six times and supporting students with home problems and with mental health being mentioned five times. The schools that talked about picking students up and bring them to school had specific people who had this as part of their school responsibilities. The employees referencing support stated that students who are having problems with absenteeism are identified and then someone reaches out to them and finds out what the issues might be and then provide extra support so the barriers keeping them from attending school are alleviated.

Schools that do not Offer Mental Health Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Informing Parents of Absence</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a Safe Educational Environment</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pick the students up and bring them to school</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Care for the students or Love the students</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An educational program consisting of Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>Group 1</td>
<td>Group 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helping students with home situations preventing them from getting to school</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referrals to the Student Accountability Review Board (SARB)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building Meaningful Relationships</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing breakfast or snacks</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letting probation know of the absence and having them take care of it</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All 13 participants representing schools that do not offer mental health to the majority of their students answered questions related to research question five. The leading theme reported by this group was related to fixing the problem of students being absent by informing parents. This was mentioned 10 times by 7 participants. A special education teacher in this group stated, “We call the parents every single day they miss school and we make sure that they know we need to come to school.” When asked the question, “What do you think are the key signature practices that county school employees use that are perceived as being most effective in reducing chronic absenteeism?” an instructional assistant stated “I don’t know if there’s really anything key. I know here we just try to stay on the top of their absences and contact parents as frequently as possible.”

The second most popular theme mentioned by this group was related to creating a safe educational environment. This was mentioned five times by five participants. An
instructional assistant who mentioned this theme stated, “We still do have students are are upset quite often and we just do the best we can for them to get them to come. We try to make it a safe environment for them.” Another special education teacher in this group stated, “We’re here and we’re a safe place because a lot of the kids come from not safe areas.” A county program director expanded on how safety impacts attendance by stating, “It’s kind of a natural thing for kids to be in school and they know that and then you know, if they know that you care and that if you can create a safe place for them to, I mean physically safe and emotionally safe, then they’ll keep coming back.”

The school with the best attendance rate had a chronic absenteeism rate of zero. Most of the participants of this school, two out of three of them, mentioned picking up students and bringing them to school as the best way to ensure good attendance. A teacher from this school stated, “I don’t know what the key signature practices are, but we have an on-campus attendance person, and we have a van. He goes out and gets them.” The attendance person for this school was interviewed and stated, “I drive the van. I go to their houses and I pick them up. I call them as their alarm clock, wake them up in the morning, text them.” The attendance person went on to say, “We have this program going on right now where we have tickets they can earn. So anybody who’s up and ready when I get there earns two tickets. They can use these tickets to buy things from the student store.” At this school the attendance person stated this in reference to what he does at the school, “I wear a lot of hats. I am the lunch lady, I am the bus driver. I do the attendance, and pretty much whatever needs to be done. All of the duties. I do a lot of the barbecuing and so whatever’s needed. It’s not a particular job description that I go by it’s whatever is needed.”
Research Question 6

Research Question 6 asked: *What are the practices used by community school employees that are most effective in improving achievement?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not knowing what is done to improve achievement</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice taking tests</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeping students in school and having a high attendance</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking breaks during tests to break them up and keep students’ interest</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having educational programs that are individually designed for each student</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating and maintaining strong relationships</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expressing that the achievement question is difficult to answer</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing food and feeding students</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Stating students have no incentive to do well on standardized tests | 2 | 4
--|---|---
Having strong Professional Learning Communities | 2 | 3
Stating that students just guess and use no effort in taking tests | 2 | 2
Expressing the thought that students have no incentive to do well so they don’t care | 2 | 2

All 25 participants answered the question related to research question six. The theme that was mentioned by the most participants was about not knowing what is done to improve achievement. This theme was mentioned 15 times by 9 participants. Six of the participants who mentioned this theme were from schools that do not offer mental health and three of the participants who mentioned this theme were from schools that did. What underlined all nine participants that mentioned this was that this was not a question that held importance to what they did day to day in the school. Of the 25 people interviewed 16 had something either negative or expressed that this was not important as it pertains to testing. This ranged from things like “I don’t really know. I’m probably the wrong person to ask.” which was said by an instructional assistant. Others were more obvious in their statements by saying “I hate standardized tests. If I could wave a magic want I’d get rid of them.” This person went on to say, “I think it’s crap.”

The second most popular theme mentioned by eight participants nine times was about taking practice tests. A teacher stated, “We are doing practice testing, you know, on a regular basis.” A special education teacher from a different school stated, “I would
say Renaissance testing we have it’s just like, kind of like a monthly test we do to see where the kids are.”

The third most popular theme mentioned by five students nine times was related to keeping students in school and having a high attendance. One teacher stated, “I would say getting kids to school is the number one thing. So it’s back to absenteeism.” A teacher from another school stated, “Keeping and getting kids in school and I think just being a part of their lives is building a relationship.”

Schools that Offer Mental Health Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Creating and maintaining strong relationships</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not knowing what is done to improve achievement</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice taking tests</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expressing that the achievement question is difficult to answer</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing food and feeding students</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeping students in school and having a high attendance</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All 12 participants representing schools that offer mental health to the majority of their students answered question related to research question six. The theme that was mentioned by the most participants was related to creating and maintaining strong relationships. This was mentioned six times by four participants. One principal stated, “I
think it’s those some things. So building that relationship. Supporting the student. Willing to be shoulder to shoulder with the student as they do their learning.

The second most popular theme by this group was about not knowing what is done to improve achievement. One credentialed teacher who is currently the school’s librarian stated, “I think the standardized tests are very biased. You know they’re racially biased and they make kids very anxious. I don’t know what the teachers do or if they focus on that. I don’t think they do.” A special education teacher from this group simply stated, “I’m the wrong person to ask.”

Schools that do not Offer Mental Health Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not knowing what is done to improve achievement</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice taking tests</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having educational programs that are individually</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>designed for each student</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking breaks during tests to break them up and keep</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>students’ interest</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeping students in school and having a high attendance</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having strong Professional Learning Communities</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stating that students just guess and use no effort in</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>taking tests</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Providing food and feeding students | 2 | 2
Expressing the thought that students have no incentive to do well so they don’t care | 2 | 2

All 13 participants representing schools that do not offer mental health to the majority of their students answered questions related to research question six. The leading theme reported by this group was related to not knowing what is done to improve achievement. This was mentioned 10 times by 6 participants. The initial response by members of this group included, “I’m not really familiar with that”, “I’m not even sure”, “That’s tough. We, you know, we try to educate them in the best way we can”, “I don’t even know the answer to that one”, and “Oh gosh, you know, we don’t even really focus on that here”. The titles of the participants quoted above include a school coordinator, instructional assistant, a licensed clinical social worker, and a counselor.

The second most popular theme that was mentioned 10 times by 6 participants was related to practicing taking tests. One director of this group stated, “you have to expose them to the tests and practice often.” Another teacher stated, “We are doing practice testing, you know, on a regular basis and I don’t know whether or not that's going to improve their scores. I don't know for sure.”

The school that had the highest achievement measured by the standardized test scores reported to the California School Dashboard stated the best practice to increase achievement was related to creating and maintaining strong relationships. One teacher in this group stated, “You’re going to probably hear this from me the whole time. I think it’s all about building that relationship with students to keep them coming, and then breaking down barriers.” A school psychologist from this same school stated, “There’s a
lot going on outside the classroom that’s going to impact their scores so it’s all coming back to relationship building.” One interesting finding from this question was the key signature practice of creating and maintaining strong relationships by the most successful school interviewed was also mentioned by other schools that offer mental health to the majority of their students. However, this theme was not mentioned a single time by any participant of schools that do not offer mental health to the majority of their students.

**Research Question 7**

Research Question 7 asked: *What are the practices used by community school employees that are most effective in improving graduation rates?*

**Combined Results**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A reduction in the amount of credits required to graduate</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussions of life for students post-graduation</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a personalized educational program</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating and maintaining strong relationships</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working with families to assist with the breaking down of barriers impeding success</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting students academically to complete the requirements needed for graduation.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Keeping students in school and having a high attendance | 6 | 7  
Staying on top of students so they cannot give up | 4 | 7  
Stating that students’ home life is bad as a reason for failure | 4 | 4  
Letting students they are loved and/or cared for | 3 | 5  
Letting students know that staff are there for them and they are not on this journey alone | 3 | 4  
Follow-up with students to ensure they are on the right path towards graduation | 3 | 4  
Extra time to complete requirements for graduation | 3 | 4  
Supporting them with problems or providing mental health support | 3 | 3  

All 25 participants answered the question related to research question seven. The theme that was mentioned by the most participants was about improving graduation rates by a reduction in the amount of credits required to graduate. This word or phrase was mentioned 22 times by 15 participants. A teacher from a school that offers mental health stated, “We give them a lot of opportunities to get credit. Amazingly anything they want to do we're going to give them credit for, you know, so whatever interest they have we try to focus in on that we try to give them whatever it is so that they can get credit.” This teacher went on to say, “We give them credit for things that they’re interested in.” An
aide from a school that does not offer mental health support stated, “The credits that they need here is lower. There’s not so many electives. So, you know, it’s easier to graduate.”

The second most popular theme was discussions of life for students post-graduation. This theme was mentioned 22 times by 11 participants. A Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist (LCSW) for a school that does not offer mental health to the majority of students discussed how to improve graduation rates by stating, “Some kids are just not going to go to college and they want to be manual labor, that's, that's what we try to provide here.” He went on to say, “The students are raising animals, chickens and stuff like that. So we try to try to help anyway we can with vocational and academics. They take eggs to the marketplace; flea market and farmer’s market. It’s what they want to do when they leave so we try to help them with that here.”

The third most popular theme was also mentioned by 11 participants, but was only mentioned 13 times. This theme was about having a personalized educational program for students. A teacher from a school that does not offer mental health discussed the importance of having an individual plan to assist with graduation. This teacher stated, “we show them how many credits they need and how they could catch up.” This teacher went on to say, “say a kid has 10 credits in algebra, and they still need five credits and they're about to need to graduate. Instead of them giving up because they aren’t going to graduate on time, we can actually implement a plan to help them recover. So I think that helps our graduation rates go up, especially when they feel like they actually have a chance.” The individualized program described above is the same as every individual program by schools that do not offer mental health in that they are a way to do credit
recovery in a manner individualized to each student based on the student’s credit needs.

An employee of a school that offers mental health stated, “The opportunity to earn credits is self-directed learning. I think for the first time students are accountable to create learning and or broaden their knowledge in a way that interests them. Students have an opportunity to control the stakes.” In this example students pick the topic that interests them and how they will prove knowledge of that topic. When they show proficiency they are given credit but the entire process is led by the students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Schools that Offer Mental Health Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Themes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussions of life for students post-graduation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating and maintaining strong relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A reduction in the amount of credits required to graduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working with families to assist with the breaking down of barriers impeding success</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a personalized educational program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letting students they are loved and/or cared for</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting them with problems or providing mental health support</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Keeping students in school and having a high attendance  |  3   |   3  

All 12 participants representing schools that offer mental health to the majority of their students answered question related to research question seven. The theme that was mentioned by the most participants was related to discussing life post-graduation. This was mentioned 19 times by 9 participants. One special education teacher simply stated, “We have a transition specialist that helps them with getting jobs or moving onto college.” An employee from a different school stated, “They have choices you know. They ask to work on this project and we help them. They can ask how many credits they’ll get for this. We tell the answer and it takes away all the mystery. That’s the key. They have choice were they didn’t before, and it’s not a mystery where I think for most of them they didn’t understand the process before. Here it’s clear.”

Schools that do not Offer Mental Health Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A reduction in the amount of credits required to graduate</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting students academically to complete the requirements needed for graduation.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a personalized educational program</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staying on top of students so they cannot give up</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working with families to assist with the breaking down of barriers impeding success</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating and maintaining strong relationships</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeping students in school and having a high attendance</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extra time to complete requirements for graduation</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stating that students’ home life is bad as a reason for failure</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussions of life for students post-graduation</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letting students know that staff are there for them and they are not on this journey alone</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow-up with students to ensure they are on the right path towards graduation</td>
<td>2</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

All 13 participants representing schools that do not offer mental health to the majority of their students answered questions related to research question seven. The leading theme reported by this group was related to a reduction in the amount of credits required to graduate. The director of a school that does not offer mental health to the majority of their students stated, “I don’t think we can underrate the whole AB2306.” This is Assembly Bill 2306 – Juvenile court school pupils. This bill amends four different codes in the California Education Code, but the director referenced the part of the bill that reduces the amount of credits needed to graduate to 130. For many high schools this is a reduction by half or even more. The director went on to say, “I talk with these kids. Have you ever been a foster kid, have you ever been homeless? You’re like, Is there anything I can do qualify you under this law? Couch surfing. That counts. Now you can graduate. There are loopholes that I use even though they don’t appreciate.
They see they have a chance at the end of the road. That helps.” It should be noted that in all the literature examined by this researcher, increasing achievement by decreasing demands was mentioned nowhere.

The school that had the highest graduation rate reported to the California School Dashboard stated the best practice to increase graduation rates was discussions of life for students post-graduation. A counselor from this school went into detail by saying, “We meet with our students and do grad plans for post-graduation. We ask what they want to do after graduation. Their answer dictates what we do. If they want to go to community college we help sign them up. If they want to go into the workforce we help get them a job. If they don’t know then we help them decide.” Employees from both schools talked about fear students have for a life after school, but few schools helped alleviate that fear by giving them a plan.

**Research Question 8**

Research Question 8 asked: What are the practices used by community school employees that are most effective in decreasing suspensions?

**Combined Results**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The use of alternative placement or in-school suspension</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilizing restorative justice practices</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating and maintaining strong relationships</td>
<td>11</td>
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<td>Letting students know they are loved and/or cared for</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
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<tr>
<td>Statement</td>
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<td>Score 2</td>
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<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stating that the school doesn’t suspend</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stating that the school doesn’t automatically suspend for things that they used to suspend for</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting them with problems or providing mental health support</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilization of the Positive Behavior Interventions and Support (PBIS) program.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Getting to the root of the problem and not just reacting to the behavior that is easily observed</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowing actions can stem from past trauma</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicating with students about their needs</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Contacting probation and having them respond to the situation</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conducting mediation after an incident with the parties involved</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listen to what students say happened and why they think it happened</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stating that suspension is an ineffective practice and thus shouldn’t be used</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stating their needs to be consequences for student actions</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Never letting students be unattended so chances to do something suspendable drop dramatically</td>
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All 25 participants answered the question related to research question eight. The theme that was mentioned by the most participants was a three way tie where 11 participants referenced the use of alternative placement or in-school suspension, utilizing restorative justice practices, and creating and maintaining strong relationships. Utilizing alternative placement or in-school suspension that is used in lieu of suspending or reporting suspensions to the state was referenced 19 times by the 11 participants. One of the schools that offer mental health stated, “Well we do in-school suspensions. So that’s one of the things we do to make a point, and we’ll meet with families as part of that.”

This interview was the only interview of the 25 that was interrupted by a supervisor. The supervisor stated, “It’s an alternative placement not an in-school suspension. We use the name suspension but we don’t do the paperwork for this.”

The second most popular theme also mentioned by 11 participants and mentioned 16 times was the use of restorative justice practices. A teacher from a school that does not offer mental health stated, “I think having alternative solutions is important. We use restorative justice and have our own practices that we might have to modify depending on who the kids are.” An aide from this same school stated, “Depending on the situation. Like if we have kids that get in a fight instead of automatically suspending we try and do restorative justice. Meet with them and try to fix the situation and I guess look at the bigger picture.” A psychologist from a school that does offer mental health stated, “So
we think about restorative practice, and like I said, a lot of my training comes from trauma informed care. So it's not only asking the question, what you did, what did you do, but asking why it's being done? I think behavior is in communication for our students. So if they're doing something that requires a suspension or some sort of disciplinary record to be done, then we have to ask basically what led them to that point.”

The third most popular theme that was mentioned by 11 participants 14 times was about creating and maintaining strong relationships. When a teacher from a school that does not offer mental health was asked the question, “What do you think are the key signature practices that country school employees use that are perceived to be most effective in improving graduation rates?” that teacher answered, “Once again, that’s building positive relationships.”

Schools that Offer Mental Health Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Creating and maintaining strong relationships</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowing actions can stem from past trauma</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilizing restorative justice practices</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Letting students know they are loved and/or cared for</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Supporting them with problems or providing mental health support</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Getting to the root of the problem and not just reacting to the behavior that is easily observed</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stating that the school doesn’t suspend</td>
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<tr>
<td>Communicating with students about their needs</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>The use of alternative placement or in-school suspension</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conducting mediation after an incident with the parties involved</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stating that the school doesn’t automatically suspend for things that they used to suspend for</td>
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All 12 participants representing schools that offer mental health to the majority of their students answered question related to research question eight. The most popular theme that was mentioned by 8 participants 11 times was about creating and maintaining strong relationships. A teacher from a school stated simply, “Working with students and just building that relationship. You want to be able to have that connection before something happens so it’s not just reactive.” The second most popular theme mentioned by four participants seven times. A principal from a different school tied those two ideas together and talked about the importance of relationships and also how trauma impacts students. The principal stated, “Our students do come to school with trauma, but we recognize as adults that we come to school with trauma too and so we don't want to our trauma to trigger them, or to add to theirs.” He went on to say, “Suspensions do the opposite of what we try to do here, and just create more trauma. Suspension is just really a useless kind of circle of punishment that doesn't do anything positive and is actually
quite negative. Suspensions take them out of school and ruins relationships and so therefore it's, it's the opposite of what education should be.”

Schools that do not Offer Mental Health Results

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The use of alternative placement or in-school suspension</td>
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<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Utilizing restorative justice practices</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilization of the Positive Behavior Interventions and Support (PBIS) program.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stating that the school doesn’t automatically suspend for things that they used to suspend for</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Letting students know they are loved and/or cared for</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Creating and maintaining strong relationships</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stating that the school doesn’t suspend</td>
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<tr>
<td>Contacting probation and having them respond to the situation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Getting to the root of the problem and not just reacting to the behavior that is easily observed</td>
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<tr>
<td>Supporting them with problems or providing mental health support</td>
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Listen to what students say happened and why they think it happened

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<tr>
<td>Never letting students be unattended so chances to do something suspendable drop dramatically</td>
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All 13 participants representing schools that do not offer mental health to the majority of their students answered questions related to research question eight. The leading theme reported by this group was related to the use of alternative placement or in-school suspension. This was mentioned by 9 participants a total of 15 times. The director of one of these schools described the alternative placement used in lieu of suspension. She stated that, “one of the things that we do here that I think is very effective is we have two middle school classrooms and one high school classroom. And so, for those high school kids, if they mess up, they have to go do their work in the middle school classroom for the rest of the day, and you know, I have to hang out with little kids.” She went on to say, “for the middle school kid that thinks they're all tough and bad. They have to go sit in the high school now they're that little kid in high school class. They're very intimidated. So they don't like that either.” For reporting purposes she stated, “we used to call it in school suspension. And then then we realized, no, we need to call it something else because I was getting us in trouble too.” All the examples from every school in this group that used a form of alternative placement or in school suspension that should technically be reported to the state but all the administrators I spoke with stated they do not report those as suspensions. These alternative placements went by different names including a timeout room, independent study room, restorative
justice room, or spending the day or days in the office, another classroom or with an aide in a separate room.

The school that had the lowest suspension rate measured by data reported to the California School Dashboard stated the best practice to decrease suspension was related to creating and maintaining strong relationships. A special education service provider stated, “Academic success is really closely related to trust and relationships. When you suspend that will surely kind of cut, cut the cord on the trust that has been built.” A teacher from this same school stated, “I think it comes down to relationships. We have breakfast every Friday. If you want to come on Friday we’re having chicken and waffles. And then at the last Friday of the month we have a barbecue, or whatever meal. It’s community building and relationships.”

Summary

This chapter reported the findings of interviews conducted with staff from seven different community schools around California, and the quantitative data from the California School Dashboard that was reported to the state by those schools. The analysis of research questions one through four show which schools where a site visit and interviews were conducted are the best at increasing rates of attendance, achievement, graduation and decreasing suspensions. The analysis of research questions five through eight revealed what county community school employees believe are the best practices for increasing attendance, achievement, graduation rates, and decreasing suspensions. The analysis has further revealed what county community schools that offer mental health services believe are the best practices, and what county community schools that do not offer mental health believe are the best practices. In addition, each school that did the
best in any category based on research questions one through five had their best practices identified and described as in pertains to increasing rates of attendance, achievement, graduation, and decreasing suspensions. The following chapter analyzes these findings in more detail, focusing on the best practices county school employees can use to assist students and make their schools more successful in the areas in which were focused.
CHAPTER V: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this mixed method phenomenological and causal-comparative ex post facto study was to identify and describe the key signature practices used by school employees used at California community schools who work with student populations that have been expelled from their school or released from incarceration and deemed too dangerous to return to their school of residence by a juvenile court judge. Seven school sites were visited and on-site interviews were conducted with 25 different school employees. From these seven schools, three school sites offered mental health do the majority of their students and had mental health available for the majority of the time, and four schools did not. From the schools that offered mental health 12 interviews were conducted and from the schools that did not 13 interviews were conducted. A quantitative analysis was performed on the information each of these schools reported to the California Department of Education Dashboard and the best practices of each high performing school was identified and described. These findings were analyzed in the context of the existing research questions. This research also provides further recommendations for practice and research which were developed based on the results obtained in this study. This chapter ends with a personal reflection containing the researcher’s experiences and beliefs based on the information gathered while conducting this study.
Research Questions

This study was guided by eight research questions. These questions were as follows:

1. Is there a difference in attendance of community school students who have access to mental health services and those who do not?
2. Is there a difference in achievement as measured by scores on state standardized tests of community school students who have access to mental health services and those who do not?
3. Is there a difference in graduation rates of community school students who have access to mental health services and those who do not?
4. Is there a difference in suspension rates of community school students who have access to mental health services and those who do not?
5. What are the practices used by community school employees that are most effective in improving attendance?
6. What are the practices used by community school employees that are most effective in improving achievement?
7. What are the practices used by community school employees that are most effective in improving graduation rates?
8. What are the practices used by community school employees that are most effective in decreasing suspensions?

Research Methods, Population, and Sample

A casual comparative ex post facto research design was used for the quantitative portion of this study. Seven county community schools were visited where interviews
were conducted and each of those schools had the data they provide to the California Department of Education Dashboard examined. Those schools that offer mental health to the majority of their students and have that available for the majority of the time had their scores compared to schools that do not. A phenomenological approach was used for the qualitative portion of this study to identify and describe the best practices identified by county school employees to increase attendance, achievement, graduation rates, and decrease rates of suspension. Specifically, 25 in-depth interviews were conducted at seven different sites with county employees from a range of different positions. After the interviews were recorded and transcribed, each transcription was analyzed using a coding and thematic analysis. The validity and reliability of the findings were ensured with the help of the involvement of a second person in the coding process.

The population for this study is California county community schools. According to the California Education Facts website which is a section of the California Department of Education (2019) there are 73 county community schools in California that are designated to serve students who have been expelled, referred by SARB, by a county probation department, and other high-risk use that can include students who have been released from incarceration and are deemed inappropriate to return to their district of residence school. The number of county community schools has decreased in the last five years from 283 to 73. A purposeful sampling of seven of those schools from around the state were chosen that can be generalized to the greater population of community schools in California. The analysis of the major findings garnered from these in-depth interviews is provided below.
Major Findings

Key finding 1: There is a difference in attendance for community schools that offer mental health compared to community schools that do not.

Three schools that offer mental health were compared to four schools that do not offer mental health. Every one of the schools that offered mental health had better attendance than the schools that did not. The school that had the worst attendance in the group that offered mental health had a chronic absence rate of 56.9% while the school that had the best attendance rate of those that did not offer mental health had a chronic absence rate of 66.7%. The average chronic absence rate for schools that do not offer mental health was more than twice as high as schools that do offer mental health. The sample size of these schools was too small to meet the 95% confidence interval, but the data is clear that there was a large difference and the schools that offered mental health had students attend much more of the time. Focusing on the mental health of students shows students that their health is valued and protected. The Humanistic Learning Method authored by Abraham Maslow discussed in chapter two supports this finding as people who do not have the basic need of safety met will not be able to focus on the higher levels of cognitive development through school.

Key finding 2: There is a significant difference in graduation rates of schools that offer mental health to their students as opposed to those who do not.

The three schools that offered mental health to the majority of their students and have that availability for the majority of the time reported graduation rates to the state of 92.9%, 58.7% and 70.8%. Only two of the four schools that did not offer mental health to the majority of their students for the majority of the time had more than 11 students in
this category and had to report these numbers to the state. The ones that did report had graduation rates of 28.8% and 33.3%. With a sample size of only five it is very unlikely that a difference could be found to be significant with a 95% interval, but the differences were so vast that this was exactly what was found. The reason behind the stark difference will be further explained in the findings found for research question number seven.

**Key finding 3: There is a difference in suspension rates for community schools that offer mental health compared to community schools that do not.**

Three schools that offer mental health were compared to the four schools that do not offer mental health. Two of the schools that offered mental health had suspension rates of 1% and 3.3%. These are very low rates of suspension. The other school had a suspension rate of 14.8% which was much different than that of the other two. The four schools that do not offer mental health averaged a much high rate of suspension. Two of these schools hovered around a suspension rate of 10% reporting rates of 9.4% and 10.7%. The other two schools had rates of suspension hovering around 25% with those schools reporting 23.8% and 26.8%. A difference is clear in the schools that have suspension rates that hover around 2%, 10%, and 25%, but the information garnered from the CDE Dashboard was insufficient to figure out why. A deeper look into why there is such a difference is discussed in answering research question eight.

**Key finding 4: The single best way of improving rates of attendance is having an attendance officer.**

One school had a person who had the job of getting students to school who had difficulty getting themselves to school. This person was a paraprofessional and
considered himself to be “a lunch lady”, a “bus driver”, and the “attendance person”. This person said he calls them in the morning and then drives the van to go pick them up. Not only are students woken up in the morning by him stating. “I call them as their alarm clock” but this person picks them up from home and further rewards them with tickets that can be used in the student store. The chronic absence rates for the other schools that reported to the state in this category were 35.3%, 56.9%, 66.7%, 75%, and 81.6%, but this school had a chronic absence rate of 0.0%. By identifying attendance as a major priority, assigning someone to make sure students attended school, and then rewarding students for the simple act of showing up to school this school had a leg up on every other category because it’s impossible to teach students anything if they are not present in the first place.

Key finding 5: Schools that put an emphasis on building meaningful relationships had better rates of attendance.

The majority of participants who represented schools that offered mental health stated the importance of building meaningful relationships with students. Not only was this mentioned by more than half of the participants representing schools that offered mental health to students, but it was mentioned by every supervisor in either group. The supervisors in schools that offered mental health to students had many more of the teachers and aides state that work with students state the importance of building relationships as the first thing stated when asked what the signature practices are for improving attendance. This may say more about a school’s culture than if that school offers mental health to the majority of their students or not.
Key finding 6: Schools that emphasize informing parents and creating a safe physical environment at the cost of a safe social/emotional environment had the worst attendance rates.

Three schools with the worst rates of attendance with rates of chronic absences of 66.7%, 75%, and 81.6% all stated the best thing a school can do to increase attendance was reporting absences to parents and that increasing rates of attendance was a function of creating a safe school environment. By reporting absences to parents it is a way for staff to “stay on top” of students who don’t come to school, but as one instructional aide put it, “The parents of these kids are used to getting phone calls saying their kid is doing something wrong so when we call they just don’t care.” The logical next question then should be, “Then why don’t you do something different?”

The schools that talked about having a safe educational environment are also the schools that had metal detectors used on students at the beginning of each school day. These might be done to increase school safety, but as far as creating a welcoming atmosphere that is suspect as the schools that do this tend to also be the schools with the worst rates of attendance. White (2016) talks about how when a school is trying to change the culture of a school trust and relationships are key. By having the first interaction of every day be going through a metal detector or having a student spread their arms so they can be scanned with a metal detecting wand this can be seen as telling the students right from the beginning of every day, “I don’t trust you.”
Key finding 7: The best practice used by community school employees to improve achievement is to create and maintain strong relationships.

The school that had the highest scores of achievement in both math and English stated that creating and maintaining strong relationships was the most important thing for a student’s success. One interesting finding from this question was the key signature practice of creating and maintaining strong relationships by the school with the highest achievement was also mentioned by other schools that offer mental health to the majority of their students, but this was not mentioned a single time by any participant of schools that do not offer mental health to the majority of their students. That means there were 13 participants representing 4 different schools that did not mention relationships being important in helping students improve achievement. Exactly how much of an impact building strong relationships has on improving achievement could not be determined due to so few schools being mandated to report their state testing results to the California School Dashboard. However, an inference can be made on achievement by looking at a schools graduation rates. This will be presented in greater detail when looking at the key findings of research question seven.

Key finding 8: Community schools that did not give much importance to achievement as measured by state standardized test scores had the lowest test scores.

The most popular theme mentioned by 9 participants a total of 15 times when asked about the practices used by community school employees that are most effective in improving achievement was not knowing what was done to improve achievement. Furthermore, it was mentioned first by the majority of those participants. Less than a
third of participants mentioned practice as a way of improving test scores, and only a fifth mentioned attendance, taking breaks, or having individual designed educational programs to assist in this endeavor. Another indicator of the lack of forethought when it comes to answering the question on improving achievement was not indicated on the transcripts but is easily heard on the recordings. This question more than any other caused the greatest amount of silence before answering. This question more than any other also drew the most emotion in the form of rants against the importance of testing. This line of thinking was best illustrated by an independent study teacher who stated, “They [students] may not particularly care for it and honestly, I mean, we're talking about, you know, on Maslow's hierarchy of needs. We're talking about much more basic things that they need, they need shelter, consistent shelter, they need clothing. They need food. Those are things that are variables in their life on a regular basis. So test scores is kind of like, yeah, it'd be great but that's, that's kind of a higher level thing that is not as much on our radar.”

**Key finding 9: The schools with the best graduation rates had transition plans for the students’ next steps after graduation.**

The three schools with the highest graduation rates all spoke of talking to students about life after graduation and helping students come up with a plan on how to reach the goals they set for themselves. All of these schools also had mental health for the majority of their students and this was also available for the majority of the time. The schools that did not mention talking to students about a transition plan for after graduation did talk about fear students had of life after graduation. One instructional aide stated, “They’re scared because once they’re done with us. That’s it. They don’t know what’s next and
that causes a lot of fear.” Another teacher stated, “every once in a while they start getting older they get closer to graduation senior year, and a kind of light comes on some of them they realize like Oh, shit I have to do something with my life. They get scared and self-sabotage.” Both of those schools recognized the problem of fear approaching the end of high school, but neither referenced a plan of what to do to address that fear.

**Key finding 10: Creating and maintaining strong relationships is the most important factor in decreasing rates of suspension.**

Two schools had suspension rates that were much lower than the five community schools. One school had a suspension rate of 1% and the other had a suspension rate of 3.3%. Both of these schools had employees at different levels, administration, teachers, and instructional assistants, state the importance of building and maintaining strong relationships and both schools had multiple employees talk about the importance of knowing actions can stem from past trauma. When staff know that not only student trauma, but also staff trauma can impact student actions and staff take some responsibility in this then interactions between staff and students fundamentally change. When actions are seen as a communication of needs then the goal of staff changes from responding to behavior at surface level and instead attempt to find the reason for the action and then to repair damaged relationships.

**Unexpected Findings**

**Unexpected finding 1: Suspensions are being underreported.**

An unexpected finding from this study was a decrease in suspension rates that had nothing to do with change of action but rather a change in reporting. Some schools studied had suspension rates that dropped over the last three years, but this can be seen as
a change in reporting and less a change in actual action. One school who had decreased suspension rates year over year for three years stated that what was once considered in-person suspension is now reported as an alternative placement or independent study room where students are sent to a room with an instructional assistant to do work in isolation or with one other student without supervision of a teacher. Even the schools that were fudging the numbers by underreporting suspensions still had higher rates of suspension than those schools that worked more on changing the culture of the school and focusing on strong relationships.

**Unexpected finding 2: The importance of a few instructional assistants who are cultural change makers.**

Another unexpected finding was the importance of a few instructional aides who take on large roles within the school to enhance school culture. One instructional assistant that was discussed previously wears many hats including the attendance person, self-proclaimed lunch lady, as well as the bus driver. This person was mentioned by other members of the school staff that were interviewed and who all spoke very highly of him. This instructional assistant had created such strong relationships with students that these students would come to school because of this one person whereas they would not enter the doors of the school if were not for this person. A different instructional assistant was mentioned by a special education teacher at a different school. This instructional assistant had the title of “behavioral specialist”. She is fluent in Spanish, goes to the homes of students before they start and communicate to the family that her job is to help the family be successful. If they need help with groceries she hooks them up with a food bank, if they need help with work or childcare then she helps the parents
with resources. She lets the family know she’s on their side. For many families this is a first. The instructional assistant mentioned was not interviewed in this study, but this researcher did speak with her briefly as she was passing out snacks to the class. The woman was in her 60’s, and spoke in broken English while offering this researcher a cookie from her cart of snacks.

Another instructional assistant from a different school stated she was often seen as a motherly type. She stated, “When students have a need they come see me. If they’re cold I have clothes for them. If the need food at home I have food for them. So, I think they come here and they know that, you know, their needs are met.” This instructional assistant went on to give an anecdote of a student who was turning her life around and had been accepted to go to a military school she had been trying to get into but then got arrested.

“She got in a fight with her brother and she stabbed him in the arm. So she ended up in juvenile hall, never been in trouble before. And with her phone call she called us. You know, can you guys help me, I need to get out of here. And so we were able to go and have a serious talk with her. The judge said, I’m not going to give you a sentence but you have to go to your military school. And if you don't, then you're coming back. So that's the support we give to them. And, you know, she knows that we're here. I mean what kid is gonna call their teacher’s aide. And she called us when she was done and asked can you pick me up when I get out.”

The instructional assistants who were empowered to help make their schools a family enhanced the culture in their schools and did great things to build and maintain
strong relationships with students which is seen time and again as vastly important in assisting students in almost all areas.

**Conclusions**

This study focused on the impact mental health has on populations of students who attend California community schools in the areas of attendance, achievement, suspensions and rates of graduation. The goal was to find out if schools who offered school-based mental health had different rates of those areas above and to also ascertain what the key signature practices are that are used at increasing rates of attendance, achievement, graduation and decreasing suspensions. The conclusions listed below are based on the findings and supported by the reviewed literature of chapter two. These conclusions align with this study’s theoretical framework first developed by Maslow in 1954.

**Conclusion 1: Schools that make attendance a priority will have increased attendance.**

When a community school has either a team or an individual who accepts attendance as their responsibility, attendance will improve drastically and bring chronic absenteeism down to near zero (Sprick 2019). Schools have had issues with truancy in America since the beginning of the educational schools system itself (Katz 1968). It is obvious that the amount of progressive programs focusing on everything from academic advancement to mental health will have zero effect if students are not present to receive that education. Students who have poor attendance are more likely to have a poor academic record, more likely to have poor behavioral or social emotional issues, and are more likely to get into trouble with the criminal justice system outside of school (Sprick
Kearney (2019) discusses the issues of attendance being a particularly tricky issue because school professionals and mental health professionals see the issue of truancy as an important issue but ultimately is someone’s else’s responsibility. This is absolutely not the case. This study has concluded that schools that provide additional incentives to students and families for good attendance and even go above and beyond including calling students, picking them up, and bringing them to school will have significantly greater attendance than schools that put the ownerships of good attendance on students and student families alone.

**Conclusion 2: Schools that Emphasize the Importance of Relationships Will See Improvement In All Areas.**

This study has concluded that it all comes down to relationships, and schools that realize this and make a proactive effort at every level of an organization will see improvements by students in all areas. Building and maintaining meaningful relationships was reported as the number one most important practice by schools that offer mental health in improving attendance, improving achievement, and decreasing suspension rates. When a leader is trying to change the culture of an organization, trust and relationships are key (White 2016). White (2016) goes on to say that if a leader wants to improve the culture of an organization the people need to see that leader as trusting and dependable. This is true for a CEO of an organization, a dean of a university, the superintendent or principal of a school, or the teacher of a classroom. White (2016) identifies 10 strategies the leader of an organization can use to build trusting relationships that are needed if one wants to enhance the culture of an organization. These 10 strategies are: show caring, demonstrate respect and interdependence, be responsible, create transparency, create
clarity, practice accountability, listen and ask questions, keep commitments, extend trust, and be trustworthy (White 2016).

Meaningful relationships is the number one most important practice by schools that offer mental health in improving attendance, improving achievement, and decreasing suspension rates. The only category studied where it was not the number one mentioned theme was increasing graduation rates which came in as number two. It is concluded that it all comes down to relationships, schools that realize that relationship matters and make a proactive effort at every level of an organization to create this culture will see improvements by students in all areas. Every leader of a school interviewed listed building and maintaining relationships as something very important in multiple areas, but for many schools this level of importance was not expressed at all levels. The first words expressed by one director were, “It’s all about relationships. We are human beings and if we don’t have that relationship then you know why try?” This sentiment is exactly right, but in between the interview with that director and one of her staff this interviewer listened to a conversation between two instructional assistants (appendix I) that reflects a disconnect between management and what actually happens in the classroom. This conversation occurred in the presence of the interviewer who was introduced to both instructional assistants as a doctoral candidate and county school administrator studying community schools as well as two students who were also in the room. Gruenert and Whitaker (2015) argue that when school staff react to students in an expected manner, either positively or negatively, they are in fact expressing a commitment to that schools cultural values. Those two instructional assistants were in fact reinforcing the culture of the school. Gruenert and Whitaker (2015) state that the culture of a school can be seen in
what the school chooses to value in its outward appearance and in the actions of its members. If negative conversations occur in front of community school administrators and students with no shame or hesitation it is difficult to believe it is not part of the culture of the school. Negative conversations that erode culture will ruin trust which ruin relationships.

**Conclusion 3: Schools that put Resources towards Student Achievement Will have Greater Student Achievement.**

Based on this study it is concluded that community schools must take the achievement of students in their schools seriously. Community schools are not currently held to account for the achievement of their students and until that changes schools will move resources to areas that are measured by the state. Community schools that dedicate resources and time to teaching and learning as a priority will increase their state success indicators and be held accountable to allocate to all areas where resources are needed.

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 began a trend towards high stakes testing which had the result of schools shifting resources to math and English and away from other areas. Kafka (2011) states that it is natural for schools to give the most attention, scrutiny, and resources to the areas in which they are being held to account. The average county community school in California is significantly smaller than the average high school in California. The median population of county community schools in California is 85 students according to the California Department of Education School Directory. Only two of the seven schools that were part of this study reported results to the CDE Dashboard pertaining to student achievement. According to the CDE’s Dashboard State Indicators FAQ page (2019), in order for a school to be mandated to report to the CDE
Dashboard the school must have 11 or more students in that category reported upon. Only two of the schools in this study met that criteria. When county school employees were asked about how their schools improve achievement the most popular theme reflected the culture and values of that school which was that they did not take the achievement of students as measured by standardized tests seriously. This study has concluded that if community schools are expected to take the achievement of students in their schools seriously then they must be held accountable for that achievement.

**Conclusion 4: Schools that Decrease Student Fears about Life after Graduation Will have Increased Graduation Rates.**

It can be concluded that schools will increase graduation rates when school personnel work to alleviate student fears about life after graduation with specific transition planning based on students’ specific interests and needs.

The humanistic learning theory that was made most popular by Abraham Maslow views educational growth as something that does not happen in a vacuum (Noddings 1992, Zimbardo 2008). Maslow illustrates this hierarchy of needs in the form of a pyramid. These sections of needs, from the most essential first and then moving up the pyramid, are Physiological, Safety, Belongingness and Love, Esteem, Cognitive, Aesthetic, Self-Actualization, and Transcendence.

Maslow (1968) goes on to say that each section of the pyramid starting with the first level must be met before a higher section can be reached. The humanistic view states that a student, or any person, must have their physiological needs met and feel safe before academic instruction can successfully occur (Noddings, 2002). When county school employees were asked about what they do to increase graduation rates employees
from both schools talked about fear students have for a life after school, but few schools helped alleviate that fear by giving them a plan. The humanistic learning theory says that when a student does not feel safe that student will not be able to reach the level of the pyramid designated for cognitive development. Successful schools recognize this and help students create a plan for life after graduation based on student interests and needs. This study has concluded that if schools want to increase graduation rates those schools must work to alleviate student fears about life after graduation with specific transition planning based on students’ specific interests and needs.

**Conclusion 5: Schools that Provide Mental Health as an Essential Part of a Healthy School Culture will have Greater Rates of Attendance, Graduation, Achievement and decreased rates of Suspensions.**

It is concluded that schools that recognize and provide mental health services as it pertains to a humanistic learning theory approach will be better apt to create and maintain meaningful relationships. These relationships will enhance the student’s ability to be successful in every area that is essential for their success in school.

The quantitative portion of this study compared the information community schools report to the California Department of Education School Dashboard. Due to the huge reduction of community schools in the five years this study was completed, going from 283 schools in 2014 to 73 in 2019, and the school year being cut short in the 2019-2020 school year due to schools closures due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the sample size for the quantitative study was greatly reduced. Even with this, in each area studied community schools who offered mental health had higher attendance rates, higher achievement, lower suspension rates and higher rates of graduation. This study has
already concluded that relationships are paramount in the formation of a successful school culture. White (2016) states that an organization, including schools, must have trusting relationships to enhance the culture of that school. This study has concluded that schools that recognize the need for mental health as it pertains to a humanistic learning theory approach will be better apt to create and maintain meaningful relationships and those relationships then enhance the student’s ability to be successful in every area that was examined in this study.

**Implications for Action**

**Implication 1: When students don’t come to school go get them.**

Schools should do everything they can do to get students to attend school on a regular basis because it is what is best for students. Schools must dedicate time, personnel and resources to a plan to increase and maintain an attendance rate of 96%. This rate would be achieved by forming a plan which would include hiring a dedicated person to transport students to school on a daily basis. All staff at the school should make a purposeful effort to establish a caring relationship with all students. School leaders need to establish a culture of success which is student centered where students feel valued and important. This study has shown the importance of attendance in a community school. The study has shown the importance of relationships, culture, transition plans, but all of that is meaningless if a school can’t get students in the door. This study has talked about the limit of resources and funds at a schools disposal and the tough decisions administration has to make in the use of those funds. School funding is a complicated process and one that is different based on the demographics of a student body, and has changed over time. One of those factors is average daily attendance and the bottom line
is that when students don’t come to school then schools lose money. Schools should do everything they can do to get students to attend school on a regular basis because it’s good for students. This fact must be the motive for the administration of a school. Based on the results of this study, schools that dedicate an attendance person to make sure that students make it to school on a daily basis, will actually pay for themselves by increasing attendance to a degree that increases funding. Schools that were studied have proven this to be a very effective tactic at reducing chronic absenteeism. Ultimately, schools that do not enact these types of positions will continue to experience chronic absenteeism as well as not addressing the wellbeing of students.

**Implication 2: The leaders of community schools need to invest in the importance of building and maintaining meaningful relationships of all employees with students.**

Community schools should invest time and resources to establish a culture that is student centered. Actionable steps include: 1) Involving stakeholders including students in developing a plan to create, maintain and evaluate a culture that is student centered with relationships and achievement at the core of the culture, 2) Providing professional development with staff focused on elements and actionable steps of a positive culture, 3) Establish and post around school the school wide mantras the daily remind all stakeholders that they are committed to a student centered culture, 4) Message to parents and the community the success of the students and the school, and 5) Hire and integrate a mental health professional into the culture and norms of the school; a person who goes beyond counseling only.

Every administrator interviewed in this study articulated an understanding of the importance of building and maintaining meaningful relationships. The successful schools
had this value echoed by employees at all levels where the unsuccessful schools did not. Schools need to invest in mental health for students to move them up on Maslow’s hierarchy of needs so they can have their foundational needs met and them flourish cognitively. Schools need to invest in training staff in Trauma Informed Care or similar programs so they understand behaviors are communication and to solve behavioral issues one must tackle the root cause of the behavior and not just respond to what was said or done at the surface level. Everyone agrees that safety of students is important, and the humanistic learning theory has safety as one of the foundational levels, but successful schools need to make students feel safe without damaging the relationships build with mistrust. When a school starts the day by forcing a student to take off their jacket and hat, spread their arms out wide, wave a metal detecting wand over every part of their body, and even making them remove their belt to prove their isn’t a weapon under their buckle with a second pass of the wand then that school has screamed to every student, every morning, “I do not trust you.” This is very damaging to relationships and providing a safe school must be implemented in another way.

Implication 3: Schools Must Develop Accountability Systems for Student Achievement in Community Schools.

Community schools must be held accountable for student achievement as measured by the CDE dashboard, state and local assessments, and school wide learning outcomes. Staff that teach in a community school need to be trained and held accountable for student achievement.
A senate bill and an assembly bill should be passed at the state level to require achievement indicators similar to the dashboard requirements for all court and community schools. Local county offices of education also need to develop policy and practice to support and hold schools responsible for student achievement. This would include a collaborative plan including professional development and close monitoring. Finally, school leaders need to be held responsible for training all staff in best practice of teaching and learning rooting in pedagogy. When schools are held accountable for scores on high-stakes tests then schools move resources to do what is necessary to achieve those scores (Weissman 2015). The way the state of California currently has it’s reporting criteria set up many high school community schools are exempt in the reporting of those scores to the state. Each school still has areas in which they need to report, but as long as student achievement is not one of those areas, then schools will focus their time and resources in other areas. For this to change and have the greatest impact, the state needs to reformat their reporting criteria and have community schools report this information to the state. Community schools are very transient with students moving in and out frequently. The way The California Dashboard measures achievement and improvement is not designed for measuring the success of community schools. Community schools should be measured by the improvement of their student body as related to how those same students did in the prior year. This makes the current system where only 11th graders are tested completely inadequate.

If the state does not decide to change the way in which they hold schools accountable for achievement it is up to county superintendents to hold county community schools accountable. County superintendents are privy to every score from all the
students in their schools. A superintendent can mandate principals’ report to them what they do not report to the state. The superintendent can hold the principals of the schools under the superintendent’s leadership to account even if the state does not. When achievement is seen as something that is important and something that principals and teachers are accountable for, then those same principals and teachers will work to make the achievement of students a priority. When 25 county school employees were asked about the key signature practice that county school employees do to increase standardized test scores, the most common theme was county employees saying that they didn’t know. This communicates that academic achievement is not a priority. That needs to change.

**Implication 4: Schools that Implement Transition Planning for All Students Will have Increased Graduation Rates.**

Community schools need to develop a plan for all students as they transition from high school into a college or career path. This plan should have implementation steps including an interest inventory as soon as the student enters the community school system. If possible, this plan should be student centered and start their freshman year. Staff at the school should be tasked with the responsibility to develop community partnerships with businesses and local non-profits where students can intern of volunteer for community service in order to feel comfortable working for a purpose. A number of resources should be developed which include resume writing, interviewing, time management and development of skills needed to be successful in a work force. Regional Occupational Program (ROP) and Career Technology Education courses with a certificate of completion should be developed for students at the school site. This may
include partnering with local centers and school districts. Students need to be keenly aware of the next phase of life and feel ready to enter the work force.

Multiple employees from different schools talked about the fear students have of that next phase of life. They talked about fear of “the unknown” and a feeling of “oh shit, I have to do something with my life.” Multiple employees from multiple schools verbalized this fear students have, but only a few actually had a plan in place to do something about that fear. Transition planning with students is not something that is hard to do, and it doesn’t cost an exorbitant amount of money. The schools that did this right had staff, sometimes teachers, sometimes counselors, start this process by asking students what they want to do. Asking students the most basic question a teacher or counselor can ask, “How can I help?” Every school can do this. The program used by the most successful school in this study utilized an online free interest profiler to start this process. Students often discovered what careers were linked to the interests they already had and then what they needed to do to move toward that next step. This simple and fast process took away some of the fear, and as educators the bare minimum thing every employee should strive to do every day is remove fear. The outline for schools implementing transition plans should be:

1) Have students complete an interest profiler.

2) Have students research a few top findings of areas they already have an interest in perusing.

3) Have students detail what they need to do to advance themselves on their chosen path.

4) Help students with skills and resources to get to the next level.
Implication 5: Schools that have Mental Health Must as a Part of Their School Culture Are More Successful in All Areas.

Community schools should plan and dedicate funds to provide mental health providers for their staff and students. Professional development should also be funded and planned for with the mental health provider to establish a school-wide culture that is centered on relationships and student needs. After the culture has been established, schools should regularly survey staff and students to monitor and course correct according to the school-wide goals for culture and mental health services including strong relationships.

This study set out to examine the impact mental health had on populations of expelled students at California community schools. The evidence is clear that those schools studies had better results in every area studied. When asked about the key signature practices in every area, the schools that provided mental health stated that building and maintaining meaningful relationships was the most important thing when it came to improving attendance, achievement, and decreasing suspensions. Building and maintaining meaningful relationships was the second most important thing when it came to improving graduation rates, but the single most important thing was talking about life after graduation and removing that fear. Schools that provided mental health had teachers, administrators, and support staff that valued relationships to a higher degree than schools that did not. Schools need to invest in mental health providers who provide that service for every student that needs it in that school, and that service needs to take place in the schools. This researcher began this study thinking that mental health services being provided in the school setting was superior than the same service being provided
outside of school because it removed hurdles to the students and their families to receive that service. It is now the opinion of this researcher that mental health services being provided in schools is superior to that same service being provided outside the school because it illustrates to every employee at that school the importance of relationships and teaching the whole child.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

This study has added to the body of knowledge showing the benefit of mental health as it pertains to student achievement and discipline. This study also examined the impact mental health has on graduation and attendance, as well as looking at the key signature practices California community school employees believe are most impactful in improving rates of attendance, achievement, decreasing suspension rates, and improving rates of graduation. There are still gaps that need to be filled in future studies.

**Recommendation 1: It is Recommended that this Study be Replicated with a Population and Sample that Includes Comprehensive High Schools in California to Determine if these Findings can be Generalized to California High Schools.**

It is recommended that a mixed method study be conducted with personnel that serve at-risk populations in a comprehensive high school setting. This study had some very strong findings and conclusions related to the importance of relationships and school culture in a California community school, but because the average community school in California is significantly smaller than a comprehensive high school one cannot infer that these finding will hold true at schools with much larger populations without additional research.
Recommendation 2: It is Recommended that a Cost/Benefit Analysis be done to determine if an Attendance Officer improves Attendance at a Rate to generate enough Revenue from ADA to pay for Themselves.

The findings of this study show the effectiveness of having an attendance officer who picks up students who have difficulty with attendance. Further qualitative research or a mixed method study needs to be done to determine if an attendance officer picking up students leads to a significant improvement in school attendance justifying a person having that role. This would determine how this may or may not impact other transportation options at students’ disposal, or have an impact that is unknown at this time. A great deal of a student’s success is determined by the student’s attendance, research on this topic should be done at an elementary, middle, and high school setting.

Recommendation 3: It is Recommended that a Study be done to Determine the Importance of Interpersonal Skills and the Development of Relationships and How that Improves Student Achievement and Graduation in Schools.

A qualitative study examining the development of interpersonal skills with adults that work with at-risk population should take place in court and community schools as well as alternative high schools connected to comprehensive high schools. This study would also examine how culture affects all of the indicators for student achievement.

Recommendation 4: It is Recommended that a Study be done to Determine what benefits to Graduation Transition Programs for At-Risk Populations have in California High Schools.

A quantitative study which tracks the success of high school students who have participated in a transition in a post-secondary setting. The study would confirm to what
extent transition programs have long term success with students in an alternative setting or with at-risk populations. The results of this type of research may result in expansion of this type of program for all high schools.

**Concluding Remarks and Reflections**

The idea for this study began when a longtime special education teacher working at a county special education school with students identified as emotionally disturbed became an administrator at a county community school within the same county office of education. The observation was made that the behaviors of students at both these schools was very similar, but the mental health support was vastly different. The reason for this distinction was as simple as it was heartbreaking. One group of students had a legal right to have school-based mental health and the other did not. One group of students had access to a group of mental health professionals who worked with students, teachers, and support staff to come up with behavior intervention plans that looked at the function of the behaviors, when they happen, how they happen, and most importantly why they happen. This group of students is provided a detailed plan to reduce these behaviors that is followed by every staff member that interacts with that student and this plan is developed with the assistance of a team that includes the student’s parents and if the parent doesn’t sign off then the plan is not enacted. One group of students get all of that which helps build a trusting relationship where everyone on the team knows that every member of the team is there for that student, and one group does not. The researcher lived in both those worlds but when attempting to get additional resources for the community school the researcher could not find a study showing that it was worth it. The researcher set out to solve that problem. To close the gap in the research and to speak to
community school employees from around the state at urban and rural counties to see what really worked at getting students to show up to school, to achieve more, to have less suspensions, and to leave the community school with a diploma. This dissertation is the culmination of that work. This researcher set out to determine what the impact of school-based mental health really had on community school populations and to ultimately determine if it was worth it. The conclusion of this study has determined that that it is, and those kids are worth it.
REFERENCES


Chase, S. (1833). *The statutes of Ohio and of the Northwestern Territory adopted or enacted from 1788 to 1833 inclusive ; together with the Ordinance of 1787, the constitutions of Ohio and of the United States, and various public instruments and acts of Congress ; illustrated by a preliminary sketch of the history of Ohio, numerous references and notes and copious indexes*. Cincinnati: Corey & Fairbank.


APPENDIX A

California Education Code 48900

This code states:

“A pupil shall not be suspended from school or recommended for expulsion, unless the superintendent or the principal of the school in which the pupil is enrolled determines that the pupil has committed an act as defined pursuant to any of subdivisions (a) to (r), inclusive:

(a) (1) Caused, attempted to cause, or threatened to cause physical injury to another person.

(2) Willfully used force or violence upon the person of another, except in self-defense.

(b) Possessed, sold, or otherwise furnished a firearm, knife, explosive, or other dangerous object, unless, in the case of possession of an object of this type, the pupil had obtained written permission to possess the item from a certificated school employee, which is concurred in by the principal or the designee of the principal.

(c) Unlawfully possessed, used, sold, or otherwise furnished, or been under the influence of, a controlled substance listed in Chapter 2 (commencing with Section 11053) of Division 10 of the Health and Safety Code, an alcoholic beverage, or an intoxicant of any kind.

(d) Unlawfully offered, arranged, or negotiated to sell a controlled substance listed in Chapter 2 (commencing with Section 11053) of Division 10 of the Health and Safety Code, an alcoholic beverage, or an
intoxicant of any kind, and either sold, delivered, or otherwise furnished to
a person another liquid, substance, or material and represented the liquid,
substance, or material as a controlled substance, alcoholic beverage, or
intoxicant.

(e) Committed or attempted to commit robbery or extortion.

(f) Caused or attempted to cause damage to school property or private property.

(g) Stolen or attempted to steal school property or private property.

(h) Possessed or used tobacco, or products containing tobacco or nicotine products, including, but not limited to, cigarettes, cigars, miniature cigars, clove cigarettes, smokeless tobacco, snuff, chew packets, and betel. However, this section does not prohibit use or possession by a pupil of his or her own prescription products.

(i) Committed an obscene act or engaged in habitual profanity or vulgarity.

(j) Unlawfully possessed or unlawfully offered, arranged, or negotiated to sell drug paraphernalia, as defined in Section 11014.5 of the Health and Safety Code.

(k) Disrupted school activities or otherwise willfully defied the valid authority of supervisors, teachers, administrators, school officials, or other school personnel engaged in the performance of their duties.

(l) Knowingly received stolen school property or private property.
(m) Possessed an imitation firearm. As used in this section, "imitation firearm" means a replica of a firearm that is so substantially similar in physical properties to an existing firearm as to lead a reasonable person to conclude that the replica is a firearm.

(n) Committed or attempted to commit a sexual assault as defined in Section 261, 266c, 286, 288, 288a, or 289 of the Penal Code or committed a sexual battery as defined in Section 243.4 of the Penal Code.

(o) Harassed, threatened, or intimidated a pupil who is a complaining witness or a witness in a school disciplinary proceeding for the purpose of either preventing that pupil from being a witness or retaliating against that pupil for being a witness, or both.

(p) Unlawfully offered, arranged to sell, negotiated to sell, or sold the prescription drug Soma.

(q) Engaged in, or attempted to engage in, hazing. For purposes of this subdivision, "hazing," means a method of initiation or pre-initiation into a pupil organization or body, whether or not the organization or body is officially recognized by an educational institution, which is likely to cause serious bodily injury or personal degradation or disgrace resulting in physical or mental harm to a former, current, or prospective pupil. For purposes of this subdivision, "hazing" does not include athletic events or school-sanctioned events.

(r) Engaged in an act of bullying, including, but not limited to, bullying committed by means of an electronic act, as defined in
subdivisions (f) and (g) of Section 32261, directed specifically toward a pupil or school personnel.

(s) A pupil shall not be suspended or expelled for any of the acts enumerated in this section, unless that act is related to school activity or school attendance occurring within a school under the jurisdiction of the superintendent of the school district, or principal or occurring within any other school district. A pupil may be suspended or expelled for acts that are enumerated in this section and related to school activity or attendance that occur at any time, including, but not limited to, any of the following:

(1) While on school grounds.

(2) While going to or coming from school.

(3) During the lunch period whether on or off the campus.

(4) During, or while going to or coming from, a school sponsored activity.

(t) A pupil who aids or abets, as defined in Section 31 of the Penal Code, the infliction or attempted infliction of physical injury to another person may be subject to suspension, but not expulsion, pursuant to this section, except that a pupil who has been adjudged by a juvenile court to have committed, as an aider and abettor, a crime of physical violence in which the victim suffered great bodily injury or serious bodily injury shall be subject to discipline pursuant to subdivision (a).

(u) As used in this section, "school property" includes, but is not limited to, electronic files and databases.
(v) A superintendent of the school district or principal may use his or her discretion to provide alternatives to suspension or expulsion, including, but not limited to, counseling and an anger management program, for a pupil subject to discipline under this section.

(w) It is the intent of the Legislature that alternatives to suspension or expulsion be imposed against a pupil who is truant, tardy, or otherwise absent from school activities.”
APPENDIX B

Interview Protocol
Qualitative Survey Analysis of School-Based Mental Health Providers Signature Practices

Each county community school in California was contacted to ascertain if they provided school-based mental health. The answers were recorded and separated by those schools that provided mental health for the majority of their students for the majority of the time. For the qualitative section of this dissertation, a purposeful sampling of schools was chosen and the administrators of those schools were contacted so the interviewer could tour the schools and then interview county school employees to ascertain best practices to improve rates of chronic absenteeism, scores on standardized tests, graduation rates, and decreasing incidents of suspensions. Schools employees were selected to interview attempting to get interviews from employees of varied titles, locations within the state, varied school demographics and school sizes.

Participants are welcomed and thanked for participating in the interview for this study. Each participant is informed that if they chose to be in this study they will remain anonymous. Each participant is informed of the need to record the interview to transcribe and analyze later.

Interview Questions
1. What do you think are the key signature practices that county school employees use that are perceived as being most effective in reducing chronic absenteeism?

2. How does that service you provide help reduce chronic absenteeism?

3. What do you think are the key signature practices that county school employees use that are perceived as being most effective in improving standardized test scores?

4. How does that service you provide improve standardized test scores?

5. What do you think are the key signature practices that county community schools use that are perceived as being most effective in improving graduation rates?

6. How does that service you provide improve graduation rates?

7. What do you think are the key signature practices that county school employees use that are perceived as being most effective in reducing rates of suspensions?

8. How does that service you provide reduce rates of suspensions?

9. Is there anything you’d like to add about any of the questions asked?


APPENDIX C

Alignment Table

In this mixed method study research question three is what drove the interview questions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parts of Research Question 2</th>
<th>Interview Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| What are the key signature practices as described by school employees that are most effective in: | 1. What are the key signature practices that county school employees use that are perceived as being most effective in reducing chronic absenteeism?  
2. How does that service you provide help reduce chronic absenteeism?                          |
| improving rates of chronic absenteeism,                                                      | 3. What are the key signature practices that county school employees use that are perceived as being most effective in improving standardized test scores?  
4. How does that service you provide improve standardized test scores?                           |
| the percentage of students who score proficient or advanced on standardized state tests,      | 5. What are the key signature practices that county school employees use that are perceived as being most effective in improving graduation rates?  
6. How does that service you provide improve graduation rates?                                    |
| improve graduation rates,                                                                    | 7. What are the key signature practices that county school employees use that are perceived as being most effective in reducing rates of suspensions?  
8. How does that service you provide reduce rates of suspensions?                                 |
| and rates of suspensions in California community schools for expelled high school students?   | 9. Is there anything you’d like to add about any of the questions asked?                                                                               |
|                                                     |                                                                                                                                                      |
APPENDIX D

Brandman University Institutional Review Board Permission

BUIRB Application Approved: Damien Phillips

Dear Damien Phillips,

Congratulations! Your IRB application to conduct research has been approved by the Brandman University Institutional Review Board. Please keep this email for your records, as it will need to be included in your research appendix.

If you need to modify your BUIRB application for any reason, please fill out the "Application Modification Form" before proceeding with your research. The Modification form can be found at IRB.Brandman.edu

Best wishes for a successful completion of your study.

Thank You,

BUIRB
Academic Affairs
Brandman University
16355 Laguna Canyon Road
Irvine, CA 92618
buirb@brandman.edu
www.brandman.edu

A Member of the Chapman University System

This email is an automated notification. If you have questions please email us at buirb@brandman.edu.
APPENDIX E

Informational Letter to Participants

May 15, 2019

Dear Participant:

My name is Damien Phillips and I am a doctoral student at Brandman University conducting research to identify and describe the key signature practices of mental health professionals in improving rates of chronic absenteeism, scores on standardized tests, and rates of suspension for students in California community schools. The study involves two steps.

First, I will send a link that will include a consent form. The second step of this study will only consist of a phone call that will last approximately five to ten minutes. All information shared during the interview will remain confidential and your name and responses will remain confidential and known only to me.

The second step of this study involving a phone interview will last approximately 5-10 minutes at a time that is convenient for you. All information shared during the interview will remain confidential and your name will not be attached to any notes or the interview transcript. All information will be stored in locked files accessible only to me. Further, you will be free to stop the interview and withdraw from the study at any time. Finally, you may be assured that the researcher is not in any way affiliated with your employer.

If you wish to participate, please contact me at dphillips314@gmail.com or at (559)759-5028. I am also happy to answer any questions you may have in advance of your participation.

Sincerely,

Damien Phillips
APPENDIX F

Written Informed Consent Form

INFORMATION ABOUT: Identifying and exploring the key signature practices of mental health professionals in improving rates of chronic absenteeism, scores on standardized tests, and rates of suspension for students in California community schools.

BRANDMAN UNIVERSITY
16355 LAGUNA CANYON ROAD
IRVINE, CA 92618

RESPONSIBLE INVESTIGATOR: Damien Phillips, M.Ed.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY: You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Damien Phillips, a doctoral student at Brandman University. The purpose of this mixed methods study was to determine if there was a statistically significant difference between rates of chronic absenteeism, the percentage of students proficient or advanced on standardized state tests, and rates of suspensions in California community schools for expelled high school students whose schools have had staff that provide school-based mental health for the majority of their students for the majority of the time and those who do not.

In participating in this study, I agree to be interviewed about my experiences as a leader. The one-on-one interviews will take approximately 5-10 minutes of your time.

I understand that:

a) There are minimal risks associated with participating in this research. I understand that the Investigator will protect my confidentiality by keeping the identifying codes and research materials in a locked file drawer that is available only to the researcher.

b) The possible benefit of this study is that my input may help add to the research regarding the impostor phenomenon and effective ways for individuals to cope with it. The findings will be available to me at the conclusion of the study and will provide new insights about the experiences gay men in leadership roles report having with the impostor phenomenon. I understand that I will not be compensated for my participation.

c) If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact Damien Phillips at dphillips314@gmail.com. You may also contact the Brandman University Advisor for this study, Dr. Laurie Goodman at lgoodman@brandman.edu.
d) My participation in this research study is voluntary. I may decide not to participate in the study and I can withdraw at any time. I can also decide not to answer particular questions during the interview if I so choose. I understand that I may refuse to participate or may withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences. Also, the Investigator may stop the study at any time may refuse to participate or may withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences. Also, the Investigator may stop the study at any time.

e) No information that identifies me will be released without my separate consent and that all identifiable information will be protected to the limits allowed by the law. If the study design or the use of the data is to be changed, I will be so informed and my consent reobtained. I understand that if I have any questions, comments, or concerns about the study or the informed consent process, I may write or call the Office of the Executive Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, at 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618, (949) 341-7641.

I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this form and the Research Participant’s Bill of Rights. I have read the above and understand it and hereby consent to the procedure(s) set forth.

_________________________ __________________________________________
Signature of Participant or Responsible Party Date

_________________________ __________________________________________
Printed Name of Participant or Responsible Party Date

_________________________ __________________________________________
Signature of Witness (if appropriate) Date

_________________________ __________________________________________
Signature of Principal Investigator Date
APPENDIX G

Participant Bill of Rights

BRANDMAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Research Participant's Bill of Rights

Any person who is requested to consent to participate as a subject in an experiment, or who is requested to consent on behalf of another, has the following rights:

1. To be told what the study is attempting to discover.
2. To be told what will happen in the study and whether any of the procedures, drugs or devices are different from what would be used in standard practice.
3. To be told about the risks, side effects or discomforts of the things that may happen to him/her.
4. To be told if he/she can expect any benefit from participating and, if so, what the benefits might be.
5. To be told what other choices he/she has and how they may be better or worse than being in the study.
6. To be allowed to ask any questions concerning the study both before agreeing to be involved and during the course of the study.
7. To be told what sort of medical treatment is available if any complications arise.
8. To refuse to participate at all before or after the study is started without any adverse effects.
9. To receive a copy of the signed and dated consent form.
10. To be free of pressures when considering whether he/she wishes to agree to be in the study.

If at any time you have questions regarding a research study, you should ask the researchers to answer them. You also may contact the Brandman University Institutional Review Board, which is concerned with the protection of volunteers in research projects. The Brandman University Institutional Review Board may be contacted either by telephoning the Office of Academic Affairs at (949) 341-9937 or by writing to the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA, 92618.
APPENDIX H

Interview Protocol

Good morning/afternoon:

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this interview. As I mentioned during our earlier conversation, I am conducting research as part of earning my doctorate degree in Organizational Leadership at Brandman University. The purpose of this mixed methods study was to determine if there was a statistically significant difference between rates of chronic absenteeism, the percentage of students proficient or advanced on standardized state tests, and rates of suspensions in California community schools for expelled high school students whose schools have had staff that provide school-based mental health for the majority of their students for the majority of the time and those who do not. The interview will take approximately 5-10 minutes and includes just seven questions. I may ask a few follow-up questions if I need further clarification.

Informed Consent and Recording

Before we begin the interview, I want to seek your Informed Consent about your participation. I also have a copy of the Brandman Bill of Rights I sent. Do you have any questions or need clarification about either document?

I would like to remind you that anything we have previously discussed and will discuss today will remain confidential. All of the data will be reported without making any reference to you or your employer. With your permission, I would like to record this interview so that I ensure accurate recording of your responses I will be recording this session only so I have the ability to capture our discussion so that I can transcribe it for review. After I transcribe the conversation, I will send it to you via email so that you can make sure I have accurately captured your thoughts and ideas.

Finally, at any point during the interview you may ask that I skip a particular question or stop the interview altogether.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

List of Questions

1. In your opinion what are the key signature practices that county school employees use that are perceived as being most effective in reducing chronic absenteeism?

2. How does that service you provide help reduce chronic absenteeism?

3. In your opinion what are the key signature practices that county school employees use that are perceived as being most effective in improving standardized test scores?
4. How does that service you provide improve standardized test scores?

5. In your opinion what are the key signature practices that county school employees use that are perceived as being most effective in improving graduation rates?

6.

7. How does that service you provide improve graduation rates?

8. In your opinion what are the key signature practices that county school employees use that are perceived as being most effective in reducing rates of suspensions?

9. How does that service you provide reduce rates of suspensions?

10. Is there anything you’d like to add about any of the questions asked?

Do you have any questions or additional thoughts you would like to share with me before we conclude?
APPENDIX I

Conversation Between Instructional Assistants

The conversation below occurred in a resource room with the center of the room occupied by three large tables where multiple students were observed that day doing work when they were removed from a classroom. The room also contained the school copier and was between the school’s office and the classrooms. The conversation below occurred between two instructional assistants who each were supervising a student who was removed from class to do work in that room.

Instructional Aide #1: How are the girls? Getting along?
Instructional Aide #2: It’s going to happen. Everything’s all right now, but it’s tense. It’ll go down.
Instructional Aide #1: When it does don’t call me. (Both laugh)
Instructional Aide #2: She needs to get her ass beat. She’s a bully.
Instructional Aide #1: Yeah.
Instructional Aide #2: (Referencing student in the room) What’s he mad about?
Instructional Aide #1: He’s running his mouth. He wants it his way.
Instructional Aide #2: Did you tell him it’s my way or the highway? (Both laugh, student does not.)