PREDICTING VIOLENCE FROM SCHOOL MISBEHAVIOR:
PROMISES AND PERILS

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This article considers the issue of predicting violence committed by students on school campuses through the use of school discipline indices such as office referrals, suspensions, and expulsions. The existing research on incidents of school discipline markers is reviewed as well as sources of variation due to student characteristics and classroom or school-wide practices. Challenges in making accurate predictions about future behavior at school are outlined. © 2001 John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

The outbreak of high visibility violence in schools in the past few years has led to an intensive search for behavioral and emotional precursors that could provide a prediction of which students might be at-risk for committing such acts. Nationally, a number of resources have become available that attempt to provide some guidance to school staff, parents, and students (Dwyer, Osher, & Warger, 1998).

A logical place to look for students who would be likely to commit acts of school violence is on the rolls of school discipline cases. In fact, a history of discipline problems has been listed as a warning sign in the U.S. Department of Education document “Early Warning, Timely Response: A Guide to Safe Schools” (Dwyer et al., 1998). A common assertion is that the best prediction of future behavior is past behavior; therefore, those students who have exhibited previous antisocial behavior at school would be expected to be those most likely to exhibit this behavior in the future. Indeed, students who exhibit chronic patterns of school discipline involvement are highly likely to experience future school adjustment problems (Sprague & Walker, 2000). Walker and Sprague (1999) found that the number of discipline contacts during the school year for an individual child was one of three salient predictors of arrest status in the 5th and then again in the 10th grades. In addition to the perspective of individuals’ contribution to school violence, there is concern about the systemic contribution of high levels of overall disciplinary disruptions in a school to acts of more serious violence (Skiba & Peterson, 2000).

The question addressed in this article is whether or not a focus on school discipline records and patterns of disciplined behavior can improve risk predictions and inform the prevention or reduction of antisocial behavior in schools. We examine school discipline systems and the students that are most likely to be involved in them. Given this information, we then discuss the validity of predictions of subsequent violence or disruption and possible sources of error in these predictions.

School Discipline Processes and Targets

When defining the nature and scope of school discipline, it is important to recognize that school-wide discipline includes multiple settings (e.g., classroom, playground, halls, cafeteria) and can be implemented at a group or an individual level (Sugai & Horner, 1999). This article focuses on the discipline methods at the school-wide level; that is, office referrals, suspension, and expulsion. Surprisingly, there have been a limited number of studies of school discipline proce-
dures and outcomes. Yet, there has been some consistency in these research findings on the major reasons for office referrals, suspensions, and expulsions.

While focus on school discipline is most often directed to serious issues of drugs, gangs, and weapons in our schools, the data have consistently shown that these are not the most frequent problems with which school administrators wrestle. A national survey conducted by the National Center on Educational Statistics (Heaviside, Rowand, Williams, & Farris, 1998) asked school principals to list what they considered moderate or serious problems in their schools and found that the problems principals deal with most frequently at both the elementary and secondary level are non-violent or less violent behaviors such as tardiness (40%), absenteeism (25%), and physical conflicts between students (21%). The critical incidents that are the typical focus of school safety debates are seen relatively infrequently: drug use (9%), gangs (5%), possession of weapons (2%), physical abuse of teachers (2%). These national findings are consistent with research on disciplinary incidents at the school level. Similarly, in studies at the district or school level, the behaviors that most frequently result in office referral appear to be disobedience and general disruption (Skiba, Peterson, & Williams, 1997), defiance (Menacker, Hurwitz, & Weldon, 1988), and physical contact/fighting (McFadden, Marsh, Price, & Hwang, 1992).

Out-of-school suspension is among the most common consequences for disciplinary infractions (Bowditch, 1993; Mansfield & Farris, 1992; Rose, 1988; Uchitelle, Bartz, & Hillman, 1989). In one midwestern city, one third of all referrals to the office resulted in a one- to five-day suspension, and 21% of all enrolled students were suspended at least once during the school year (Skiba et al., 1997). Suspension appears to be used with greater frequency in urban areas than in suburban or rural areas (Wu, Pink, Crain, & Moles, 1982). As might be expected with such high rates of usage, school suspension is not always reserved for the most serious or dangerous behaviors. Fights or physical aggression among students are consistently found to be among the most common reasons for suspension (Costenbader & Markson, 1994; Dupper & Bosch, 1996; Imich, 1994; Menacker et al., 1988; Skiba et al., 1997). Yet, school suspension is commonly used, as well, for a number of relatively minor offenses, such as disobedience and disrespect (Bain & Macpherson, 1990; Cooley, 1995), problems of attendance (Kaeser, 1979; Morgan-D’Atrio, Northrup, LaFleur, & Spera, 1996), and general classroom disruption (Imich, 1994; Morgan-D’Atrio et al., 1996). In fact, students are suspended for more serious offenses (e.g., drugs, weapons, vandalism, assaults on teachers) relatively infrequently (Bain & Macpherson, 1990; Dupper & Bosch, 1996).

Suspension and expulsion procedures exclude students from the school setting for specific amounts of time. In the case of expulsions, this exclusion may be permanent. Each of these disciplinary actions has a set of due process guidelines that are outlined by state and local educational agencies. Most states provide guidelines for the behaviors that cause a student to be subject to suspension or expulsion, most recently as a result of zero-tolerance philosophies and federal legislation. According to a study by The Civil Rights Project of Harvard University (Advancement Project/Civil Rights Project, 2000), 41 states have laws establishing grounds for suspension and 49 have these guidelines for expulsion. All of these states require a recommendation for expulsion for possession of firearms, weapons, or other deadly weapons. Eighteen states specify that possession, use, or distribution of drugs on school campuses serves as grounds for expulsion. Other expellable offenses include willful or continued defiance of authority or disruptive behavior and habitual profanity. Some form of zero tolerance policy appears to have become the norm for the most serious infractions. Defining zero tolerance as mandating predetermined consequences or punishments for specified offenses, the National Center on Educational Statistics (Heaviside et al., 1998) reported that more than 90% of all schools report having zero tolerance policies for weapons or firearms, almost 90% for alcohol or drugs, and 79% for violence or tobacco.
In contrast to suspension, school expulsion appears to be used relatively infrequently as compared to other disciplinary options (Sinclair, 1999). Morrison, D’Incau, Couto, and Loose (1997) reported that expulsion appears to be reserved for incidents of moderate to high severity, although there is some doubt as to whether students who are expelled are always those who are the most troublesome or dangerous. Zero tolerance policies, mandating expulsion for certain types of events, have apparently led to the expulsion of many children and youths who would be considered “good students.”

The Challenge of Prediction: Multiple Sources of Variance

In using disciplinary data for early identification, one is seeking to use the discipline event to predict which students are likely to be at-risk for violence or disruption in the future. Although the stability over time of school misbehavior offers some promise for prediction, it is critical to note that predicting from school discipline is not a univariate but a multivariate process of prediction. That is, the process of school discipline is highly complex, involving student behavior, teacher reactions, administrative disposition, and even local, state, and national politics. Thus, a model of prediction from school disciplinary incidents must be similarly complex, accounting for all of these levels.

Office discipline referrals represent an initial level of discipline designed to manage disruptive behavior at school. Sugai, Sprague, Horner, & Walker (2000) defined office discipline referral as “an event in which (a) a student engaged in a behavior that violated a rule or social norm in the school, (b) the problem behavior was observed or identified by a member of the school staff, and (c) the event resulted in a consequence deliver by administrative staff who produced a permanent (written) product defining the whole event” (p. 96). Even within this apparently simple event, however, there are numerous sources of variance. For example, the nature of office referrals differs between schools depending on the unique rules and ways of referring, implementing the consequence, and formalizing (recording/reporting) the event. There will also be considerable within-school variation, depending on the tolerance level different teachers have for similar behaviors, and their skill at handling the behavior at the classroom level.

Once the office referral is made, there will be additional variation at the level of administrative disposition. The use of suspension and expulsions involves a good degree of latitude (within state-mandated limits) on the part of the school administrators and school board, and will thus result in considerable variance in the use and severity of these consequences at the school and district level. Finally, variations in school discipline philosophy can influence the use of these processes within these limits.

In the sections that follow, we attempt to outline some additional sources of variance in school discipline contributed by individual differences, as well as variation contributed by implementation of the process of school discipline.

Student Behavioral Characteristics, Discipline, and the Prediction of Violence

Individual differences that predict violence. Risk models for the prediction of juvenile delinquency often focus on the individual characteristics of the child (Loeber, 1990). Some of the individual characteristics identified in this research include: (a) problem behavior evident beginning at ages 4 and 5, (b) engagement in a variety of problem behaviors (overt and covert), (c) problem behavior exhibited in a variety of settings (home, community, school), and (d) display of extreme aggression. Difficult temperament in early childhood has been identified as an individual characteristic that may interact with a problematic, ineffectual parenting style (Moffitt, 1993). Patterson’s work has emphasized the role of coercive child-rearing techniques in the development of antisocial behavior in children (Patterson, 1982). Gresham, Lane, & Lambros (2000) suggested that attention
be given to subtypes in the prediction of youth violence. They focus on the description of the “fledgling psychopath” or children who exhibit comorbidity of hyperactivity-impulsivity-inattention and conduct problems. These children are at markedly greater risk for later psychopathology and/or chronic offending.

Walker and Sprague (1999) identify five risk factors associated with delinquency and youth violence: “(a) the mother and/or the father has been arrested, (b) the child has been a client of child protection, (c) one or more family transition has occurred (death, divorce, trauma, family upheaval), (d) the youth has received special education services, and/or (e) the youth has a history of early and/or severe antisocial behavior” (p. 69). With the exception of the last factor, these factors are all system-involvement factors, indicating factors in the child’s environment or evidence that maladjustment of some kind has come to the attention of authorities. Additional factors mentioned by the American Psychological Association (APA) in 1993 include factors associated with problem behavior, including early involvement with alcohol and other drugs, pervasive exposure to media violence, association with deviant peer groups, and easy access to weapons.

Many of the individual and family characteristics described above are likely correlates with involvement in school discipline processes. Eckenrode, Laird, and Doris (1993) reported that students with substantiated reports of abuse or neglect were significantly more likely to be referred for school discipline and somewhat more likely to be suspended, especially at the middle and high school level. Morgan-D’Attrio et al. (1996) reported that, of students who were suspended, 43% at the high school level and 38% at the middle school level had clinically elevated scores on one or more student and teacher subscales of the Child Behavior Checklist (Quay, 1983). It is important to note, however, that there was wide variability in the characteristics listed for individual students, ranging from aggression to thought problems, to delinquent behavior to somatic complaints. Thus, while individual and family characteristics in general may predict who will be referred or suspended, the specific relationship between those characteristics and school discipline can be expected to be highly variable among disciplined students.

**The problem of predicting future behavior.** Thus, although it is possible to identify the types of problems that predict future violence or disruption, the problem of predicting which students will commit acts of violence is a thorny one. First, the possibility of this prediction assumes that there is causal homogeneity, that some subset of variables measured for all participants will account for a significant proportion of variance in a multivariate statistical model (Hoagwood, 2000). This assumption is repeatedly challenged by research literature that suggests that there are multiple subtypes and a variety of developmental trajectories that describe this population (Loeber, 1996; Morrison & D’Incau, 2000). Most research has focused on markers or correlates, not on the developmental or causal processes through which antisocial behavior develops across time (Hoagwood, 2000).

Another limitation of the multivariate prediction model is that these predictions are limited in the extent to which they approximate a full accounting of the variance in the equation. While a certain subset of variables have been shown to be “best predictors” of youth aggression (see characteristics identified above), there is still considerable variance for which the equation does not account; thus, the likelihood of many false positives and false negatives is high. Indeed, it has been noted that less than 50% of children with extreme antisocial behavior become antisocial adults or continue to exhibit antisocial behavior in their later childhood or teen years (Lynam, 1996; White, Moffitt, Earls, Robins, & Silva, 1990). Gresham notes that the difficulty evident in these predictions is partially due to the relatively high “base rates” of behavior problems in young children (Gresham et al., 2000). Many children do not continue with patterns of antisocial behavior as they continue through their school years or into adulthood. Predicting future behavior from
childhood patterns is extremely difficult. In parallel, predicting extreme acts of violence from patterns of rule-breaking at school is difficult as well. Realistically, involvement in school discipline processes is just one of a cluster of student characteristics that may play a part in a developmental process that leads to violence on school campuses.

In short, not all students who have risk factors associated with antisocial behavior or delinquency involve themselves in rule-breaking behavior. Risk and resilience theory suggests that students who do not end up with negative outcomes, despite the existing risks, have some individual resiliency or protective factors within the environment that allow for more positive trajectories (Hawkins, Catalano, & Haggerty, 1993; Rutter, Giller, & Hagell, 1998). The net effect of the presence of such protective and resilience mechanisms is that the prediction model, if accounting for only individual risk factors, becomes less accurate.

An additional challenge to accurate prediction is that research that identifies and studies markers does a poor job of documenting the contribution of environmental influences to antisocial behavior. This omission is particularly problematic in the discussion of school discipline markers. While student behavior is a salient contributor to disciplinary referral, so are teacher tolerance and classroom management skill, administrative decision-making, and even local and national politics. As we discuss later in this article, these variations in school environment create a variety of situational contexts that muddy the prediction for individual behavior. School contexts do have a powerful influence on violence when it is seen as SCHOOL violence as opposed the YOUTH violence (see Furlong & Morrison, 2000 for further definition of this distinction).

Other student characteristics associated with school discipline. In addition to behavioral characteristics, other student characteristics that may or may not be behavior-related appear to be associated with the process and outcome of school discipline. Students with disabilities are particularly prone to involvement in school discipline actions and later involvement with the juvenile justice system. Youth in the juvenile justice system have a higher incidence of learning and emotional problems (diagnosed and undiagnosed) than the general population (SRI International, 1997). Leone (1994) found that as many as 70% of incarcerated youth have some kind of disabling condition. Students with learning and emotional disabilities are arrested at a higher rate than their nondisabled peers (SRI International, 1997). McFadden et al. (1992) reported that students with disabilities were more likely to be subjected to severe punishments, especially corporal punishment, and less likely to receive more moderate consequences, such as internal suspension. It would stand to reason that school-aged students with disabilities would be especially vulnerable to involvement with rule-breaking behavior, as well. Morrison and D’Incau (1997) found that students with disabilities were over-represented in school expulsions. These authors also found that within a sample of students with disabilities who had been recommended for expulsion, there were varied patterns of development of these disabilities, paralleled by difficulties in home, school, and community settings (Morrison & D’Incau, 2000).

The over-representation of minority and low-income students in the use of suspension has also been consistently documented (Brantlinger, 1991; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2000; Wu et al., 1982). In particular African-American students are more likely to be exposed to more punitive disciplinary strategies, such as corporal punishment (Shaw & Braden, 1990) or suspension (Children’s Defense Fund, 1975; Costenbader & Markson, 1994; Kaeser, 1979; Massachusetts Advocacy Center, 1986; McCarthy & Hoge, 1987; Skiba et al., 1997; Thornton & Trent, 1988) and less likely to receive mild disciplinary sanctions when referred for an infraction (McFadden et al., 1992). Neither socioeconomic status nor higher rates of African-American misbehavior are able to account for these discrepancies. If anything, available research suggests that African-American students tend to receive harsher punishments than Caucasian students, and that those
harsher consequences may be administered for less severe offenses (McFadden et al., 1992; Shaw & Braden, 1990; Skiba et al., 2000).

Together, these findings support suggestions that cultural discontinuities in many schools and classrooms place African-American students at an educational disadvantage, and contribute to the over-referral of those students for disciplinary consequences (Townsend, 2000). In general, it is difficult to know what overrepresentation of students of color or students with disabilities in discipline means. But these findings suggest that any early identification system based on school discipline must include careful monitoring for disparate treatment of students with disabilities and minority students.

**Environmental Contributions to School Discipline**

In a multivariate model, the best predictions come from accounting for as much variance in the equation as possible. Most research to date has focused on the individual characteristics that may lead a student to break rules, sometimes in a violent fashion. It is more difficult to document and account for the effects of risk and protection within the environment, yet it is apparent that classroom and school characteristics contribute a significant source of variance to school disciplinary events and outcomes.

**Classroom and school predictors of school discipline.** Classroom and school characteristics are a significant source of variance in predicting school disciplinary actions. At a molar level, schools have been implicated in the contribution to antisocial behavior through practices such as punitive disciplinary practices, lack of clarity about rules, expectations and consequences, failure to consider individual differences and overall high rates of academic failure (Sugai & Horner, 1999). Hinshaw (1992) notes that academic failure in the early school years contributes to frustration, peer rejection, and concomitant aggressive behavior.

At a molecular level, classroom and school variation appears to make a substantial contribution to who is referred or suspended. In one investigation at the middle school level, two thirds of all disciplinary referrals came from 25% of the school’s teachers (Skiba et al., 1997). Rates of suspension are also influenced by a variety of school factors. Schools with higher rates of suspension have been reported to have higher student-teacher ratios and a lower level of academic quality (Hellman & Beaton, 1986), spend more time on discipline-related matters (Davis & Jordan, 1994), and pay significantly less attention to issues of school climate (Bickel & Qualls, 1980). Indeed, Wu et al. (1982) reported that school and district characteristics, such as teacher attitudes, administrative centralization, quality of school governance, and teacher perception of student achievement, explained a greater proportion of the variance in school suspension than student attitudes and behavior.

**Differing discipline philosophies/implementation.** Administrative philosophies and variations in interpretation and implementation of rules and policies are a major source of variation for discipline referral, suspension, or expulsion rates at the school level. Bowditch (1993) reported that repeated school violations constituted the most frequent reason for suspension in the inner-city school she studied, and found that the disciplinarians in troubled urban schools often view their role in large measure as dealing with persistent “troublemakers” who challenge the institution’s authority.

In contrast to the view of school discipline measures as a discipline “event” and a way to control student behavior, there is increasing recognition that students who break the school rules are in need of some additional form of academic, social, or personal assistance. The provision of this assistance, as part of the punishment, could potentially enhance the protective factors in the child’s environment or enhance their personal resilience. For example, in one study school admin-
Administrators interviewed about the topic of school discipline revealed that they used the office referral or suspension event as an opportunity to contact the parent and bring them into the circle of concern about the student’s behavior (Morrison, Morrison, & Minjarez, 1999). Some would also use these events as an opportunity to pull in support from community agencies, depending on the needs of the student. These system-level actions have a potential to interrupt the negative trajectory of student misbehavior.

Morrison et al. (1999) noted that school principals’ beliefs about children who misbehave and about the nature and cause of their misbehavior were important determinants of whether they approached discipline from a punitive or learning perspective. Two overall approaches were distinguished. The first approach was an emphasis on the rule-breaking behavior and the desire to deliver consequences. The overall driving theme for these principals was the need to control the students’ behavior and a perspective about the behavior that was “black-and-white” (i.e., a rule was broken, the student must suffer the consequence). These principals did not necessarily see the need to involve the parent or bring in external resources to provide for support and possible remediation. The second approach was characterized by a focus on potential contributing influences for the rule-breaking behavior. These principals explored the issues with the parents and sought out resources to assist the child and their family with ongoing problems. Their emphasis was on assisting the child to improve their behavior and overall school functioning. In general, schools who had principals that endorsed the first, “get tough” approach had more suspensions than those who endorsed the second “student support” approach. Principals in the second group were more likely to explore and pursue non-punitive consequences for the behavior in question. Related to the question of prediction, the principals who adopted a supportive, non-punitive approach would be contributing inadvertently to error in the prediction of violent behavior; they would be instrumental in bringing protective factors and resilience into the lives of these students, helping them to decrease their use of aggression or rule-breaking behavior.

Suspension/Expulsion as an Intervention

The Latin root of the word discipline is “to learn.” Thus, given a literal interpretation, all forms of school discipline such as office referrals, suspension, and expulsion should be designed for student learning. However, given the influence of zero-tolerance policies and mentalities, the main “learning” message is that the student’s behavior is not acceptable and will not be tolerated. These discipline events typically are designed as just that . . . an event. The purpose of the event is to send a message to the student and to others, that a line has been crossed and the punishment is exclusion from the setting. This view of discipline begs the questions (a) Is the event as a punishment effective? and (b) In the case of students with disabilities, have important educational rights have been denied?

Part of the prediction question related to suspension and expulsion is the impact of those disciplinary measures on the student and on their future behavior. Very little research has documented the effects of these disciplinary actions as measures of change. Although they are designed as punishment (i.e., setting events designed to decrease the target behavior), it is unclear whether or not student behavior changes in a positive fashion as a result. In fact, some experts argue that school disciplinary consequences may accelerate the course of delinquency by reducing supervision and increasing the opportunity to associate with deviant peers (Skiba & Peterson, 1999) and putting the student at odds with potential source of adult support at the school (Comer & Poussaint, 1992). However, some students who are disciplined, such as the “first-timers” described by Morrison and D’Incau (1997), do respond with an awareness of avoiding trouble in the future and with the benefit of heightened vigilance by family and school personnel through supervision and
support. Thus, given the unknown contribution of disciplinary processes to future student behavior, predicting from records of discipline events is of questionable utility.

There is very limited professional or research literature about “best practices” for suspension and expulsion. Over the past 20 years, a handful of articles have appeared that address the use of “in-school” suspension as an alternative to avoid total school exclusion (Bacon, 1990; Chobot & Garibaldi, 1982; Diem, 1988; Dupper, 1998; Mizell, 1978); however, data-based evaluations of these strategies are limited and do not begin to answer the plethora of questions that need to be addressed. These questions include (a) Are student outcomes improved as a result of the intervention? (b) Are subsequent discipline referrals reduced? and (c) Are school-wide rates of discipline reduced?

Sugai et al. (2000) present a multilevel system of school-wide discipline strategies, noting that students who exhibit different types and different levels of severity of antisocial behavior will need different types and intensities of intervention to arrest and prevent future behavior. The relevance of this model for the prediction of violent behavior at school is that the prediction of violent behavior may be different at each of these levels. A number of other researchers have proposed preventive models that focus on school-wide reform (Knoff & Batsche, 1985) and a comprehensive combination of program components with documented effectiveness such as skill training (conflict resolution/social skills), parent involvement, classroom and school-wide behavior management, functional assessment and individual behavior plans, school safety planning, and school and district data management systems (Skiba & Peterson, 2000).

Although these authors advocate for proactive, preventive school-wide discipline plans, at the point where a student is being excluded from school for disciplinary purposes, there is little to guide school personnel in how to make such actions part of a learning, improvement process. In recognition of the potential problem with denying education to a student, some states do mandate an alternative form of education for excluded children, as does the IDEA legislation for students with disabilities. As alternative programs continue to expand in response to increased disciplinary vigilance of the past few years, best practices for alternative programming will need further examination and explication (Bear, 1999).

**Goodness-of-Fit Between Individuals and Systems**

In the previous paragraphs, we outlined discipline practices that potentially have an impact on student outcomes. The variations in these practices will contribute to either positive or negative student trajectories. It is important to recognize that these trajectories develop over time. It is likely that the influence of a discipline “event” will be affected by the numerous environmental and individual circumstances that accompany the event. In this sense, the student’s behavior and the system’s reaction to that behavior are in constant interaction. The ultimate outcome for the student will be influence by the extent to which there is “goodness-of-fit” between the child’s characteristics and the school’s approach to discipline (Thomas, Chess, & Birch, 1968). Students with a high number of risk factors for delinquency may fit better in a school where the principal or school leader in charge of discipline takes a broad view of the student’s behavior and garners support to keep that student in school and behaving in productive ways.

**Conclusions**

Any effective early warning system must meet two important criteria. First, as an early identification and screening system, it must yield reliable and consistent predictions. Thus, early warning signs must be capable of being reliably measured, so that there is a high level of certainty that the behaviors and students identified are those that most need assistance. Second, a primary requirement, perhaps the most important requirement, for early identification is that it enables
effective intervention or treatment. The U. S. Department of Education guide *Early Warning, Timely Response* (Dwyer et al., 1998) counsels that the primary use of any early warning system is not to target troublemakers, but to provide help for at-risk students identified through such a system. Unfortunately, accurate prediction may be a double-edged sword: a high level of accurate prediction of future disorder from present behavior may simply mean that our treatments have not been particularly effective in influencing the trajectory of disordered behavior.

In school discipline, as in much of education and psychology, the ability to predict disorder seems to far outrun the ability to positively influence the course of disorder. Studies of school suspension have found that up to 40% of school suspensions are due to repeat offenders (Bowditch, 1993; Costenbader & Markson, 1994), suggesting that this segment of the school population is decidedly not “getting the message.” Tobin, Sugai, and Colvin (1996) reported that, contrary to their original hypothesis, students suspended in the 6th grade were more likely to be referred or suspended in middle school, prompting the authors to conclude that for some students “suspension functions as a reinforcer . . . rather than as a punisher” (p. 91). In the long term, school suspension appears to be moderately correlated with school dropout (Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollack, & Rock, 1986; Wehlage & Rutter, 1986). From a standpoint of prediction, these data suggest that school suspension may be a useful predictor of future disorder. From a standpoint of treatment, however, these data provide a rather distressing insight into the failure of current disciplinary approaches to positively affect long-term outcomes.

In this article, we developed the case that students who are involved in the types of offenses that are disciplined by school systems are at-risk for a variety of negative outcomes, some of which may be violent and unsafe behaviors that threaten the overall safety of school campuses. However, the extent to which we can make accurate predictions from past discipline histories to future violent incidents is compromised by the variations in discipline practices among school campuses and limitations in capturing other environmental sources of risk and protection. Because the science of prediction has yet to capture these sources of error, we propose an alternate goal for educators. While we recognize the importance of protecting school campuses from the dangers of violent behavior, educators should attempt to undermine the science of violence prediction by making process of predicting future behavior from past behavior more error-prone; that is, they should institute effective school-wide prevention programs that address antisocial behavior early. Educators can thereby “bust” the predictions by making them meaningless and irrelevant in students’ lives. Effective educational, behavioral, and mental health interventions may serve to interrupt the negative trajectories of students who would be expected, from past behavior, to commit the violent offenses of the future. Early warning systems, then, to be effective would need to factor in the presence (or lack of) effective early interventions, the nature of school administrator discipline philosophy, and the availability (or lack of) of secondary and tertiary intervention possibilities in order to provide “accurate” warning signs.

**References**


