ZERO-TOLERANCE DISCIPLINE POLICIES AND SCHOOL BUS SAFETY

by

ANTHONY WILLIAMS

(Under the Direction of Sheneka M. Williams)

ABSTRACT

The job of the school bus driver is one of the toughest jobs in Winn County Public Schools (WCPS) district, specifically at Xavier Elementary School (XES).[1] The purpose of the school bus is to transport student riders in a safe and orderly manner daily. This mixed methods research study examines the role of the bus driver in the larger school-community context and how bus ride infractions affect learning outcomes. This study also examines the impact of zero-tolerance discipline policies on school bus safety. An interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach (Reid, Flowers, & Larkin, 2005) was utilized to collect and triangulate data from a focus group, semi-structured interviews, baseline local school bus discipline data, a questionnaire, and observations of bus drivers, while transporting students. The school bus driver is responsible for providing an orderly bus environment where students can have more positive thoughts about learning and fewer concerns about violence. The XES Action Research (AR) team implemented an effective school-wide bus intervention program to reduce the number of violent infractions on the school bus, minimize bus suspensions, while improving the student learning outcomes on the Quarterly District Assessments (QDA), as compared to the neighboring elementary schools. Findings suggest that bus safety is paramount to the start of each day of teaching and learning.

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[1] Both Winn County and Xavier Elementary are pseudonyms.

INDEX WORDS: school bus suspension, safety, zero-tolerance discipline policy, absenteeism,

student achievement, school attendance

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DEDICATION

Tuwanda Rush Williams, my wife, soulmate, and Proverbs 31 woman, you made this journey

possible with your prayers, love, and commitment. I love you with every fiber in my body.

and

A.J and Autumn, Williams my children, academic role models, and greatest blessings on earth.

You inspire me to be a better student, father, husband, and man of God. I love you, equally.

and

My parents, Rachel and Nathaniel Williams, I am infinitely grateful for your sacrifices,

unwavering prayers, and work ethic on behalf of the entire family (my brothers and sister).

and

Jake John Rush

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

School bus referrals at Xavier Elementary School (XES) are one part of a larger

number of discipline infractions. The XES Parent-Student Handbook contains zero-tolerance

discipline policies for bus riders, Winn County Public Schools (WCPS) district finds it

challenging to fill its bus driver positons annually, due to student growth and other factors such

as salary and daily morning and afternoon split shifts. Therefore, the district has an ongoing

recruitment campaign to hire, train, and retain bus drivers for schools, including XES.

Context

"My bus is out of control," says a third grader. "The bus is late and loud every day,"

rants the parent of a kindergartener. "The bus driver is being petty on purpose," complains the

grandmother of a first and a fifth-grader. "My son said he didn't do it! How am I going to get

him to school?" asks father. These are just a few of the frequent bus issues, emails and voice

messages from students and parents that sometimes lead to a bus infraction, with each bus

referral averaging one hour from investigation to notifying the parent of the offender. The

common offenders for both non-bus related infractions and bus violations typically represent

10% of the student population.

Concerns about school bus safety and order, which include the recruitment and retention

of bus drivers, are not new to WCPS. Difficulty retaining bus drivers has been a reoccurring

issue for decades due to exponential growth in the district, low salary, and bus routes that are

more challenging than others. XES has twenty regular and five special-needs buses that serve

the community. In 2014-2015, several bus routes experienced an increase in disruptive and

distracting student behaviors, known as Rule 13 bus violations (see Figure 1).
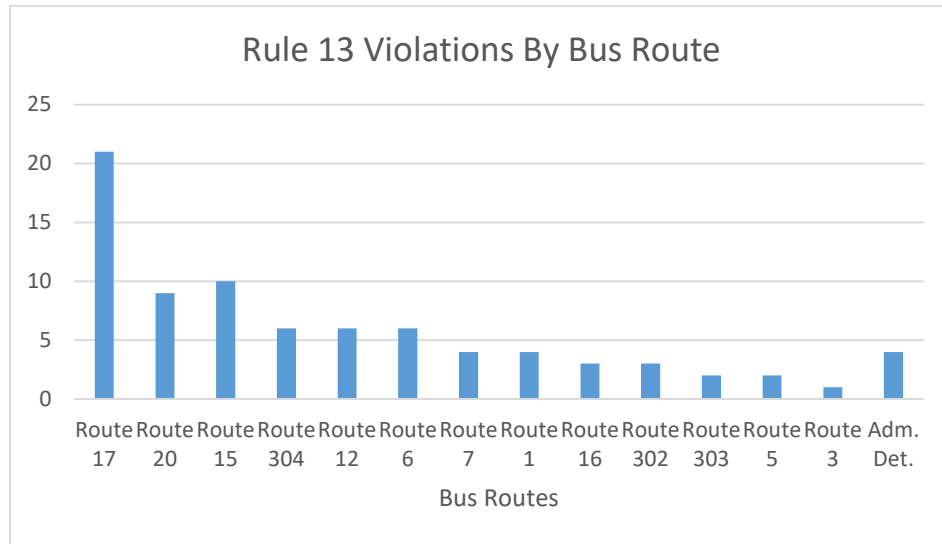
Figure 1. Rule 13 violations by bus route.

Winn County Public Schools (WCPS) is a large urban school district located in the

southeastern region of the United States. WCPS is one of the largest school systems in the

nation with 139 schools, an enrollment of more than 178,000 students from Pre-K – 12th grade

and a teaching and support staff of 22,000 for the 2016-2017 school year. WCPS is one of the

largest employers in the area and depends on the support of its community and business

stakeholders for continued academic and behavioral success. School district personnel from

across the nation visit WCPS to study its operational strategies and methods for achieving

continuous and quality improvement. It has an accountability system in place to predict the

resources needed in several areas, such as student enrollment, staffing, and instructional

resources.

XES is a very transient school for both students and staff. It is one of several Title I schools in close proximity of another, due to overcrowding at XES. WCPS simultaneously constructed and opened two elementary schools, within five miles of each other to relieve overcrowding at XES. Students, faculty, and supporting staff members were assigned to the new schools based on several factors, such as place of residence, date of hire, and the opportunity to volunteer. The changes encouraged some families to move to a different area within the district because they were unhappy with their new school and the changing demographics of the community.

Demographically, XES is a predominantly African-American school, with 79% of students receiving free or reduced price lunch. The student enrollment is 72% African-American; 13% Hispanic; 8% White; 5 percent multiracial; and 2% Asian.

XES discipline practices are congruent with the Student Code of Conduct for Winn County Public Schools (WCPS), which includes a system of 13 Discipline Rules and Consequences for on-campus and bus infractions.   XES noted an increase in non-bus related (Rule 1-12) discipline data over the three -year period from 2012-2015 (WCPS Student Discipline Summary Reports, 2012-2015; see Table 5).   In 2012- 2013, there were 77 Rule 13 bus violations, and by 2014-2015 the number of bus infractions had increased to 81, an increase which may seem miniscule. However, the noted increase involved violent Rule 13 infractions that jeopardize the bus driver's ability to safely navigate through local morning and afternoon traffic, which could cause a collision, bodily harm or death for the riders. There were some Rule 13 bus infractions, such as "Codes C--not following directions" and "G--distracting the bus driver" that were more prevalent than non-violent offenses during 2014-2015 (see Table 1). When dangerous and violent bus infractions, such as fighting, throwing objects, and spitting

occur, the bus driver is expected to safely pull the bus over to stop the offense before the offending students' siblings, cousins, and friends become active participants in the infraction (Codes WCPS Bus Discipline Form, 2015). Additionally, innocent students sometimes become victims while witnessing vandalism, vulgar language, and intentional physical contact toward the bus driver from student riders (WCPS Bus Discipline Form, 2015). Parents are upset when their child is suspended from the bus for one or more days, and some parents wait at the bus stop to voice their dissatisfaction with the bus driver. How do the bus drivers' encounters with irate parents impact on bus driver retention? How might the numbers of bus discipline infractions represent violence in Winn County in general? And how might bus discipline infractions be a response to zero-tolerance discipline policies at Xavier Elementary School (XES)?
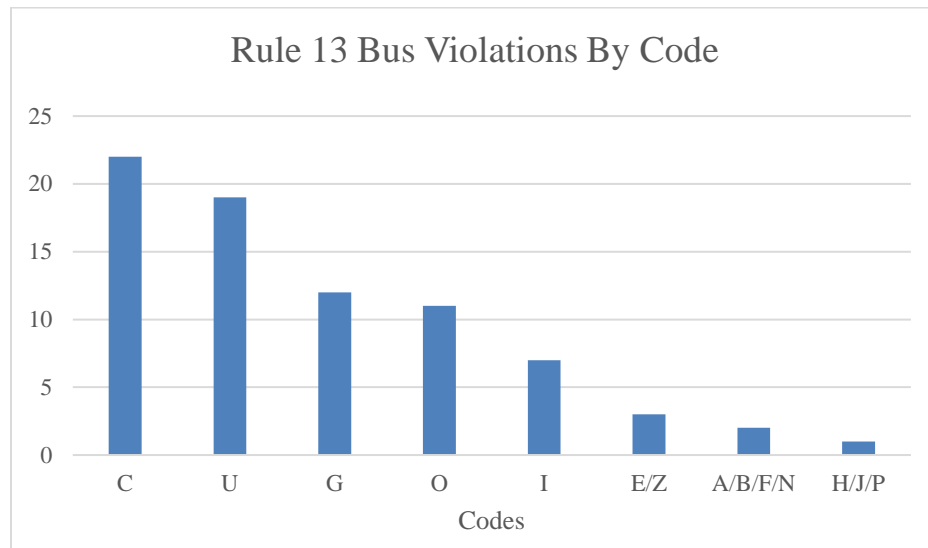
Figure 2. Rule 13 bus violations by code.

Pertinent information, such as staff rosters, emergency plans and room assignments must be updated annually due to retirements, promotion and resignations. The transient nature of the school's community, students, and staff may be a challenge that will have a significant impact

on the problem addressed in this study. For example, at the close of the 2014-2015 school year, WCPS discussed rotating transportation bus managers to new areas to afford them an opportunity to work in diverse environments. Ironically, a new bus manager might influence the effectiveness of the novice and veteran bus drivers serving the students and community of XES when processing bus referrals. The new bus manager would be expected to learn the established procedures for investigating and submitting bus discipline referrals to the local school in a timely manner, which could impact safety and order on a moving or stationary school bus (see Figure 3). Violent and inappropriate bus behaviors from one student can interfere with the pleasant ride of others, negatively impacting students' attitudes and influencing the instructional start in several classrooms before the bus riders even enter the school building. During the 2014-2015 school year, 68% of bus violations happened while the bus was traveling to or from XES, 26% occurred while at a bus stop or parked at XES, and 5% of the infractions were offenses that originated in the community and continued as students boarded the bus. These community-based infractions are most difficult to investigate because they stop momentarily and then escalate to a dangerous Rule 13 bus violation, while the bus is in motion.
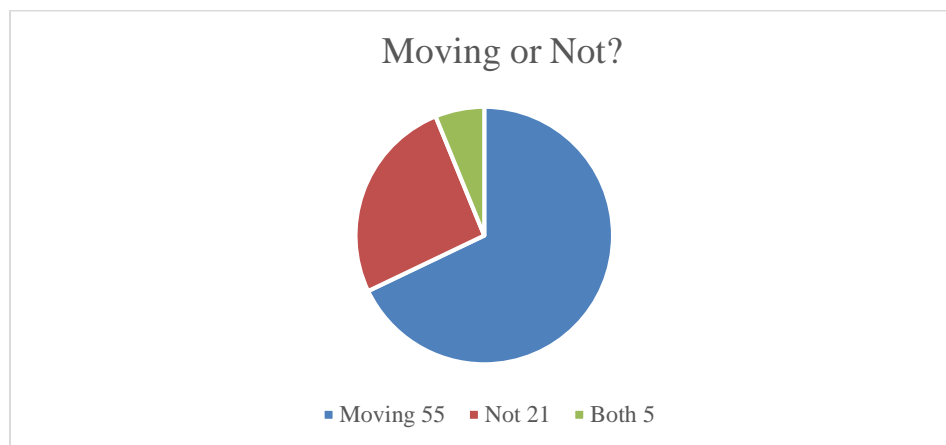
Figure 3. Rule 13 violation grouped by whether the bus was moving or not.

Purpose and Research Questions

As an educator, I completely understand the impact the community and family can have on a student's success and/or failure, from a practical and theoretical perspective. However, as an African American administrator collaborating with Caucasian WCPS Transportation team members, there are times we disagree on the definition of violence, disrespect, and what action deserves a warning, Administrator Detention, or referral (see Figure 1). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Division of Violence Prevention defines school violence as violence that can happen "on school property, on the way to or from school" (Understanding School Violence Fact Sheet, 2015). The spread of violence in schools and on buses is a microcosm of societal issues locally and nationally. I share my perspective in this regard when I conduct investigations with the Transportation team at my school, but the bus managers are not receptive. Delpit (2006) asserts that even when presented with examples, some Caucasians think they know what is best for everybody, including students of color. Hence, I acknowledge and will address my personal concerns and perspective as part of the AR project.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to address the cause of discipline infractions at Xavier Elementary School (XES) and their impact on bus safety. The questions are as follows:

1. How do school bus infractions affect students' learning opportunities through absenteeism?

2. What is the relationship, if any, between school bus infractions and student achievement outcomes?

3. How does the action research process affect the number of bus infractions for students?

As a benchmark for the study, I will utilize the three-year trend of discipline data from XES. During 2012-2015, the Student Disciplinary Summary exposed bus violations as a large percentage of the total discipline infractions annually. There may be a need to further analyze the data and determine if school and community stakeholders should have input in the solution.

I anticipate that the bus drivers, students and community members will play a role in analyzing the bus data from both the morning and afternoon routes. In the three years highlighted a distinct number of students (10% of the student enrollment) who account for the zero-tolerance discipline infractions, which may also involve a select group of bus drivers. I will document the data-driven conversations that happen during the AR sessions individually, in small groups and whole groups to further investigate. Additionally, a discussion of student accountability for their conduct when they are "indirectly supervised" on the bus will continue. Consequently, I anticipate learning how the level representatives on the AR team view the problem and what ideas are shared in order to learn more about bus routes, drivers, students, and the process before writing a bus discipline referral. This study will benefit the local school and perhaps it will be transferable to area schools and district-wide.

Definitions

There are several terms pertinent to the study that are commonly used in the elementary educational setting, such as at-risk, needs, violence, referral, infraction, Individual Education Plan (IEP), and violation. The term "at-risk" is defined as a "state or condition marked by a high level of risk." Needs are "physiological or psychological requirements for the well-being of an organism." It is essential these basic needs are met to ensure survival and maintain existence within a structured environment. Violence is defined as "the use or exertion of physical force so as to injure, harm or abuse someone or property." Referral is the completion of a document to

send to "a person to a place for treatment, help or advice." Infraction is "an act that breaks a law

or rule (synonymous with violation)." An IEP is defined as a specialized academic and/or

behavior plan for a student that qualifies for special education services. An IEP drives the goals

and objectives for the student's educational program. Violation is "the act of doing something

that is not allowed by law or rule; ignoring or interfering with a person's rights; the act of

showing disrespect for property or a person (synonymous with infraction)." (Merriam-Webster

Online, n.d.). Thus, the terms explored in this section may influence the presence of violence,

safety and order on the school bus (Figure 4).
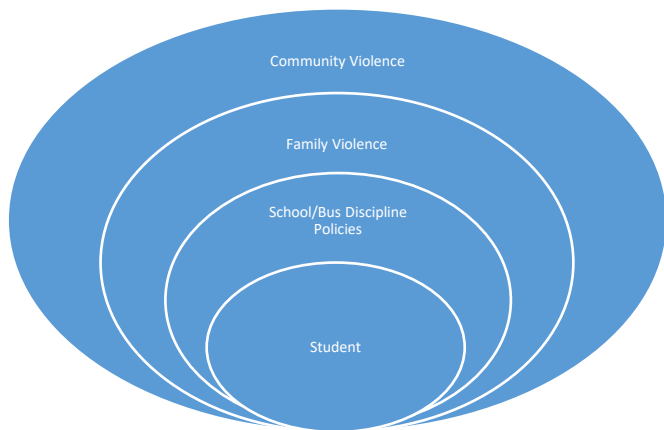
Figure 4. Influence of violence on the students.

I have identified the problem by examining our Three Year Trend (2012-2015) Student

Discipline Summary Report as evidence for this study. The influence of violence in the school

community negatively impacts student behaviors. Xavier Elementary School (XES) houses five

self-contained Emotional Behavioral Disorder (EBD) classrooms that account for many of the

violent Rule 1, 2, 4, 5 and 13 infractions (School Disruption, Damage to School Property,

Threat/Intimidate/Physical Contact with Staff, Threat/Intimidate/Physical Contact with a

Student, and Bus Violation, respectively). XES staff members are trained to restrain the EBD

students during instructional and non-instructional periods. Additionally, five Special Services

buses transport special education students; who have documented needs included in their IEP. Rule 13 violations are safety-oriented and may include, but are not limited to, issues that distract the bus driver, such as standing/walking in the aisles while the bus is in motion, bullying/teasing, inappropriate language, and roughhousing/fighting, to mention a few (see Table 1).

Table 1

XES Three Year Trend (2012- 2015) Student Discipline Summary

Rule	Violations 12-13	Violations 13-14	Violations 14-15	Difference
1. School Disruption	40	52	23	-17
2. Damage/Steal School Property	9	2	1	-8
3. Damage/Steal Private Property	3	2	3	0
4. Threat/Intimidate/Physical Contact with Staff	11	12	21	+10
5. Threat/Intimidate/Physical Contact with a Student	58	68	37	-21
6. Weapon Possession	1	3	0	-1
7. Drug Possession	0	0	1	+1
8. Failure to Follow Directions or Command	3	3	1	-2
9. Sexual Misconduct	3	3	9	+6
10. Tardies/AWOLS	5	3	1	-4
11. Conduct Subversive to Good Order	0	0	0	0
12. Chronic Behavior Problem Student	0	0	0	0
13. Bus Violations	77	54	81	+4
Total Referrals for SY	210	202	178	-32
Total Students for Referrals	110	111	101	-9

My Role

As an Assistant Principal, I am charged with overseeing bus discipline for XES and I am excited and well positioned to complete this study. I acknowledge the many assumptions and ideologies held by members of the WCPS Transportation Department, such as bus drivers, bus

managers and supervisor. I am hopeful about conducting this study because of the access that I have been granted to analyze data, review an abundance of documents, and examine a potential connection between zero-tolerance discipline policies and school bus safety. However, after looking into the issue of zero-tolerance discipline policies I have been made aware of a need for systematic change and the further investigation of alternatives. I have been at XES for over a decade and have witnessed many changes in student behavior during my tenure, including the shift from minor offenses to violent outbursts. My goal during this study is to acquire recommendations from WCPS staff and community members to improve safety on the school bus, which includes updating the zero-tolerance discipline policies in the Parent-Student Handbook. Additionally, I am aware of my experiences and knowledge of the local school and recognize there is a need for a change in our school-wide behavior management system. As the administrator responsible for bus discipline, I am well positioned to keep an accurate account of my interactions with individuals and groups while contributing to the progress of this study.

Annually, XES monitors the alignment of their student code of conduct, handbooks, and discipline policies with those of the WCPS district. However, during the past decade XES has experienced a change in the community, more specifically in the socio-economic status of its students. The construction and opening of two new schools and redrawing of attendance zones have resulted in more students riding the bus each day has and increased the importance of students behaving appropriately in transit to and from school. Consequently, the bus safety instructions and riding procedures regularly shared with the students and families have proven ineffective because discipline infractions have increased and are negatively influencing several aspects of the school environment. The purpose of this study is to address the cause of discipline infractions at XES and their impact on bus safety. XES is located in WCPS with a

predominately African-American population and houses five Special Education self-contained programs for three attendance zones in the district. The students in the kindergarten through second, third, and fourth-fifth grade combination self-contained classrooms have qualified as Emotional Behavior Disorder (EBD) and require restraint due to their violent outbreaks in school and on the bus.

The spread of violence in schools and on buses is a microcosm of societal issues locally and nationally. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) Division of Violence Prevention defines school violence as violence that can happen "on school property, on the way to or from school" (Understanding School Violence Fact Sheet, 2015). Everytown for Gun Safety (2014) is a gun control advocacy group that tracks incidents reported by the media. There have been 48 shootings on K-12 school campuses in the past two years, 18 mass shootings since 1966, and 120 planned assaults that were thwarted in schools across America. Even in small towns and school districts, there are signs that less serious incidents in schools and on buses continue to pose important zero-tolerance discipline challenges for education employees and decision makers, which is additionally challenged by many interpretations of its definition. For example, the Cambridge Dictionary Online (2015) defines "zero-tolerance" as

"the act of punishing all criminal or unacceptable behaviors severely, even if it is not very serious," and "policy" as a "set of ideas or a plan of what to do in particular situations that has been agreed to by a government, business, etc." The U. S. Department of Education defines zero-tolerance policies in two separate documents, "Sec. 14601 of the Elementary and Secondary Schools Act (ESEA) 1994 and the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) Sec. 4141 of 2001 (Potts, et al., 2003). NCLB Act stated:

Each State receiving Federal funds under this Act shall have in effect a state law

requiring local educational agencies to expel from school for a period of not less than one

year a student who is determined to have brought a weapon to school. The state law

allows the chief administering officer of such local school educational agency to modify

such expulsion requirement for a student on a "case-by-case basis" (U.S. Department of

Education, Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools, 2006).

WCPS district has modified its zero-tolerance discipline policy in its handbooks to address

bullying, threatening/intimidating physical contact and any behaviors that impact the teaching,

learning and safe transporting of students. Additionally, WCPS ensures that due process is

extended to all students. After two decades of policies and practices grounded in punitive

measures to remove allegedly disruptive students from school, there is a need for drastic reform

that will improve the bus ride for students. McKenzie and Skrla (2011) share that low-income

students who reside in high-crime/high-poverty neighborhoods across America may be at a

greater risk for participating in zero-tolerance policy offenses that typically result in suspension

or expulsion. Cornell and Mayer (2010) note that mischief and violence in schools and on buses

is not a single problem, but rather a variety of problems and challenges that can range from

playful misconduct to disrespect, teasing, and disruptive outbursts. Students in high-poverty

attendance zones like XES may utilize survival practices that include protecting themselves at all

costs. Furthermore, they argue that school safety is relevant to staff attrition, student

engagement, community poverty, academic achievement, and many other areas in education

(Cornell & Mayer, 2010). Skiba and Peterson (2000) state that the use of zero-tolerance policies

has not consistently led to safe schools, even when considering gender, socio-economic status

and the ethnicity of the student. As an administrator who oversees school-related discipline and

bus violations, I understand the impact the bus climate can have on the success and productivity of students. Thus it is essential to have an effective driver on each bus. Each morning the bus driver is the first representative of XES whom the students encounter. The bus driver's interaction with his student passengers can determine if the students exit the bus with clenched fists, frowns and teary eyes or with smiles, laughter, and cheerfulness.

Initial Findings

School violence has been an area of concern for years in WCPS, and in July of 2014, the Board of Education approved funding to hire more School Resource Officers (SROs) to support schools in the district.

The initial findings from this analysis stage contradict the amount of violence in the area surrounding XES. The community consists of single family dwellings, manufactured homes, rental properties, and apartment complexes where sex offenders reside. Acts of violence and crime in the surrounding area are frequently reported by the news media, which influences local policies and practices. The implementation of zero-tolerance discipline policies is one way government officials "get tough" on school violence, while creating initiatives at the national, state, district and local level. Based on the XES 2013-2014 School Safety Perceptions Survey, 82.2% of students agreed or strongly agreed that they felt safe at school and 97.4% of parents agreed or strongly agreed that "their child's school was safe." However, Rule 13 bus violations are distributed across all grade levels at XES (see Figure 5).
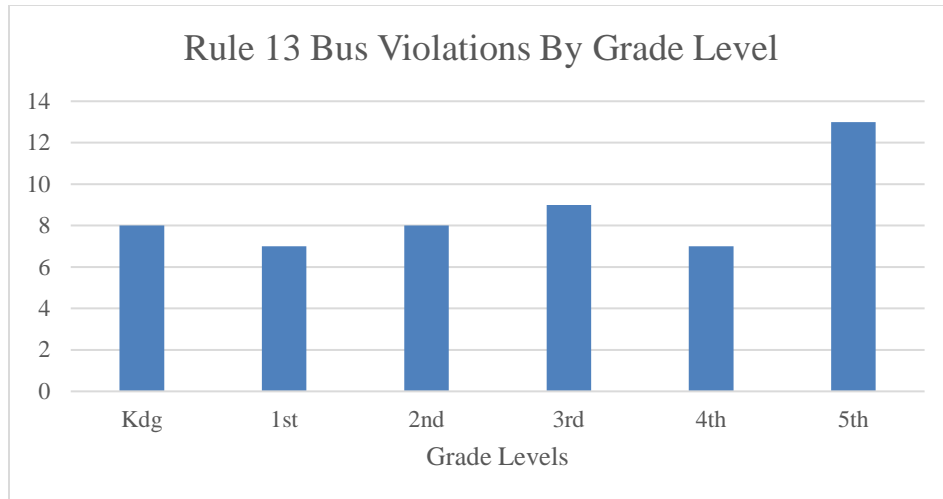
Figure 5. Rule 13 bus violations by grade level.

These results reveal that some stakeholders may not completely understand the terminology related to zero-tolerance discipline policies and the consequences. 52 students were responsible for the 81 bus violations for the 2014-2015 school year, which included 23 students in kindergarten through second grade and 29 students in third through fifth grade. The practical problem to be addressed is that school bus referrals at XES are one part of a larger number of discipline infractions annually.

Problem Grounded in Literature

From colonial times to Columbine, Colorado the study of school violence has been a topic of interest over the years, especially since the Gun-Free Act of 1994. Information from surveys and research exploring zero-tolerance discipline policies, suspensions, expulsions, and their influence on school violence can be found in Figure 8 below. Researchers, legislators, and community activists have all contributed their input for possible solutions to end crime, violence and other infractions in American schools. The Indicators of School Crime and Safety (1992-1998) report that 63 homicides occurred in American schools between 1992 -1994 and 34

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homicides in the 1997-1998 school year. In a national survey of youth, the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control Division of Violence Prevention (2013) reported 7.1% of the participants missed one or more days of school in a 30- day period because they felt unsafe. A survey of 272 high school administrators by the US General Accounting Office (1999-2000) revealed the ratio of major offenses were 15 per 1,000 and 50 per 1,000 for regular and special education students, respectively. Additionally, the National Center for Education Statistics, (NCES, 2013) reported that 39% of all infractions (433,800 serious discipline violations) were reported by public school principals.

Table 2

American Schools and Violence

Organization(s) Date(s)	Title	Method(s)	Sampling	Results	Conclusion
CDC Violence Prevention (2015)	Understanding School Violence (qualitative)	The data were collected through a national survey of youth.	A national sampling of 9th – 12th graders was surveyed.	7.1% felt unsafe and were absent 1 or more days in a 30 day period.	The students were afraid to attend school.
Everytown for Gun Safety (2015)	Analysis of School Shootings	The group tracked media reports about violence in America.	Violent incident on K-12 American campuses were collected.	There were 48 shootings during 2012-2014 on school campuses.	Violence is rampant in K-12 schools across America.
US Department of Education & Department of Justice	Indicators of School Crime & Safety	Variables related to school safety were examined.	American students during 1992-1998 were monitored.	There were 97 homicides at American schools.	Violence and safety were a concern for Americans.
National Center for Education Statistics (2013)	Indicators of School Crime & Safety	Public school principals voluntarily reported the data.	US public schools in 2009-2010 were sampled and participated in the survey.	There were 433,800 serious discipline actions administered.	The findings revealed a need for safety concerns in American schools.
US General Accounting Office	Ratio of Serious Misconduct: Regular & Special Ed.	In 1992-2000 data were collected for incidents of serious misconduct.	A sampling of US public schools during the 2009-2010 SY were surveyed.	The ratios of 15:1000 (regular ed) and 50:1000 (special ed.) for serious misconduct were reported.	Nationally, special ed students account for a large number of serious offenses.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

School safety and order is essential to student academic progress. For decades, repeated

episodes of school campus violence and media coverage from Columbine to Oregon have

overshadowed the need to examine bus safety. Skiba (2012) states that in 1986, the Reagan

Administration introduced zero-tolerance discipline legislation that would require schools to

remove dangerous students from schools. The bill was unsuccessful, leaving many school

districts to adopt no-nonsense discipline consequences, extend the length of suspensions and

expulsions, and create a list of additional punishable infractions. It is the responsibility of the

state school districts and local school leaders, states Dunbar and Villarruel (2004), to ensure that

zero-tolerance discipline policies are interpreted and implemented fairly. Noguera (1995) reports

the fear of violence in schools led American legislatures and educational leaders to adopt

discipline policies that are increasingly punitive in nature. One example of a punitive discipline

policy is the Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994 (U. S. Department of Education, 2006). The Gun-

Free Schools Act of 1994 required each state to have "zero-tolerance" for students who bring

guns to school and/or school sponsored functions.   Potts, Njie, Detch, and Walton (2003) define

zero-tolerance, as it relates to discipline and behavior, as the "policy or practice of not tolerating

undesirable behavior, such as violence or illegal drugs, with the automatic imposition of severe

penalties even for first time offenses" (p. 12). States were given the latitude to modify their

Student Code of Conduct to include an array of offenses and infractions to "satisfy the

community" and ensure that schools were safe places to learn, free of violence (see Figure 6).

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National Level: Gun-Free Act of 1994 and "School Violence"

State Level: List of "weapons"

Zero Tolerance Policies- National

Zero Tolerance Policies- State

Zero Tolerance Policies- School

Zero Tolerance Policies- District

Local School- on campus and bus violations

District Level: Code of Conducts- Infractions and consequences
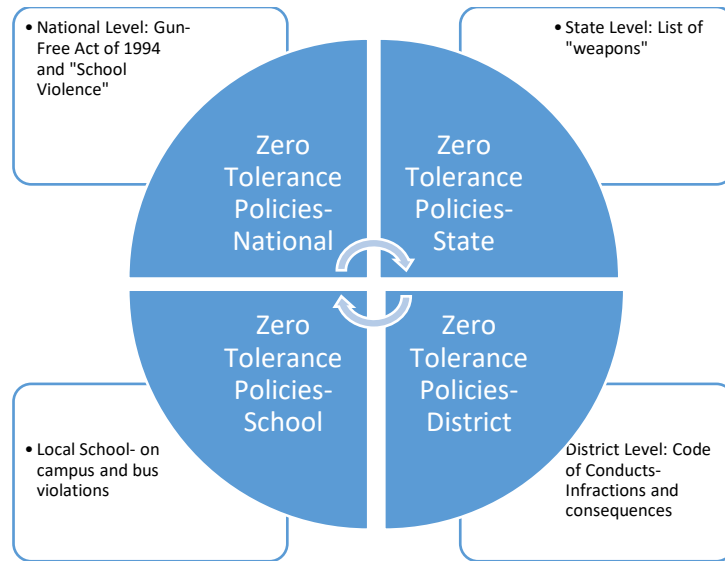
Figure 6. Impact of zero-tolerance discipline policies in schools.

The Gun-Free Act of 1994 (GFA of 1994) was implemented to get "tough" on school violence following the attack at Columbine High School in Colorado. The legislatures created "zero-tolerance" discipline policies from the national level to soothe the fears of their constituents, while maintaining due process for all students. The political goal was to eliminate "guns" from schools and require each state receiving federal funding to construct and enforce its own "zero-tolerance" policies for "weapons" (Mongan & Walker, 2012). The school districts within each state were expected to construct a Student Code of Conduct and implement it to decrease school transgressions, while removing unruly students. The local schools within the districts were expected to interpret the district-wide "zero-tolerance" discipline policies, while continuing to focus on creating safe and orderly schools and buses. This literature review contains journals, artifacts and other scholarly works from the 19th through the 21st century. Pertinent information from journals, such as Exceptional Children, Education and Urban Society, and the Peabody Journal of Education, documents released by the U. S. Department of Education Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools, and contributions from researchers, such as Delpit (2006),

Skiba (2001), Verdugo (2002), Payne (2013), and Maslow (1943) also contributed to the literature base of the study.

Theoretical Framework

I examine this study through the lens of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory (HNT). HNT was founded by humanist and Motivation Learning theorist Abraham Maslow in the early 20th century (Cherry, 2015). HNT is based primarily on satisfying your basic "physiological" needs in life, such as food, water, shelter, and warmth. These essential factors are positioned at the bottom of the hierarchy of needs pyramid. The next level, "safety needs" addresses the desire for security, stability, and freedom from harm. Maslow argues that safety can grossly influence the level of comfort and order within an environment. The pyramid progresses through increasingly sophisticated levels of need, including "social" needs "esteem" needs, and the final and top level "actualization" needs.

XES is located in a low socio-economic area where violence is present on a regular basis, which may impact the family dynamics and physiological needs of the students. Title I school with many of its students qualifying for free and reduced-priced lunch. The basic need for food may influence the critical thinking and problem solving skills of the students on a daily basis. Consequently, the desire to select the appropriate behavior at school and on the bus will aid in the transition between levels, and WCPS staff members, specifically bus drivers, can play a huge role in setting boundaries to create a welcoming and safe ride for the students. "Belonging" also known as a "social" need, refers to the connections students have with friends, family, and other important individuals, like educators and bus drivers. Research states that when students are invested and have ownership as a member of a team or bus route, their attitude might improve, which enables the students to move up the pyramid. HNT reveals the "Self-Esteem" needs, such

as achievement, mastery, recognition, and respect, are met as the confidence of the student increases. The final need located at the top of the pyramid is "Self-Actualization." At this level, the student has the creativity, talent, and innate abilities to pursue what makes him/her happy, thus attaining the measure of success for the student, school, and community (see Figure 7).
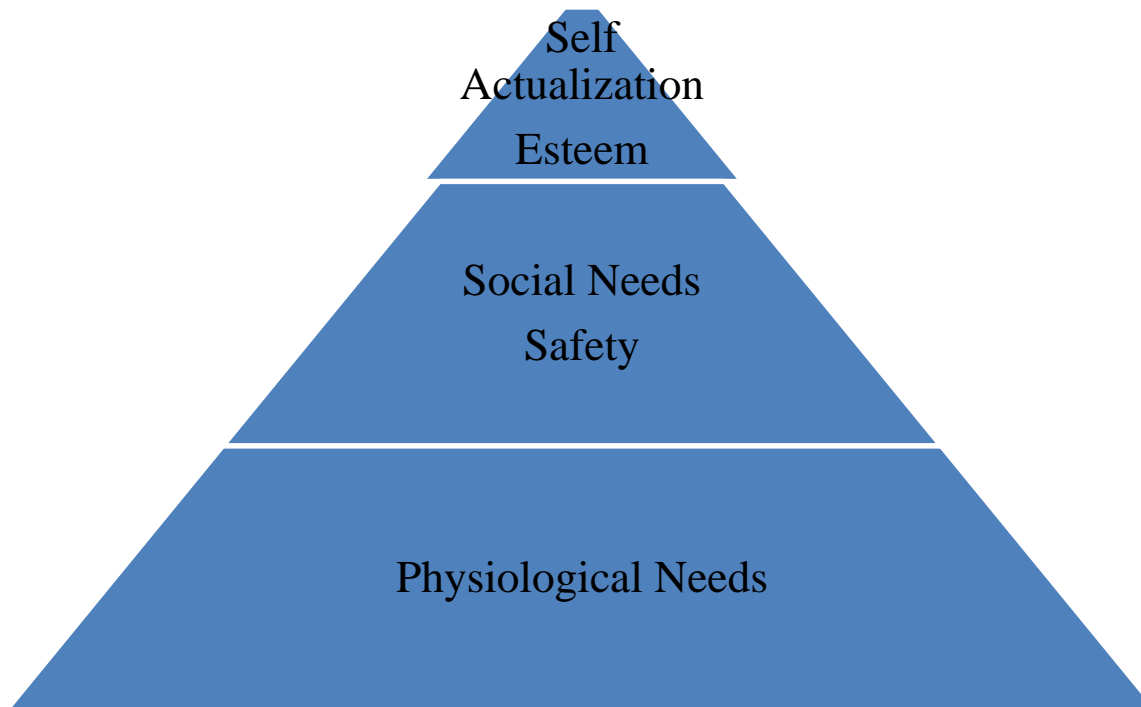
Figure 7. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs pyramid.

It is important to ask whether the basic physiological, safety and social needs of all students, including the rule violators are being met. As an educator in a well-structured work environment, I have the ability to monitor my actions when I lack sleep, food or affection, but can the students of XES?   A 2002 study by the U. S. Secret Service National Threat Assessment Center revealed there were 37 school attacks between 1974 and 2000, with "no accurate or useful profile" or predictor for violent offenders in the schools. Acts of extreme violence have been

carried out by students of all races, disciplinary history, age, socio-economic status, and social spectrum (from loner to the most popular student). Prior to the violent offense many of the attackers felt ostracized, bullied, depressed or desperate, and most had no discipline or criminal record. Also, in 31 of the 37 school attacks in the study, the Secret Service reported that the attacker tells at least one classmate about the plan of violence. The shocking and tragic violence that has played out in our nation's schools in the last two years has elevated the status of school discipline from an issue of perennial concern to one of national urgency (Skiba & Peterson, 2000).

This study investigates whether the relationship between law enforcement officers and community members, including students, has an impact on the effectiveness of zero-tolerance policies. Some school districts, such as Portland Public Schools (PPS) are experiencing issues with "imbalanced discipline practices" (House, 2014). There was an imbalance of suspensions and expulsions for students of color. On October 6, 2014, the Oregon Department of Education fined PPS and mandated four million dollars of its budget be used to pursue a solution. Furthermore, the massive national dropout rate of high school students each day as a result of expulsion or other conditions (Kingston, 2006) should be of great concern. In America, close to 1 million students leave school without graduating from high school, with a cost of more than 260 billion dollars in lost wages, taxes, and productivity over the students' lifetimes (Schoonover, 2009). Even with these astounding statistics, school districts continue to suspend students of all ages through the use of zero-tolerance discipline policies on a daily basis. Former U. S. Secretary of Education John B. King, Jr. (2016) called the signing of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), an opportunity in education to assist students of color and low-income households to graduate from high school prepared for college, careers, and life. Furthermore,

King (2016) stated that we must commit to lifting up the teaching profession by training and retaining educators. Additionally, we must identify and develop interventions that support high schools with large dropout rates for students, regardless of ethnicity, zip code, or gender (U. S. Department of Education, 2016). With regard to gender, McKenzie and Skrla (2011) reveal that boys are referred to an administrator for discipline infractions more often than girls, excluding truancy. In a 2002 study of over 11,000 students in a large Midwestern urban school district, McKenzie and Skiba (2011) found that boys are more likely than girls to be punished severely for both minor and major offenses, which has caused schools to defend their actions in court.

For decades, there have been countless lawsuits over proper application of zero-tolerance policies. Jenkins and Dayton (2003) share the case of a Pennsylvania seventh grader who was expelled for one year because he was filing his fingernail at school with a nail file that was attached to a small Swiss Army knife. No consideration was given to the model honor student with no history of misconduct. Most zero-tolerance discipline policy infractions require little common sense. However, there have been countless cases exposed by the media with questionable outcomes (see Table 3).

Table 3
Due Process and Court Cases with Questionable Suspensions and Expulsions

Year	Age/Grade	Item(s)	Consequence
1995	15 years old	Knife to peel an orange fell from his book bag	Expelled nearly a year
1995	2nd Grade	1-inch long imitation Swiss Army knife	Suspended three weeks
1997	5 years old	Nail file	Suspended
1998	2 students	1 Squirt gun and 1-inch long G. I. Joe	Both Suspended
1999	12th Grade	Pocket knife found in the first aid kit in his car	Suspended three days
2000	4 Kindergartners	Making threats while using fingers as guns	Suspended three days
2000	11 years old	Wearing a Tweety Bird key chain	Suspended ten days

| 2001 | 8 years old | Pointing a chicken finger and saying "pow pow" | Suspended three days |

There are numerous zero-tolerance discipline policy consequences for bus infractions that do not make the media, such as "not sitting properly, crying loudly, "not keeping himself" under control, and misbehaving." Boys are responsible for 65% of the bus infractions for 2014-2015 school year (see Figure 8). Regardless of the nature of the infraction or gender of the student, the zero-tolerance discipline policy in the handbook dictates that the first bus referral is a one (1) day bus suspension. Upon receiving a second bus referral the offender is removed from the bus for three (3) days, then five (5) days for the third violation. Violent offenses, such as fighting, throwing rocks, bullying or choking a peer will yield the same consequences as simple youthful exuberance, like talking back to the bus driver.

Bus Infractions By Gender

■ Male 31   ■ Female 21
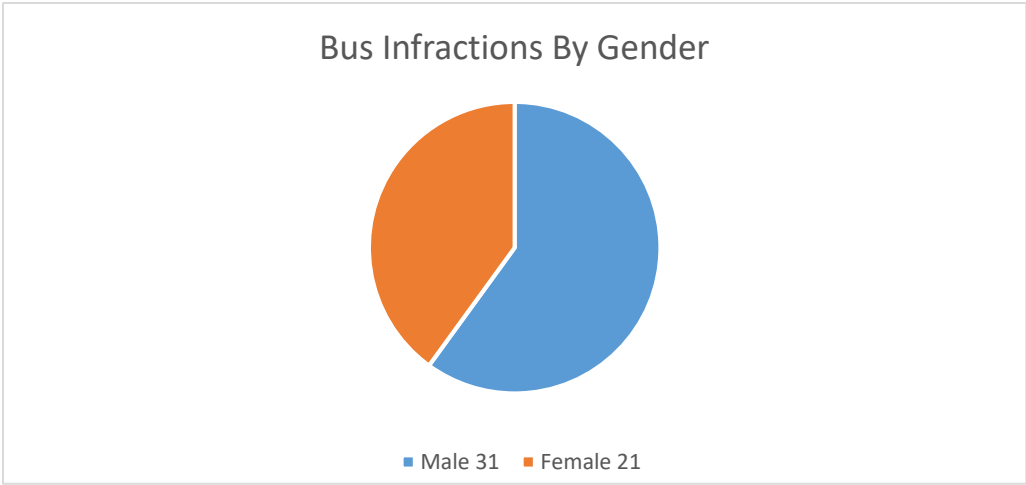
Figure 8. Rule 13 bus violations by gender

Carr (2014) adds that male and female students in New Orleans are routinely suspended for non-violent offenses, such as leaning against a wall, placing their head on a desk to fall asleep, or skipping class. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES,

2009), not only are some student groups more often severely disciplined than others, the numbers of students who are suspended and expelled is alarming. About 1 out of every 14 students (or 7%) of various socio-economic backgrounds were suspended from school at least once in a calendar year, excluding in-school suspensions (ISS). Many of the students and their families are not aware of the law of due process. Therefore, they tend to be victims of the system on many levels. Additionally, Payne (2013) adds students need to know the "hidden rules" to decrease digressions in the classroom before they escalate to chronic discipline problems and challenges to authority. There are violations and consequences at schools such as XES that never receive media attention. For example, not sitting in the seat properly, making loud noises, and being disrespectful are a few of the subjective infractions that WCPS drivers utilize on bus referrals to have students suspended from the bus for one or more days.

The threat of school violence cuts across socioeconomic class, geographical location, and the presence or absence of a disability status (Skiba & Peterson, 2000). This means that affluent and well-established schools are not exempt from the repercussions of failed zero-tolerance discipline policies and social injustices. The socio-economic status of a school or the political leverage of a community has little or no impact on the effectiveness of zero-tolerance policies.

Like other districts throughout the country, both affluent and poor schools have experienced acts of violence in their respective communities that impacted the safety and order of their schools. Regardless of its location, students deserve a quality education and an opportunity to reach their full potential in life. For many students, becoming successful does not come easily. According to a study by the Annie E. Case Foundation (2014), much of it depends on the site-based management practices of the local school leader. Dunbar and Villarruel (2002) add that the responses of school principals and how they interpret and implement the zero-

tolerance policy affect the educational experiences of children in their schools. For example,

when one urban school leader was asked his interpretation of zero-tolerance, he replied that:

"Zero-tolerance means zero-tolerance" of weapons, threatening, and bullying. We don't give

kids an inch. We don't give them chances! Ironically, the one rural principal recalls telling a

student who accidently had a hunting rifle displayed in his vehicle to "turn his car around and

take it home" (Dunbar & Villarruel, 2002). This reaction and leadership style is strikingly

different than one evidenced in Seal v. Morgan, a lawsuit involving a high school junior who was

suspended after a friend placed a knife in his car's glove compartment without his knowledge,

(Jenkins & Dayton (2003). Fader, Lockwood, Schall, and Stokes (2014), caution that the

overreliance on extreme disciplinary consequences has far-reaching negative implications on

students. Overuse of suspensions, expulsions and forwarding school offenses to police officers

harms students in three ways: (1) an increase in arrest and contact with the juvenile system; (2)

premature removal of students who may pose a threat to the overall school/bus climate, and

academic performance, and; (3) targeting disadvantaged students with disabilities or specific

cultural backgrounds.

Furthermore, implementation of the zero-tolerance discipline policies are responsible for

a 280% increase in school-related arrests due to the relabeling of non-serious behaviors as

criminal acts and the wave of school districts hiring their own resource officers. According to

Fader et al. (2014) the proliferation of School Resource Officers (SROs) on school grounds

increases the visibility of police on school campuses and encourages administrators to "push out"

academically low-achieving students, which artificially raises the test score averages of the

school. For example, Clayton County, Georgia reported a 600% increase in school-related

arrests in its first three years of training and hiring SROs. Similarly, a study of five states by the

Advancement Project (2010) revealed that in four out of five states, as the school discipline referrals increased, so did the number of juvenile court cases. In addition, that research study consistently identified suspension and expulsion initiated by a zero-tolerance discipline policy infraction as a major risk factor for dropping out of high school. Bejarano (2014) adds that those students who are willing to return to their home school found there was a perceived stigma of guilt, which leads to depression, lack of due process, or becoming the target of administrators. The principals who manage and lead schools across the country must report zero-tolerance discipline policy violations to the district office, which passes the information to the state board of education. The consequences of violating zero-tolerance discipline policies vary by district and by violation, but, generally, the harsher the perceived violation, the graver the punishment. Dohrn and Ladson-Billings (2001) state that school personnel may use discretionary judgment to suspend students for up to 180 days for vague and questionable violations of policies that move beyond the intent of zero-tolerance.

Although school violence is a real issue affecting students regardless of socio-economic class, geographic location, and the presence or absence of a disability status (Skiba & Peterson, 2000), zero-tolerance policies may not be the best way to address this threat. Cosby & Poussaint (2007) encouraged school officials to examine the impact of zero-tolerance policies on the pipeline from the school yard to the prison yard. The exclusive use of zero-tolerance policies to punish students is connected to their attendance, academic performance and daily conduct. Payne (2005) reveals that students are in need of a greater amount of "space" to exhibit their unique personality, and they need warmth and accountability from adults to successfully ascend Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. The literature supports the use of zero-tolerance discipline policies to address school bus infractions with monitoring by the school leaders. Options, such

as parent conferences, bus safety presentations, and student counseling should be considered for

first time offenders or minor bus violations.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

How do school bus infractions affect students' learning opportunities through absenteeism? Is there a relationship between school bus infractions and student achievement outcome? How does the action research process affect the numbers of bus infractions for students? These were essential questions pondered as the seven-member AR team initiated a plan, set norms and scheduled meetings for the next six months as I anticipated the completion of my research study in one cycle. The study consisted of two groups: WCPS transportation employees and the XES staff members Focus Group (FG). Following IRB approval on May 25, 2016, the research cycle began with a short survey to acquire baseline data for the study. During the study, I objectively observed and collected input from the FG, investigated bus discipline referrals, attended transportation department-parent meetings, interviewed seven bus drivers, and collected data as a morning and afternoon passenger on the school bus. Consequently, to advance the purpose of the study, the first semester was utilized to monitor the progress of the study without sacrificing data.

The action research approach at XES was determined by many variables, such as the age, experience and ethnicity of the bus drivers. The AR team addressed the purpose of the study, formulated a plan to decrease the number of bus violations, and participated in monthly reflective dialogue sessions. At XES, the AR team disaggregated the research study findings and offered relevant strategies to improve bus safety. As an administrator for XES and

representative of the local AR team, I collected input from questionnaires. Consequently, AR was the preferred method to address this problem because it allowed the team to examine the data from XES and peruse other pertinent information, such as the contents of the XES Parent-Student Handbook. We analyzed the school-discipline information and determined the impact on school climate. The AR team closely monitored data that influenced the use of zero-tolerance discipline policies on students, staff, community stakeholders, and bus safety. Ultimately, the goal of the study was to increase safety on school buses that transport students to and from XES each weekday and develop a school Bus Safety Plan (BSP) that could be replicated at schools across the area and district.

School bus referrals at XES are one part of a larger number of discipline infractions annually. The XES Parent-Student Handbook (2016-2017) contained zero-tolerance discipline policies for bus riders within WCPS. XES discipline practices were congruent with the Student Code of Conduct for WCPS district, which included a system of 13 Discipline Rules and Consequences for on-campus and bus infractions. XES noted an increase in bus related discipline infractions over a four-year period from 2012-2016. In 2012- 2013, there were 77 Rule 13 bus violations and by 2015-2016 the number of bus infractions had increased to 94, which suggested a need for additional research. However, the noted increase involved violent Rule 13 infractions that jeopardized the bus driver's ability to safely navigate through local morning and afternoon traffic, which could cause a collision, bodily harm or death for the riders. Parents were upset when their child was suspended from the bus for one or more days and some parents waited at the bus stop to voice their dissatisfaction with the bus driver.

As I initiated the process of co-constructing this study with the AR team, the influence of the bus driver on school bus safety was larger than anticipated. In this mixed method research study I addressed the cause of bus discipline infractions and the impact on school bus safety.

The integrity of this action research study was extremely important because its results influenced the school bus ride for students at XES. Select bus drivers and bus routes were consistently responsible for most discipline referrals each year. An abundance of time and resources were utilized to investigate bus referrals. Therefore, AR was the approach selected for this study to ensure reliability and validity of the collected qualitative data. Creswell (2014) stated that action research involves deciding a course of action, based on a cycle of posing questions, gathering data, and reflection. The AR approach allowed the team to disaggregate student bus discipline data, observe bus driver practices, and collect focus group commentary. Additionally, I selected AR as my approach to involve stakeholders in my study, such as school staff, bus drivers, and parents. The involvement of key members of the school and community fostered triangulation of the collected data through scheduled AR team meetings and the reflective multiple perspectives of the group.

Data Collection

The purpose of this study was to better understand and address the causes of discipline infractions at XES and the impact on bus safety. The questions were as follows:

1   How do school bus infractions affect students' learning opportunities through absenteeism?

2   What is the relationship, if any, between school bus infractions and student achievement outcomes?

3   How does the action research process affect the number of bus infractions for students?

Archived data (Student Disciplinary Summary 2012-2015) was utilized to expose bus violations as a large percentage of the total disciplinary infractions annually. The bus violations were

discussed in conjunction with the school bus setting and bus driver practices during the first two

AR meetings. The dialogue revealed the need to increase the involvement of school bus drivers

in this study.

For almost two years I have viewed my research study through the lens of an assistant

principal tasked with handling bus discipline. Parent contacts, student investigations, and

collaborating with the WCPS transportation department occupied an abundance of my daily

schedule. Each Rule 13 Bus Referral averaged an hour, from start to finish, which included

navigating the community "no snitch" phenomenon by students on the bus and at school. There

were 94 Rule 13 Bus Violations in 2015-2016 (see Table 4). By my calculations, that is 94 hours

of investigating inappropriate bus behavior, which is practically twelve school days that I have

dedicated to a non-instructional matter.

Table 4

Rule 13 Four-Year Trend of Bus Violations (2012-2016)

Rule 13 Bus Violations	Violations 2012-2013	Violations 2013-2014	Violations 2014-2015	Violations 2015-2016	4yr Difference +/-
Bus Violations	77	54	81	94	+17
Total Referrals for School Year	210	202	178	316	+106
Total Students for Referrals	110	111	101	139	+29

Honestly, there were moments when I lacked the needed sensitivity and endurance when dealing

with stakeholders, and my biased views led me to blindly impose a zero-tolerance discipline bus

policy consequence for a first-rule offender. Consequently, my research interest tilted toward the

school bus setting and the perspective of bus drivers.

As I traveled to work each morning, I drove through three Winn County Public Schools (WCPS) attendance zones and every school marquee displayed the same message: "Bus drivers are needed." It was then that I realized the mass exodus of XES bus drivers each year is not an anomaly. For ten years, the WCPS district has employed an ongoing recruitment campaign for bus drivers, including coverage for the bus routes in the XES attendance zone. I began to ask myself some questions.

What were the qualifications to become a school bus driver? What are the salary and benefits earned by a school bus driver? Were specific training and professional development classes provided to bus drivers to improve student behaviors and dialogue with parents? As I viewed the Rule 13 Bus Violations data (see Figure 9) from the perspective of a driver, the lengthy protocol involved before I received a referral for a student rider (WCPS Transportation Handbook for School Personnel, 2016-17) began to dawn on me.
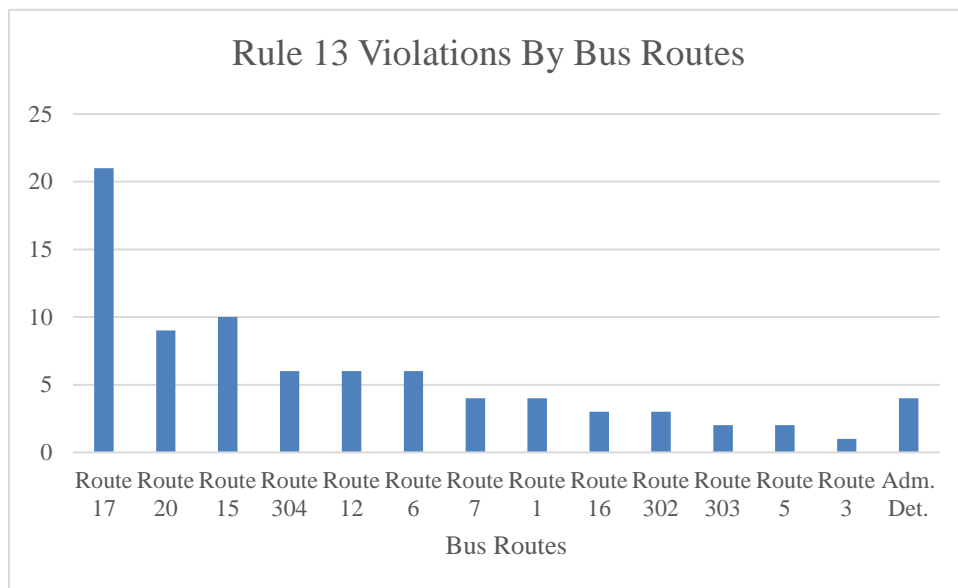
Figure 9. Rule 13 violations by bus route

The bus driver was required to do the following:

- Review the rules and expectations each Monday with the bus riders

- Assign seats to riders based on an established formula.

- Contact parent/guardian by phone about first infraction (warning).

- Reassign seat and send a Parent Notification Form home for second infraction (written notice to be signed and returned).

- Parent phone call about third encounter with the student--bus discipline infraction (referral submitted to local school administrator).

Bus drivers were expected to safely navigate the bus through traffic, while indirectly supervising the student riders. The bus driver, unlike the classroom teacher, did not have the option of sending a disruptive student to a time-out area, a neighbor's room, or immediately call for an administrator. The bus driver had the tremendous responsibility of managing behaviors in isolation, with or without timely support from parents or the school. Consequently, each morning and afternoon the bus driver had to follow (and monitor) the steps outlined above for minor non-threatening infractions, with major infractions requiring a referral for the first offense.

Before the co-construction of my AR study, I viewed school bus drivers as excessive whiners and complainers who had the perfect (part-time) work schedule and the benefits of certified staff members. School bus drivers were like nomads, disconnected from the local school until they provided daily transportation for thousands of student riders. As the 2016-2017 school year unfolded, some of my biases toward school bus drivers were extinguished. I realized the mammoth responsibilities they were entrusted to perform, with little positive feedback from stakeholders. As the XES administrator who collaborated with the WCPS

transportation department, I actively recruited bus drivers who provided rich descriptive dialogue for this study.

I had greeted the transportation department members for years, so it was easy (following IRB approval) to distribute an informational flyer about my study to all of the school bus drivers as they entered the bus lane. Each bus driver received an informational flyer, questionnaire, and two consent forms in an envelope. Interested drivers were instructed to return the completed questionnaire and a signed/dated consent form in a sealed envelope to the front office staff member as they entered the building (for their daily restroom and water break). This was an anonymous process because I have received packages, referrals, and notes from WCPS transportation department, parents, staff, and students on a regular basis. As for the local staff at XES, I solicited participants during the grade level collaboration meetings. I expected an AR team of seven participants, from various grade levels and support staff, to ensure a wide range of opinions, perspectives, diverse backgrounds, and rich discussions. Finally, I invited reliable and candid community members, with transportation to attend AR team meetings to participate in the study.

The 2012- 2016 trend data of Student Discipline Summary reports were collected as the base line for the study. I created interview questions that afforded me an opportunity to converse with participants in a non-threatening manner. A semi-structured questioning protocol was utilized to interview the bus drivers and later I transcribed my notes. During the summer of 2016, I made frequent attempts to contact my AR team with little success, until one day, while at the XES distributing textbooks and other instructional materials, I decided to take a break to phone some of the AR team members. I scheduled two bus driver interviews approximately a week apart and in the following months, five other drivers returned consent forms.

Participants

The AR team consisted of seven members: three WCPS employees assigned to XES, a WCPS Transportation staff member, and three community members. The role of the local school AR team was to triangulate the qualitative and quantitative data, while the WCPS transportation representatives freely shared information from interactions with student riders and parents. Additionally, the goal of the participants was to understand the impact of zero-tolerance discipline policies on school bus safety, formulate a plan to decrease the number of school bus violations, and develop a school Bus Safety Plan (BSP) that could be replicated at schools across the district. Berle, Bishop, Dennis, Schoffner, Treylor, Usher, and Wilkins are the seven school bus driver participants (pseudonyms used) who volunteered for the study. Each of the participants is a full-time employees of WCPS with assigned bus routes in the XES attendance zone. The demographics of the participants were a good sampling of the team of bus drivers responsible for transporting students daily to and from XES, which included a possible connection between on-campus and bus discipline data.

I interacted with the XES staff members to gain personal and professional information, as needed. However, due to the prominence of the bus driver's role in this study and my infrequent contact with the driver-participants, a brief driver description and a reflective comment was added as a part of the context of the study. The driver-participants have different backgrounds that may have influenced their responses to student digressions on the bus and dialogue with parents in the community. The participants were transparent with their responses, such as no recollection of ever riding a school bus as a child, riding public transportation to school as a child, or being witness to violence on a school bus.

Berle. Berle, a veteran school bus driver, has transported elementary, middle and high school students in the XES zone for four years, and often reflects on the level of violence witnessed on the bus. Berle believed that parental involvement would help with many of the issues encountered on the school bus.

Bishop. Bishop, a longtime employee of WCPS (with nine years dedicated as a school bus driver), believed that adequate prevention and planning has been successful over the years in addressing the predictable behaviors of middle and high school bus riders. However, young elementary riders were very impulsive, and Bishop noted that parents generally believed anything reported by their child.

Dennis. Dennis, a veteran driver with more than 10 years of bus driving experience, was very hesitant to participate in the study. Dennis had managed a large number of students on the bus, from new riders to relatives, such as sons, daughters, nieces and nephews, for years. Dennis was adamant that all student riders are expected to follow posted rules or suffer the applicable consequences. Throughout the years Dennis has gained the respect of the XES community for maintaining open and honest lines of communication.

Schoffner. As a veteran bus driver, Schoffner had transported non-English speaking students from kindergarten through twelfth grade for six years. As a retiree, Schoffner enjoyed the daily interaction with students and looks for teachable moments to explain the importance of bus safety. Schoffner would like to one day receive high school graduation announcements from former elementary school riders.

Treylor. Treylor, a novice school bus driver with less than two years of experience, needed a job. Treylor stated that some days were more challenging than others due to a small number of students who caused most of the chaos on the bus. Most of Treylor's day between

transporting students was spent online searching for another full or part-time job to spend more time with family. Ironically Treylor stated that the frequent vacations and holidays as a WCPS employee were great.

Usher. It really did not matter whether it was a small or large bus, as Usher preferred to drive the roughest routes. Usher, with six years of bus driving experience, made an effort to contact parents for both positive and negative incidents. Usher was honored to be invited to (and attend) family and athletic events in the community by parents and student riders.

Wilkins. A novice bus driver with less than three years of experience, Wilkins never rode the school bus as a child. Wilkins followed the established WCPS procedures for completing bus referrals to the letter: review the rules, reassign the rider a new seat, and send home a parent notification form as the prerequisites to submitting a bus discipline referral for a student rider. Wilkins believed that parents should talk to their children to stop distracting behaviors on the school bus because these behaviors have led to bus collisions.

Wilkins and the other bus drivers were open, honest, and transparent during the semi-structured interviews. During the course of this research study I witnessed study participants (and non-participants) discuss the school bus collision where six people died and at least ten more were injured in Baltimore, Maryland. Both drivers were killed (National Transportation Safety Board, December 8, 2016). NTSB (2016) reported that Glenn Chappell, the driver, had been involved in at least a dozen crashes or incidents in the last five years while operating a school bus or personal vehicle. The school bus is a microcosm of society where minor and major infractions occur on the bus and at the bus stop, which was explored during interviews.

Semi-Structured Interviews

I utilized the semi-structured interview method with 12 open-ended questions for the case study. Questions numbers 1-4 of the open-ended interview explored the schema of the bus drivers. Questions 5 and 6 suggested the importance of relationships, and question numbers 9-11 addressed the three research questions of the study. The semi-structured interviews allowed the participants to share unbridled opinions, work-related experiences, and the personal responsibility of reading the XES Parent-Student Handbook, which is listed as the twelfth question of the interview. The individual interviews were conducted face-to-face, with responses recorded and transcribed by the researcher. During the semi-structured interviews several participants responded to multiple open-ended questions with a detailed reply, which was noted. Some participants provided lengthy feedback, while others offered short replies due to time constraints. I probed some participants to provided richer dialogue, with a mixture of personal and general responses.

I interviewed seven school bus drivers individually to collect data about bus discipline, the school-parent partnership, bus safety, and student learning outcomes, including absenteeism. The interviews were all completed on the XES campus. Three of the interviews were completed in my office, two in the front office conference room, and two in the parent center. The average interview length was 46 minutes. The transcripts from each interview were reviewed twice to ensure accuracy and then coded. Mezirow (1978) suggests rereading data several times for emerging themes and coded statements from semi-structured interview questions, research questions, and AR team reflective dialogue.

On June 2, 2016, I interviewed Treylor, a bus driver with three years of experience, who shared, "some students get on the bus angry and I ask what's wrong," and I get 'leave me

alone.' I don't take it personal. Yes, I have seen some violent students push, hit, and kick each

other, and I call the parents. Some of the students were in survival mode from a community

issue and bring it on the bus. I separated the students before it escalated into violence."

On June 14, 2016, a ten-year veteran bus driver, Dennis, stated there was a lot of

playfulness that gets out of hand, but "I talk to the students and tell them I care. Also, I try to

connect with the parents. I don't let it get to violence. Some drivers just sit and look in the

mirror and complain…to other drivers. They don't do nothing and it gets to violence and a lot of

trouble on the bus." A bus driver must command respect on the bus and within the community.

It was hard for bus drivers to see all that was happening on a bus while driving, which was why

it was important for the driver and parents to communicate, says Treylor. "The driver and

parents need to support each other. I am very flexible with my write ups. I talk to parents at the

bus stop and explain the situations with them. Most of the students are okay. I tell parents that I

can't let students disrespect me on the bus then I would have a bus, full of problems." Treylor

added that, if the bus gets out of control, then it is a reflection on the parents and the school.

After completing two interviews, one with a novice and one with a veteran bus driver, and

examining the transcripts, I realized the need to interview more bus drivers to gain additional

insight. Treylor and Dennis are drivers of bus routes with a low number of discipline referrals.

Therefore, I solicited drivers with a high number of bus referrals to participate in the study. Why

were some bus drivers writing more bus referrals, while other drivers submitted zero referrals? I

also observed bus driver practices as a bus rider on select routes. The collected data from my

experiences could benefit the local school, community, district, and zero-tolerance discipline

policy after it is analyzed.

Data Analysis

The interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was selected because it provided the flexibility to interpret the personal experiences of study participants from differing perspectives. Additionally, the IPA approach complements my "bottoms up" Vivo coding process. Essentially, I felt connected to my research study and the rich dialogue collected during AR meetings. First, I typed the transcript following each open-ended interview. The typed transcript gave me an opportunity to revisit the comments of the interviewee and the AR team, which included comments I found congruent with frequent negative student and parent complaints. Secondly, I separated my preconceptions about the data and organized a color-coded system of index cards and markers. Thirdly, after transcribing the research data, I coded the participant's comments, perspectives and experiences on whether they were from the interview or AR meeting dialogue. I manually coded the qualitative research data and the data analysis method and began to look for patterns in the content that were relevant to the study. Fourthly, I selected five colors, one for each theme that was discovered: Planning (blue), Communication (orange), Responsibility (green), Relationships (red) and Survival (purple). Each theme from the color-coded system and its, corresponding comments and data were utilized to answer the following questions: 1)How did the school bus infractions affect students' learning opportunities through absenteeism?;- 2) Was there a relationship between school bus infractions and student achievement outcomes?;- and 3) How did the action research process affect the number of bus infractions for students?

First, the XES English/Language Arts data from the Quarterly District Assessments (QDA) was compared with area elementary schools to measure how bus infractions affect the students' learning achievement through absenteeism. Second, the number of bus referrals for the years 2015-2016 and 2016-2017,were analyzed from XES and area elementary schools. Third,

the AR process examined how research affects the number of bus infractions for students, as well as XES use of gradual bus suspensions for the first, second and third bus infractions.

Case Study Design

All participants in the study were provided with pseudonyms. The AR focus group consisted of: XES staff members (Carson Leigh, and Broadway); three community members (Moore, Walker, and Kennedy); and a WCPS transportation employee (Train). The seven members of the AR team signed consent forms and were eager to participate before school ended on May 27, 2016. I was excited and looked forward to engaging the AR team during the summer. Beginning on Tuesday, May 31, 2016, I was challenged to coordinate a common meeting date for the AR team members. However, Carson and Leigh, from the K-2 and 3-5 grade level bands, respectively; Broadway, from support staff; and Walker, a parent were present for the August 8, 2016 AR team meeting. Community members Moore and Kennedy, and transportation employee Train were not in attendance. On August 19, 2016, there were only two bus drivers who completed consent forms and interviews. However, five more bus driver interviews were completed for the study.

The first WCPS employees to see the students in the morning and the last in the afternoon were the bus drivers. Over one thousand students, kindergarten through fifth grade, rode the school bus daily at XES.

My goal was to acquire rich dialogue from bus driver interviews and focus group meetings. On June 14, 2016. the AR team established the following norms during its first meeting:

- Attendance is important (start and end on time)
- Respect the perspective/opinion of all parties

- Give your complete attention (no texting, phone calls)

Following the acceptance of the norms, I reminded the AR team that our overall purpose was to address the cause of disciplinary infractions at XES and their impact on bus safety. I revealed the manner in which qualitative and quantitative data would be generated and collected for the study, such as Monthly Student Discipline Summary Reports, Rule 13 Bus Infraction Data, Bus Discipline Policy (Parent-Student Handbook), State-sponsored grade level Reading test scores, observations (as a bus rider) and seven bus driver interviews. The AR team agreed to monthly meetings of 30- 45 minutes. Leigh (L), Broadway (B), Walker (W), and Carson (C) were present for the AR meeting. After light refreshments were provided by the meeting host, we analyzed Rule 13 Bus Violation Trend Data from 2012-2016 (Table 4). At the conclusion of the meeting, I formulated a plan to type and triangulate the reflective dialogue from the AR meeting, which included an examination of the Parent-Student Handbook.

I used methodical triangulation (with the other administrators) to ensure the content of the XES Parent-Student Handbook aligned with the WCPS handbook, specifically regarding the School Bus Discipline section. The XES handbook and language was modified to suit the kindergarten through fifth graders it serves, including the declaration that "riding the school bus is a privilege" that can be lost if rules are not followed. The XES local handbook reiterated that school bus behavior was a safety issue, and thus on a regular basis bus drivers reviewed the expected behavior with the students and parents. Rules such as, but not limited to, following the bus driver's directions, walking only in the aisles to enter or exit the bus, and sitting quietly and properly in an assigned seat were critical to a safe school bus ride (XES, 2016-2017).

In order to best understand what constituted a safe bus ride, I observed select bus drivers as a passenger during morning and afternoon routes. The combination of observations were split

50-50 between the most challenging bus routes, and bus routes with fewer than five bus referrals from the 2015-2016 school year. Additionally, I examined the demographic data from the bus drivers to ensure that I observed both novice and veteran bus drivers during the bus rides, which would help when designing the bus intervention and implementation plans.

Interventions and Implementation Plans

When I started this study, I had emotionally detached myself from the research process, including data collection and analysis. I thought it was essential to mentally distance myself from others to produce credible intervention and implementation plans for the research study. Flyvbjerg (2006) explored this conventional wisdom and revealed that it would be acceptable if I generalized during my case study and held a bias toward confirming my research. The misunderstandings that Flyvbjerg (2006) addressed afforded me the opportunity to identify key concepts and design my case study plans for improvement.

I modeled my school-wide bus intervention plan after Sugai and Horner (2002), which began with an orientation, targeted all bus riders, and utilized data to drive the evaluation and program incentives. How the action research process affected the number of bus infractions for students was a major factor for the plans. Other factors, such as bus driver indirect supervision, overcrowded buses, bus referrals, zero-tolerance bus discipline policy, and the school-parent partnership were examined. I acknowledged my biases during the research study due to unsympathetic parents, teachers, and bus drivers who are unaware of the vast amount of time required per discipline referral submitted. The second factor involved the indirect supervision of student-riders, while navigating the bus through traffic. As a third factor, I examined the zero-tolerance bus discipline policies in the Parent-Student Handbook, which may reveal a need for systematic change and further investigation of alternatives (XES Parent-Student Handbook,

2016). The fourth key factor was the possible relationship between bus referrals and the student

learning outcome of violators on state-sponsored assessments. The last factor was the ongoing

bus driver recruitment/retention campaign by WCPS and its possible influence on bus safety for

student riders, novice and reassigned veteran drivers.

Interview: Staff/Bus Drivers/Parents	Document Analysis: Trend Data/Bus Referrals/ZTDPolicy	Observations: Bus Drivers (Ride Along)

Research Purpose: to address the cause of discipline infractions and the impact on bus safety	Research Questions (3)

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs/Motivation Learning Theory
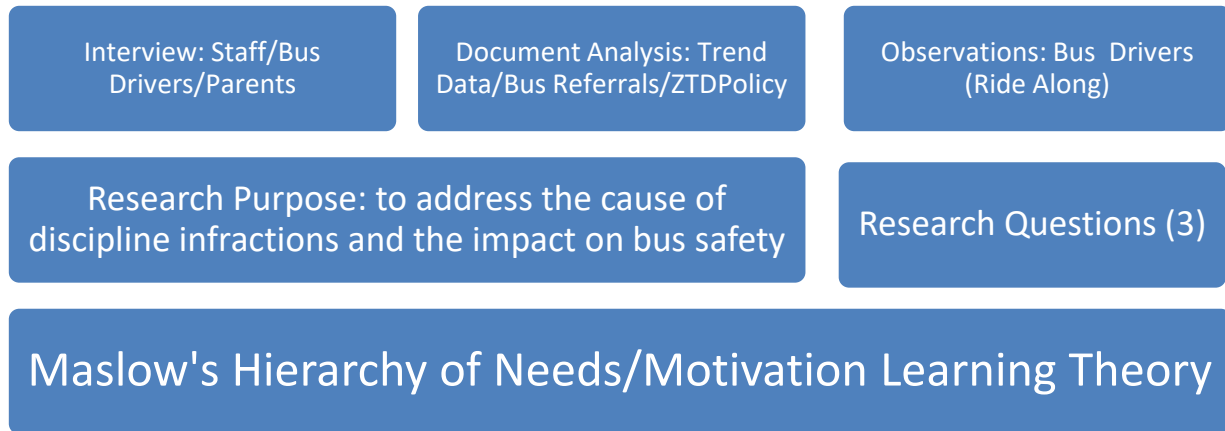
Figure 10. Conceptual foundation - impact of discipline policies and practices on bus safety.

Conceptual framework adapted from the Pyramid Model of K. deMarrais (2014). (The

University of Georgia).

Children simply are not little adults, and it was imperative that the WCPS transportation

department, the local school and parents respected the established intervention strategies. It was

natural for children to test boundaries and sometimes their inappropriate behaviors were noticed

while at other times they were not. The children frequently behaved differently when they were

not accompanied by a member of the family, including making impulsive decisions that were

contrary to the values and expectations of their parents and the school bus environment. Parents

wanted to believe their child was well-behaved and well-mannered at all times, until the child

was caught numerous times disrupting the safe transporting of student-riders. After verbal

warnings, written documentation, and the reassignment of the child's seat, a bus referral was submitted by the driver to the local school. Upon receipt of the bus referral, I was afforded three days or less to complete the investigation and provide a consequence for the infraction to the parent of the offender. "He has no way to school if you suspend him off the bus!" was a common response during phone conversation with parents. As I progressed through my research study, meetings, and observations, alternate consequences to suspension were discussed with the AR team.

Implementation Plan

Moving forward, the AR team at XES analyzed and disaggregated Rule 13 Bus infractions and examined pertinent documents though triangulation to determine the impact of these infractions on the school bus environment. The AR team had set norms and scheduled monthly meetings for the next six months to stay laser-focused on the study. My plan required all seven AR team members to be fully engaged in the process, as our next meeting was Monday, September 12, 2016 at 3:15 p.m. My biggest challenge was to get consent from additional bus drivers to complete a short questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. However, I utilized the beginning, middle, and end of the semesters as a guide to monitor the time-sensitiveness of the study without sacrificing data analysis. The Miles for Smiles Bus Intervention Program was implemented on September 5, 2016.

XES Miles for Smiles Bus Intervention Program

The XES Miles for Smiles Bus Intervention Program was launched September 5, 2016 for the 2016-2017 school year. Each day, the bus drivers informed the bus lane monitor if their bus earned a "thumbs up" or "thumbs down" based on the ride home and to school.

The expectations of student bus riders were to Be Respectful, Responsible, and Ready

45

by:

1. Staying in your seat

2. Using your inside voice

3. Keeping your hands and feet to yourself

The bus lane monitor, Ms. Covenant, recorded check marks on a weekly form (thumbs up) or X (thumbs down). Each check represented a mile. The goal was for buses to earn 50 miles before winter school break (December 2016). When a school bus received 50 miles, the bus driver received Miles for Smiles rewards for each child on the bus. The bus duty monitor forwarded the completed form to Ms. Grace each Friday.

Approach to Data Analysis

I completed my AR study in one cycle and the data analysis approach was as follows:

Fall 2016: Session 1. I began the semester (week of August 8, 2016) and contacted additional bus driver participants. I administered a brief questionnaire and transferred data/responses into a chart along with the local school staff members (with pseudonyms).

Ride-along 1. I contacted the WCPS Bus Supervisor to schedule a minimum of two bus rides in the morning and afternoon to observe behaviors, such as parent presence at bus stops and driver management practices.

Session 2. On September 12, 2016, the AR team had scheduled a bus driver participant to share her duties and responsibilities, best practices, and common myths. An open dialogue between drivers and non-drivers was the planned focus of the meeting. However, I had a meeting at the University of Georgia and did not want to decrease the interest in the action research process by cancelling our AR team meeting on September 12, 2016. Therefore, I sent information electronically, requesting feedback before Friday, September 16, 2016. The AR

meeting agenda items were to analyze the monthly quantitative School-wide Discipline Summary (SDS), which included Rule 13 (Bus) Violations, and to share the status of the Miles for Smiles Bus Intervention Program (MSBIP).

Session 3. On October 10, 2016, the AR team analyzed School-Wide Discipline Data for August and September 2016, including bus discipline infractions. I updated the team about the Miles for Smiles bus intervention program, as well. The plan was that each Friday following an AR meeting, each student-rider on a school bus with fewer than 2 bus referrals each month would receive a reward from our Miles for Smiles Bus Intervention Program. The program was a way to evaluate the research study, while providing students with small low-cost (or no- cost) incentives.

Session 4. On November 14, 2016, the AR team divided into small groups to analyze quantitative bus discipline data, by infraction codes, grade level offenders, and route. The groups reported their findings at the end of the meeting and I shared ride-a-long bus observation data.

Session 5. On December 12, 2016- was a brief AR team meeting. We analyzed bus infraction data by gender, location (was the bus moving or not), and time of the day (morning or afternoon) and explored possible patterns based on the Monthly Discipline Summary Report from August through December 2016.

Session 6. On January 9, 2017, the AR reflective dialogue regarding the quantitative and qualitative data analyzed during the research cycle was discussed to ensure triangulation and authenticity. One of the AR team members was accepted into the district's Administrator Training Academy (ATA) and foreshadowed several absences or resignation from the study.

Ride-along 2. The ride-a-long took place after the season had changed. I rode a bus and observed parent presence at bus stops and bus driver practices on an afternoon route in winter temperatures.

Session 7. On February 9, 2017, the AR team analyzed data by comparing the number of bus referrals mid-year for August 2015 through January 2016 and for August 2016 through January 2017 for possible patterns. The AR team discussed the Bus Transportation section of the XES Parent-Student Handbook (2016-2017), which listed bus riding as a privilege that can be removed without warning. The zero-tolerance discipline policy for bus violations was documented with a gradual increase in one, three , and five day bus suspensions for the first, second and third offenses, respectively. The AR team noted that the doubling of suspension days should be noted in the Parent-Student Handbook, such as that the fourth referral consequence would be a ten day bus suspension. Consequently, the zero-tolerance policy and bus suspension discussions provided feedback for items on the March 13, 2017, agenda and, therefore, the meeting was cancelled. The AR team discussed current events, such as Stirgus (2016) reporting that bus accidents occur about "every other day in WCPS," and the use of bus cameras as a possible remedy for school bus safety. Before closing out the study, I shared the research with Dr. Wisdom, XES Principal; Train, the WCPS Transportation Supervisor, and the study participants.

There may be a need to revise the XES Parent-Student Handbook to reflect the current needs of transient students because research suggests that the exclusive use of zero-tolerance policies to punish students is negatively connected to their attendance, academic performance and daily conduct. Payne (2005) revealed that students are in need of a greater amount of "space" to exhibit their unique personality, and they need warmth and accountability from adults

to successfully ascend Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (see Figure 8). The time between the school bus exiting the community and traveling toward the school was the most dangerous segment in a student's day because they were indirectly supervised. Ideally, the school bus drivers would recognize the vast and differing levels of maturity, unique abilities, experiences, and basic human needs of the students on the bus each day and respond accordingly.

Support from Literature

Riding the school bus was considered a privilege (XES Parent-Student Handbook, 2016) and was also a challenge for some students and bus drivers due to factors beyond their control, such as poverty, assigned route, lack of community support, and unmet basic needs (Maslow, 1943). Blank and Shavit (2016) revealed that a few unruly students can create a disruptive environment for all. For twenty years, XES has hosted the self-contained emotional behavior disorder (EBD) program for three regions within the WCPS district, in which teachers are trained to provide daily instruction and supervision. Unfortunately, some of the most volatile students enrolled in a closely monitored special educational setting (small classroom) with four or five other students and an adult monitor (paraprofessional) were placed on an indirectly supervised large school bus with fifty bus riders. If XES staff members receive the needed training to manage physically aggressive students with Behavior Intervention Plans (BIP), so should non-special needs school bus drivers. Additionally, some students with diagnoses, such as Attention Deficient Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and Oppositional Defiance Disorder (ODD) experienced great difficulty riding the school bus without constant redirection by the bus driver and frequent encouragement from their parents and teachers. Some students with an Individual Education Plan (IEP) were transferred to a special needs bus (with an adult monitor) after several major (violent or physical) violations.

Thompson (2016) stated that, in grade school, suspension was often the beginning of a chain of events that led to academic disengagement, academic failure, and subsequent delinquency. Putnam, Handler, Ramirez-Platt, and Luiselli (2003) revealed that there is a need to train bus drivers to identify inappropriate and recognize appropriate behaviors during the transport of students by providing positive reinforcement and rewarding exceptional conduct.

The ongoing recruitment and retention of school bus drivers across the nation had an impact beyond the school bus setting. The School Bus Fleet Contractor Survey (2016) yielded that 85% of school districts surveyed across the country reported having school bus driver shortages. Daley (2016) reported that Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) district, like WCPS and other large school districts, experienced a bus driver shortage for the 2016-2017 school year. The ways that bus drivers were hired and trained was addressed by the district's board of education, while substitute drivers filled the bus driver vacancies. The director of the CMS district, Janet Thomas, emphasized that driver candidates must be 18 years or older, pass four written tests, have a commercial driver license, and pass the road portion of a driving test with an 80% or better. The WCPS district, like CMS, was looking for bus drivers who wanted to drive for the right reasons and love children (Daley, 2016). Just like a substitute or novice teacher has experienced their share of challenges, it is no different for school bus drivers.

Through the lens of humanist and Motivation Learning theorist Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory (HNT), I explored the direct impact of the school bus driver's practices on zero-tolerance discipline policies and bus safety. Daniel (2016) stated that there are several external and internal factors that yield motivation in the work place. Extrinsic motivators, such as salary, incentives, and job title may entice a driver to stay committed for the school year. Intrinsic factors, such as pride in completing a task and the joy of the job, attracted

some drivers, like retired school employees and servicemen, to the job of a bus driver (Daley, 2016). The aforementioned factors were carefully managed by some bus drivers who achieved job satisfaction, maintained a safe bus environment, and ascended the pyramid of Maslow's (HNT) toward self-actualization. Bourassa (2016) suggested that the bus drivers create a safe and orderly environment by employing an authoritative style of management. The authoritative style of management employs the needed responsiveness and flexibility to consider alternative discipline consequences. Additionally, this management style required the driver to have high expectations, firm rules, and a willingness to communicate effectively with the parents, especially before an offense escalated to a bus referral.

Action Research Outcome

The purpose of this chapter explored the methodology, processes, and conceptual framework involved in answering the three research questions at XES. The undergirding theory, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, paralleled the perspective of the AR team and effectiveness of XES school bus drivers. This action research study addressed the impact of zero-tolerance discipline policies on school bus safety as it relates to student attendance, academic outcomes, and the bus infraction referral process. The data presented in the next chapter was analyzed and triangulated through the perspective of local school personnel and transportation staff members. During the action research process, XES and WCPS participants acquired a new respect for the responsibilities and best practices of their counterparts. Finally, the examination of qualitative and quantitative data, such as SDS, Rule 13 bus referrals, transcripts, and interviews revealed academic and behavioral results that offer a means for improvement at XES.

Table 5

Literature on School Buses and School Bus Drivers

Organization(s) Date(s)	Title	Method(s)	Sampling	Results	Conclusion
International Journal of Engineering Technology Science and Research (June, 2016)	Finding Motivation for Workers in the 21st Century	Explores three principal sources of motivation and four theories of motivation	Theory X & Y; Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Motivation) Theory; Argyris Interpersonal Dev & Job Enlargement	Compared Motivation Theories to reveal influence of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation factors	All of the theories have their pros and cons. Author proposes a hybrid of the theories.
International Journal of Innovative Research and Development (June, 2016)	Factors Influence Quality of Life—A Theoretical Proposition	Provided various definitions (and examples) for 'quality of life' and influencing factors	From MHN to Andrews classic model (well-being); 12 factors influencing Quality of Life	Educational, family relations, financial, work place, social esteem, dependence, interdependence, and strength all play a major part in 'quality of life.'	The aptitude and attitude of a person is critical for achieving a 'quality life.' Continuously approach life as opportunities for change.
PsychCentral.com (Blog) 6/28/2016	Fostering Self-Actualization During Child Development	Explore MHN first 4 levels of "D-needs" safety, food, shelter	Positive environment, Importance of: authority, health, and safe home	How different living conditions, authoritative parenting and healthy/safe home can	Fostering positive child development strategies achieves esteem and belonging to move toward self-actualization

				impact child	
The Authors SAGE Publications (July-September 2016)	The Association Between Student Reports of Classmates' Disruptive Behavior and Students' Achievement	5th-8th graders tested nationally and completed questionnaires in 4 core areas to collect data with two time points	ES/MS students grouped in four clusters to test in two groups (strictness and mistreatment)	Most students changed schools during study (1st 6th &7th -9th). 78% stricter in upper graders. Self-reported teachers prefer some students over others.	Policy makers seeking ways to improve disciplinary climate and reduce infractions, violence.
Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis (Winter, 2003)	Improving Student Bus-Riding Behavior Through a Whole-School Intervention	Whole-school collaborative (training) effort with students, drivers ,teachers, and administrators using an incentive-based system to motivate performance	Three year study with 624 bus riders (K-fifth), drivers and teachers. Longitudinal data: out of seat without permission, throwing objects, eating, talking back, damaging property, obscene language/gestures , and hitting others	Potential threats to internal validity (seasonal influences not considered). Over the 3 year study-office and bus referrals decreased (61%) by building a sustainable program with high accountability for all.	School adopted and maintained after consultation ended. Limitations-no one to travel on buses to conduct "interobserver agreement assessment."
Brigham Young University Educational and Law Journal	Eliminating Zero-tolerance Policies in	The Critical Race and Restorative Justice	In 2013-14 African-American and Hispanics students were	MDCPS reduced school-related arrests, expulsions	Florida (MDCPS) changed its zero-tolerance statute toward students of color and eliminated punitive practices.

(June 30, 2016)	Schools: Miami-Dade County Public School's (MDCPS) Approach	Theories were adopted to argue alternatives to zero-tolerance policies in MDCPS (School-to-Prison Pipeline)	23% and 30% of enrolment, yet 53% (African-American) and 15%(Hispanics) of suspensions and expulsions	(44%), and suspensions with the use of three-tier positive behavior support system, as soon as it was implemented.	

CHAPTER FOUR

CASE STUDY

Description of Context

This case study was conducted within Winn County Public Schools (WCPS), a large urban school district that is located in the southeastern region of the United States. WCPS, with over 178,000 students and 22,000 employees, is one of the largest employers in the area. However, WCPS is annually challenged to fill its bus driver positions due to student growth and other factors, such as low salary and daily morning and afternoon split shifts. Therefore, the district has an ongoing recruitment campaign to hire, train, and retain bus drivers for schools, such as Xavier Elementary School (XES), which is the data collection location of my case study.

Although the collection of data is analyzed at XES itself, bus drivers and the school bus environment play a prominent role in this study, where 79% of students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch (FRL). Bus drivers transport 83% of the 1150 students enrolled at XES twice daily. The other 17% of students are car riders or are transported by a day care vehicle. XES is a very transient Title I school for both students and staff, which has influenced the regular attendance of Action Research (AR) team participants. An average of five participants were in attendance during AR meetings was five, including myself. The participants were very courteous in providing reasons for their absences, such as leave for personal, sick and scheduling conflicts. When an AR team participant was absent, I met with the participant independently or emailed the questions, which we monitored for triangulation purposes, upon completion of the task. Additionally, the influence of the bus driver on school bus safety may be larger than

anticipated, as five themes were common between the reflective dialogue of the AR team and bus driver interviews. In this mixed method research study I addressed the cause of school bus discipline infractions and their impact on school bus safety. The following research questions guided this study:

1) How do school bus infractions affect students' learning opportunities through absenteeism?

2) What is the relationship, if any, between school bus infractions and student achievement outcomes?

3) How does the action research process affect the number of bus infractions for students?

Action Research Cycle

Method

Mixed methods research, as defined by Creswell (2014), is a unique approach to research inquiry that integrates quantitative and qualitative data during the collection analysis and interpretation process. As an inside researcher, the integrity, reliability, and relevance of the data is important, which is why I utilized the mixed methods research approach and triangulated the data with the AR team. The use of open-ended and close-ended data in isolation presented both strengths and limitations during my study. Creswell (2014) states, that the mixing or blending of both qualitative and quantitative data collectively provides a stronger foundation for understanding research problems, questions, and the views of research participants. Additionally, Stake (2005) states that the mixed method approach provides opportunities to explore the diverse perspectives and experiences of the participants.

The AR study was completed in one cycle utilizing an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory (HNT). The IPA was selected because it provided the flexibility to interpret the personal experiences of study participants from differing lenses. Maslow's HNT (1943) is based primarily on satisfying a person's basic "physiological" needs in life, such as food, water, shelter, and warmth. These essential factors are positioned at the bottom of the hierarchy of needs pyramid. The importance of Maslow's HNT for both bus riders and drivers is the acquisition of motivation. The bus drivers are the liaison between the home and XES and are therefore crucial to providing student riders with a positive start and end to each school day. The bus drivers provide intervention strategies and, communication with the parent, as well as follow prescribed behavior management steps before a bus discipline referral is submitted to XES. The bus driver is required to submit a summary of the incident with the bus referral (WCPS Transportation Handbook for School Personnel, 2016-17). Ultimately, I depend on these documents (referral and summary) from the school bus driver to initiate my student bus offense investigation and subsequent zero-tolerance policy consequence (XES Parent-Student Handbook, 2016). Argyris (1970) looks at the nature of the workplace and how it influences the individual worker, which includes identifying three limitations, such as maturity, interpersonal competence, and the nature of the organization that drives the motivational level. Bourassa (2016) adds that many people, such as bus drivers, may struggle daily to satisfy their basic needs and direct the proper energy towards job fulfillment.

Achieving and maintaining a safe bus environment is no easy task, yet some bus drivers have consistently provided such a setting for their riders. Rachakonda (2016) explores the eleven factors that influence the quality of life and work experience for school bus drivers:

physical and mental health; educational factors; family relations and interpersonal bonds; financial factors; workplace environment; striving for safe and secure life; social esteem; personal and social adjustment; dependence and interdependence; personal strength; and religious or spiritual well-being. Consequently, based on these factors and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory, this study targeted the basic needs of the students and adults from August 8, 2016 through February 13, 2017.

The school bus, like the world, is a big place where anything can happen at any time. One such example is what happened in Charlotte, North Carolina, when multiple adults forced their way on to a school bus and assaulted several elementary students because someone was "talking about my cousin's clothes" (Mendis, November 10, 2016). This type of incident could happen anywhere at any time. Each morning, kindergartners through fifth graders, await the arrival of a school bus heading to schools, such as XES (WCPS Transportation Manual, 2016-2017).   The ages of the XES students living in the high-poverty area range from five to twelve years of age. The students also share common experiences, including moving between multiple schools, sleepiness, fatigue, and hunger.   The school bus arrives at the bus stop with parents waving good bye to their children as they board the school bus, a microcosm of society.

Purpose and Procedures

The purpose of the case study is to examine the impact of zero-tolerance discipline policies on school bus safety from the perspective of school bus drivers. Interviews, school bus ride-a-long observations, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Motivation theory, and three research questions guide this study: 1) How do school bus infractions affect students' learning opportunities through absenteeism? 2) What is the relationship, if any, between school bus

infractions and student achievement outcomes? and 3) How does the action research process affect the number of bus infractions for students?

Recruitment of Participants

This case study involved extensive planning, steps and procedures, with supporting forms organized in the Appendix section of this document. First, approval was acquired from WCPS and the principal of XES to conduct my Action Research (AR) study. Second, I acquired approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the University of Georgia. The IRB process required a number of documents to be submitted, such as a Client Recruitment Letter and Consent Letter. Following IRB approval, I utilized a recruitment letter to solicit XES staff members from grade level groups (K-2 and 3-5) to participate in the AR study. Third, I received approval from the WCPS Bus Supervisor to recruit school bus drivers to participate in the study. I provided a recruitment letter and questionnaire to all bus drivers in order to gauge interest and acquire contact information. All interested school bus drivers were contacted for a face-to-face semi-structured interview, potential bus ride-along observations, and examination of bus discipline referrals, with supporting forms located in the Appendix section of this document.

The qualitative and quantitative data collected from seven bus drivers of both regular and special needs buses was analyzed using the interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach (Reid, Flowers, & Larkin, 2005). The IPA approach was selected because it offers insight into the personal experiences of the participants, while providing me with opportunities to interpret qualitative research data. Smith (2007) suggests that IPA makes sense of a given phenomenon by connecting to research questions, topics, drawing together multiple perspectives, and providing feedback over a span of time. I used IPA to analyze the questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, school-wide discipline summary, and Rule 13 bus discipline referrals,

including attendance of violators. The AR team shared their professional perspective and provided triangulation through regular discussions about on-campus discipline infractions, bus violations, and implications for students' attendance. The participants in the study were each given a pseudonym and a questionnaire to acquire baseline data for the study. After the school bus drivers completed the questionnaire and expressed interest in the study, I scheduled and completed a semi-structured interview with each of them, which included 12 questions that were modified based on the driver's responses.

Following each interview, the information was transcribed to afford me an opportunity to revisit each interviewee's comments. The original documents were organized into color-coded folders based on their respective focus group and stored in an off-campus secure environment. Additionally, per IRB request, electronic documents were password-protected on an external drive. Once all of the information was organized, I followed the recommendations of Gall, Gall, and Borg, (2007) and Creswell (2013) to use Vivo codes to link specific words to code labels. Rubin and Rubin (1995) state, that coding is the important process of grouping interviewees' responses into categories, ideas, themes or concepts. Therefore, I decided to manually code the qualitative research data to revisit the participants' comments, while noting five potential themes and patterns of the study. I completed this step one participant at a time, which proved to be quite challenging and rewarding, as I facilitated the comparison of rich information between categories and support or opposition of my research questions (Maxwell, 1996). Additionally, to ensure validity, I utilized a modified version of Wellman and Lipton's (2004) Data Driven Dialogue protocol during the analysis of data, such as XES discipline trend data and Rule 13 bus violations (as cited in Love, Stiles, Mundry, & DiRanna, 2008). Wellman and Lipton's Data Driven Dialogue consists of four phases: Prediction, Observation, Making Meaning, and Now

What. I had planned to compare the annual state-wide high stakes reading scores of XES and neighboring elementary schools. However, the annual May administration of the test is beyond the time allotted for this research study, so I will utilize WCPS Quarterly District Assessments (QDA) English/Language Arts scores instead. Additionally, I will compare the number of XES bus referrals for 2016-2017 with other elementary schools in the area.

There are three other elementary schools located within a ten mile radius of XES William Elementary School (WES), Flower Elementary School (FES), and Donald Elementary School (DES).[2] The three area elementary schools are similar demographically, except that WES has an average student enrollment of 600 (half the average population of 1200 at FES, DES and XES). Students transition between the schools for many reasons, such as financial hardships (homelessness), family crisis (divorce), educational programs (special education), or permissive transfers (child care hardship). Regardless of the reason, school transfers create challenges for families to adapt to a new school with its own set of practices, policies, and bus drivers, which is evident in the wide range of bus referral data between the schools.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire is a very brief document used to collect demographic information from the participants (located in the Appendix section). Ethnicity, gender, years of bus driving experience, and the perception of safety at XES were the basic questions. Respondents were reminded that pseudonyms would be provided to maintain their confidentiality. The research questions were incorporated into the questionnaire, as well as in the reflective discussions during AR team meetings. Pen and paper were utilized to complete the short questionnaire. The participants were provided forty-eight hours to complete each section of the questionnaire, although some questionnaires were submitted incomplete.

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[2] William, Flower, and Donald Elementary schools are pseudonyms.

School-wide Discipline Summary

 The School-wide Discipline Summary (SDS) is a monthly electronic report provided by WCPS to monitor on-campus and bus discipline referrals at XES. SDS is self-explanatory and is organized by WCPS 13 Behavior Rule Violations:

 Rule 1, School Disruption; Rule 2, Damage/Steal School Property; Rule 3, Damage/Steal Private Property; Rule 4, Threat/Intimidate/Physical Contact with Staff; Rule 5, Threat/Intimidate/Physical Contact with another Student; Rule 6, Weapon Possession; Rule 7, Drug Possession; Rule 8, Failure to Follow Directions or Commands; Rule 9, Sexual Misconduct; Rule 10, Tardies/AWOLS; Rule 11, Conduct Subversive to Good Order; Rule 12, Chronic Behavior Problem Student; and Rule 13, Bus Violations. Rule 13 bus infractions provide information for the research questions. SDS data was analyzed by the AR team to discover patterns of behavior on school bus routes, discipline infraction codes, and repeat violators. At the end of the first semester of the school year (January 2017), first and fourth graders had the largest number of on-campus discipline referrals, 113 and 63 (minor/major offenses) respectively, which is significantly similar to the Rule 13 bus violations by grade level referenced later in this document (see Figure 13) (XES SWIS Report January 3, 2017).

Bus Discipline Referrals

 School bus drivers implement several steps before writing a bus discipline referral. The bus drivers review the rules and expectations with students regularly, assign seats, and provide families with a Parent Notification Form (PNF) and phone calls if previous strategies were unsuccessful. After the PNF has been issued and the negative behavior of the student continues, the school bus driver then submits a WCPS Rule 13 bus discipline referral to XES. During the study, the AR team members were transparent with their lack of knowledge in school bus

matters. They learned that a WCPS Rule 13 Bus Discipline Referral averages an hour, from start to finish, which includes navigating the community "no snitch" phenomenon on the bus and at school. Parents advise their children to not snitch, by responding with, "I don't know" or "I don't remember" when questioned by a WCPS bus driver or XES staff member. Thus, withholding valuable information during investigations. In 2015-2016, there were 94 Rule 13 bus violations at XES (see Table 4), which equals twelve days of investigating inappropriate bus behavior that is dedicated to a non-instructional matter. In comparison, the AR team suggests the Rule 13 Bus Violation data for the first semester of the 2016- 2017 school year contains a theme that influences student attendance, academic outcome, and the bus referral process.

Summary of Findings

Three research questions guided the methodology of the case study, which is the foundation for the findings. The Miles for Smiles Bus Intervention Program (MSBIP) and Student Discipline Summary (SDS) report provided quantitative data to evaluate the study at XES.

XES is located in the Winn County Public School (WCPS) District. It is a very transient school for both students and staff. WCPS is a large urban school district that is located in the southeastern region of the United States with 139 schools, an enrollment of more than 178,000 pre-school – 12th grade students, and a teaching and support staff of 22,000 for the 2016-2017 school year. WCPS has an accountability system in place to predict the resources needed in several areas, such as student enrollment, staffing, and instructional resources. However, WCPS is annually challenged to fill its bus driver positions due to student growth and other factors, such as salary and daily morning and afternoon split shifts. Therefore, the district has an ongoing recruitment campaign to hire, train, and retain bus drivers for schools, including XES.

Violent and inappropriate student bus behaviors at XES interfere with the pleasant ride of others, negatively impacts students' attitudes, and influences the instructional start in several classrooms before the school bus riders even enter the school building.

Research Question 1

How do school bus infractions affect students' learning opportunities through absenteeism? The findings of the analyzed data revealed that school bus infractions indeed have no significant impact on student learning opportunities or absenteeism. The AR team successfully collaborated to implement an intervention system titled the Miles for Smiles Bus Intervention Program to significantly decrease violent school bus infractions. Through parent contacts, consistent communication with XES staff, and following established WCPS transportation department processes, school bus drivers were an invaluable variable toward affecting the learning outcome of student riders with one or more bus suspensions. Consequently, the relationship between the bus driver, parents, and XES personnel significantly improved during my case study. Furthermore, the awareness of established zero-tolerance discipline policies in the Parent–Student Handbooks by all stakeholders encouraged the students to make better choices and maintain regular attendance, in spite of a bus suspension. Ultimately, the case study showed that the academic outcome for students (with multiple bus referrals) on the QDA II Mid-Year E/LA was not affected.

Research Question 2

What is the relationship, if any, between school bus infractions and student achievement outcome? This case study revealed that strategies, such as teachers greeting students at the door each morning and afternoon, may have a positive influence on student bus behavior. The AR team explained how a teacher (or any staff member) can help a student

recover from earning a bus referral before "shutting down" in the instructional setting. The school bus drivers understand the impact they can have on the social, emotional, and academic achievement of student riders. The feedback offered during the open-ended bus driver interviews revealed best practices that are congruent with local school expectations, including their desire for additional student behavior management training.

Research Question 3

How does the research process affect the number of bus infractions for students? Could I be the problem? The research process required me to constantly reflect during bus referral investigations. I viewed the infractions from the perspective of parents and student riders. As the administrator for first and fourth graders and bus discipline, I pondered my impact on bus infractions. My grade levels have the largest number of on-campus referrals and are responsible for a significant number of the bus infractions noted earlier in this document. However, the data shows that the same five students account for 48.44% of the on-campus referrals (XES SWIS January 4, 2017), which includes a group of volatile first and fourth graders in self-contained EBD classes and riders of special needs buses. Additionally, I was more aware of the influence of at least 18 convicted sex offenders residing in the XES community (WCPS Transportation Report February, 13, 2017), and a wide spectrum of minor and major bus violations, with zero-tolerance policies and consequences in the XES Parent-Student Handbook. There is a need to revise the local school handbook, which may be shared with other elementary school with similar bus safety concerns. There was a gap in the literature during this study on the impact of zero-tolerance discipline policies on school bus safety. Further research should explore the influence of an administrator's multiple duties and responsibilities on school bus and campus wide safety.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS

The purpose of this action research study is to examine the impact of zero-tolerance discipline policies on school bus safety. This case study answers the following research questions:

1. How do school bus infractions affect students' learning opportunities through absenteeism?

2. What is the relationship, if any, between school bus infractions and student achievement outcomes?

3. How does the action research process affect the number of bus infractions for students?

This chapter presents the research findings through the analysis of qualitative and quantitative data from SDS, school bus driver interviews, ride-a-long observations, and transcripts, which discovered five themes during the coding process.

Table 6

Research Study Findings

Research Question	Findings
1. How do school bus infractions affect students' learning opportunities through absenteeism?	• Planning-"I see the way a student acts when I write them up. Most students shut down after a bus infraction and it ruins their day. It's like they are absent and they don't give 100% effort during learning." - absenteeism changes the routine for students. It may take some students a while to regain their routine.

	• Responsibility- parent or driver should accept responsibility for transporting and informing the students of school bus expectations because it impacts the learning outcome and absenteeism. - "I don't understand how the parents get mad after the warnings I give before a referral. I hear them complaining about missing school, only after their child is suspended off the bus." - school bus infractions do not significantly affect students' learning opportunities through absenteeism.
2. What is the relationship, if any, between school bus infractions and student achievement outcomes?	• Relationships- "get to know them" or "you have to build relationships" with the students and parents. • Communication- "If they behaved on the bus and in school it would be easier to learn. Most students do behave, but when they don't it cost learning time" -The importance of communication between the school, the bus driver, and the parents is essential to student achievement. - The WCPS Quarterly Assessments reveal there is no relationship between school bus infractions and achievement.
3. How does the action research process affect the number of bus infractions for students?	• Survival- parents advocating for their children. -Students are overwhelmed and are taking their frustrations out on anyone - More sensitive to parent pleas

Research Question 1

How Do School Bus Infractions Affect Students' Learning Opportunities Through Absenteeism?

School bus referrals at Xavier Elementary School (XES) are one part of a larger number of discipline infractions annually. The XES Parent-Student Handbook contains zero-tolerance discipline policies for bus riders that impose additional days of bus suspension for each bus

referral. The AR team examined the bus policy in the Parent-Student Handbook and the influence on bus suspensions, learning outcome, and absenteeism.

Absenteeism can influence the ability of a student to acquire knowledge at school and on the school bus. During the coding process, two themes evolved from the dialogue: Planning and Responsibility. From the perspective of the driver and parents, the importance of proactively planning to safely transport students in an efficient and orderly manner was a common thread, which included arriving at the bus stop in a timely manner and frequently reviewing the bus environment expectations with all parties. "I see the way a student acts when I write them up. Most students shut down after a bus infraction and it ruins their day. It's like they are absent and they don't give 100% effort during learning" (Dennis, interview, June 14, 2016). Maslow (1943) reports that children have a greater need to feel safe and in the presence of a crisis (such as receiving a bus referral, in this case), and some parents may elect to keep their child at home to minimize embarrassment.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory (HNT) states that children, being at the mercy of adults (such as parents, drivers, and administrators) desire social acceptance in small and large group settings, in this case, those settings include, school and the bus. School bus violations affect students' learning opportunities through absenteeism "due to the fact that absenteeism changes the routine for students."(Broadway, AR team meeting, December 12, 2016) It may take some students a while to regain their routine (Carson, AR team meeting, December 12, 2016). The recurring theme of whether the adult, parent or driver should accept responsibility for transporting and informing students of school bus expectations was important because it impacts the learning outcome and absenteeism. "I don't understand how the parents get mad after the warnings I give, before a referral. I hear them complaining about missing school, only

after their child is suspended off the bus" (Berle, interview, August 29, 2016). All seven bus drivers interviewed for this study follow a daily vehicle maintenance and student management plan, which is expected of all WCPS bus drivers. However, WCPS annually has a shortage of bus drivers, and this shortage impacts the learning opportunities of bus riders at XES. For example, in 2015, the bus riders of XES missed a bus safety learning opportunity due to the absenteeism of the puppet show production. "It is with great regret that I inform you we will not be able to present the School Bus Safety Puppet Show this year. As you know the Puppet Team was needed to drive routes due to a shortage of drivers" (WCPS Puppet Team, email, December 16, 2015). A bus safety video was presented by the XES media center staff as a secondary source of safety information. School bus infractions do not significantly affect students' learning opportunities through absenteeism, although as evidenced by this anecdote and others, the shortage of bus drivers may affect students' learning opportunities. A sampling of XES bus riders with two or more bus suspensions earned statistically superior academic scores than their grade level peers at other elementary schools in the area based on their performance on the WCPS Quarterly District Assessments (QDA) for English / Language Arts (E/LA) QDA II E/LA. Although the selected students had three or more days of bus suspensions, most attended school each day of their bus related consequences. Finally, two of the students with five or more absences (as seen in Table 8) are due to out-of-school suspensions (OSS).

Research Question 2

What is the Relationship, if any, Between School Bus Infractions and Student Achievement Outcome?

As the inside researcher, I took copious notes during AR team meetings, interviewed seven bus driver participants, and transcribed the information, which included pseudonyms to

ensure confidentiality is maintained. While analyzing the data, most of the participants argued that there is a relationship between school bus infractions and student achievement outcome. To ensure the authenticity of the data, I monitored my unique biases (of being the bus discipline administrator and inside researcher at XES) through triangulation of the information. Trustworthiness, reliability, and validity were of the utmost importance as I coded the semi-structured interviews, bus observations, and school documents to address the relationship, if any, between school bus infractions and student achievement outcomes.

There were two parallel themes for the WCPS bus drivers, parents and the AR team Communication and Relationships. The phrases or comments "get to know them" or "you have to build relationships" were present during discussions, data coding, and parent-student zero-tolerance discipline policy conversations. The importance of communication between the school, bus driver, and home is essential to student achievement, which includes academic and behavioral outcomes. "If they behaved on the bus and in school it would be easier to learn. Most students do behave, but when they don't it costs learning time" (Schoffner, interview, September 28, 2016). XES is a transient school, where families move between three other elementary schools within the area, WES, FES, and DES. This movement challenges the students to become familiar with the new local schools expectations, bus procedures, and zero-tolerance discipline policies. As of February 13, 2017, the number of school referrals for 2016-2017 are as follows: WES, 3; DES, 23; FES, 49; and XES, 58 (Train, WCPS Supervisor). WES has a student enrollment of 610, which could account for the low number of bus referrals. However, DES, with 23 bus referrals, has an enrollment of 1182 students, very similar to the FES enrollment of 1159 and XES enrollment of 1165. Moreover, WES, FES, and DES have posted the WCPS

Parent-Student Handbook on-line, but the website does not specify the zero-tolerance discipline policies of their respective schools.

I attend district-wide and Area Assistant Principal professional development sessions with administrators from WES, DES, and FES. I inquired about their bus discipline referral process at their respective schools, and each administrator shared common responses. The first bus referral is a three day bus suspension, with the goal of creating a deterrent for students acquiring multiple bus referrals, increased focus on positive student achievement outcomes, and activating parental involvement. Additionally, multiple administrators at FES, WES and DES handle bus discipline referrals for their respective grade levels, unlike XES where I handle all bus referrals, investigations, and phone calls. The WCPS Quarterly Assessments (WQA) reveals there is no relationship between school bus infractions and student achievement, when comparing XES with the district and area schools (WES, DES, and FES) for the Mid-Year QDA II, for English/Language Arts scores.

The action research findings reveal that students with multiple school bus referrals (two or more) performed at or above the level of their peers at neighboring elementary schools, as well as XES. A sampling of school bus riders with multiple bus violations was analyzed, with data revealing students of various learning abilities (those with IEPs to those in the gifted program). Student riders with two or more bus suspensions earned statistically superior academic scores than their grade level peers at WES, DES, FES, and XES. Based on performance from WCPS Quarterly District Assessments (QDA), English/Language Arts (E/LA) QDA II E/LA, third grade student proficiency levels increased from 11% to 28% and students falling in the exemplary category grew from 2% to 6%. In fourth grade, the total proficiency level increased from 11% to 23% and exemplary increased from 2% to 6%. Our fifth-grade students in the

proficient category increased from 21% to 38% and the exemplary students rose from 3% to 7%.

Not all learners are administered the QDA in the same manner. Kindergartners receive state-required performance assessments and screenings throughout the year, and the QDA is orally read to first and second graders at a moderate pace. Additionally, students in kindergarten and first grade are evaluated with four levels of E, S, N, and U (Excellent, Satisfactory, Needs Improvement, and Unsatisfactory), while second through fifth graders earn numerical and letter graders (A/100-90; B/89-80; C/79-74; D/73-70; U/69-0). XES students who have received only one bus referral are performing on grade level. The students highlighted in Table 8 with multiple bus infractions are an academic and behavioral sampling of XES learners. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory (1943) argues for the importance of students building relationships with adults to become acclimated to academic expectations and surroundings in order to experience a feeling of belonging, which will influence the number of bus infractions for students.

Research Question 3

How Does the Research Process Affect the Number of Bus Infractions for Students?

As stated previously in this study, parents state that bus riders are out of control, buses are late, students are loud and some parents argue that bus drivers are unfair to the student riders. In addition, parents advocate for their children (e.g., "He said he didn't do it!") and are concerned about how their child will be transported to and from school during a bus suspension. These are just a few of the frequent bus issues, emails and voice messages from students and parents that sometimes lead to a bus infraction, with each bus referral averaging one hour from investigation to notifying the parent of the student offender. Student offenders, typically represent approximately 10% of the student population.

I have been the bus discipline administrator at XES for over five years, and this research study has magnified the process but reduced the pace of investigation of each bus infraction. For decades, there have been concerns about school bus safety and order in WCPS, including the recruitment and retention of bus drivers. Retaining bus drivers has been a recurring issue due to exponential growth in the county, low salary, and challenging bus routes. XES has twenty regular and five special needs buses that serve the community.

"Students, it seems are overwhelmed and are taking their frustrations out on anyone and may need a break" (Broadway, AR team meeting, November 14, 2016). As a research insider, I increased the depth of conversations with student riders during this study and was sensitive to the pleas of parents and guardians, while implementing zero-tolerance discipline consequences. In one situation, the grandparent-guardians of two students were reported as ill, so I agreed to alternate the days of bus suspensions for "Luke " and sibling "Tia." It was reported by Train, WCPS Transportation supervisor that, both students were extremely disrespectful to the bus driver on the way home, and the grandparents were at the bus stop (seemingly healthy) awaiting the arrival of their grand kids. I regret succumbing to grandmother's request. Subsequently, the next day, Tia had a bus suspension for five consecutive days. I wanted to view the bus environment from the perspective of a student rider with no other means of traveling to and from school. "These students start back to school in July, earlier than when I was growing up. I think the students get tired and it shows in their behavior, with no school breaks" (Carson, personal communication, January 9, 2017). Technology, limited unstructured play, and the increase in single-parent households are a few challenges for XES students. "My job is to keep all of us safe and survive the ride to and from school. Each day we have all grade levels mixed together on the bus. At school they are separated. I try to keep them apart, but when the bus is moving some of

the bigger ones bother the smaller ones and most of it started in the community and they bring it

on the bus" (Bishop, interview, September 28, 2016). The topic of survival was a common theme

from reflective dialogue from AR team meetings, bus driver interviews, and student comments.

As a XES administrator I was challenged to balance the enforcement of zero-tolerance discipline

policies and addressing the basic needs of the parents, guardians, and students, as they focused

on surviving the school bus environment.

There is little room to move on the bus because all of your possessions are in your lap

inside of a book bag. You try to remember what your big brother told you about bus etiquette–

only the strong survive and the less eye contact you make the better. You find yourself sharing a

seat with one and sometimes two total strangers that may be almost twice your size and age. The

seats are so high that the only adult on the bus, the driver, cannot see you in his/her rearview

mirror. Your mother told you this is a fresh start for you, leave all your troubles at your old

school, which will enable you to strive for better attendance. You would never admit it, but you

do not trust anyone at the new school, in the community, and are terrified that trouble may find

you on this big school bus.

The AR team had limited knowledge of the school bus riding process and bus driver

duties and expectations for student riders. Likewise, school bus drivers had a skewed perspective

of the daily experiences of local school employees. This had its pros and cons. If a student is

misbehaving in class and distracts the teacher, the teacher can stop teaching and deal with the

student, which might include sending the student to another room. As a school bus driver, a

student distraction could cause a major collision or death, like in Maryland (NTSB, 2016).

The disaggregation of data during the final AR meetings produced repetitive comments

and data saturation. Rubin and Rubin (1995) define saturation as the point where data and

relevant discussion become redundant. For example, during a meeting, I reminded the team to stay on topic, while simultaneously establishing a cohesive, non-exploitative, and collaborative environment (Snyder, 2012). My primary focus was on note-taking and avoiding interruptions in the rich dialogue during the AR team meeting.

AR Team Meeting (August 8, 2016, Reflective Dialogue) Notes:

C: I know that students who have issues on the bus often bring negative behaviors into the learning environment. That's why I stand at my door in the morning.

L: When students have repeated infractions they could lead to a school bus suspension which results in missed lessons if the student can't get a ride to school.

W: The student is upset in the morning and it could result in the student being upset the remainder of the day….and the student can bring the behavior to the classroom and disrupt others.

C: You   are   right….It   hinders   the   positive   environment   and   student achievement…some students are unable to shake 'it' and it follows them all day.

B: Also, if students have difficulties on the bus, they have begun the day negatively and yes, it could impact how students focus in class. The emotions of a student could have been affected.

B: For example, if a student is involved in a physical altercation, or was the victim of verbal abuse or bullying, he or she may need to debrief with a teacher or counselor.

L: Great idea….good intervention.

B: Although it is a great intervention, the student is still missing learning opportunities.

L: Well, the negative behaviors that are occurring before school hours…at home…or on the bus….or…at daycare…can carry over to the school causing negative behaviors in the morning.

B: Well, if the student is having difficulty in the afternoon, it could impact their focus on homework, remembering what they learned at school, and could cause the student to carry it over into the next day.

W: …...And the consistent negative bus infractions in the afternoon…can lead to suspensions, thereby causing the student to miss lessons more than one day.

After the AR team analyzed the Bus Violation data, I asked the team to share their thoughts about the Five Year Trend Data from 2012-2017 (see Table 7).

Table 7

XES Five Year Trend (2012-2017) School-Wide Discipline Summary

Rule	Violations 12-13	Violations 13-14	Violations 14-15	Violations 15-16	Violations 16-17
1. School Disruption	40	52	23	60	58
2. Damage/Steal School Property	9	2	1	1	4
3. Damage/Steal Private Property	3	2	3	2	3
4. Threat/Intimidate/Physical Contact with Staff	11	12	21	30	14
5. Threat/Intimidate/Physical Contact with a Student	58	68	37	90	60
6. Weapon Possession	1	3	0	2	0

7. Drug Possession	0	0	1	0	1
8. Failure to Follow Directions or Command	3	3	1	22	17
9. Sexual Misconduct	3	3	9	12	8
10. Tardies/AWOLS	5	3	1	3	4
11. Conduct Subversive to Good Order	0	0	0	0	1
12. Chronic Behavior Problem Student	0	0	0	0	0
13. Bus Violations	77	54	81	94	58
Total Referrals for School Year	210	202	178	316	226
Total Number of Students	110	111	101	139	98

B: Wow, look at this data?! (facial expression –perplexed/excited/disappointed)

W: Is there a reason why the data has increased significantly from '12-'13 through '15-'16? (facial expression – shocked)

L: Bus Violations were excessive in '15-'16, as well as School Disruptions, Physical Contact w/ Students, and Failure to Follow Directions. There are seemingly some similarities.

B: The data shows some increases in negative behaviors, but not consistent enough to identify one area of concern. You see, data is only as good as it is tracked, and accuracy makes it more reliable data.

L: Some students start off their day in a negative way and there is more of a tendency for them to misbehave in other ways, like not following directions….the data shows it.

C: Disruptions, Physical Contact/Aggression, and Failure to Follow Directions all have increased over the years.

B: This is interesting…data could be a reflection of teacher turnover.

(Long pause….across the room with quick glances my way…I continued to take notes)

Or is the increase in data due to the fact that now teachers and staff feel more comfortable writing a form? Whereas before, the drivers were reluctant to complete a form?

B: Look at School Disruption and violations that involve the most dangerous and severe behaviors…seem to be the majority of the violations.

The AR meeting ended after an hour. I was the first to exit the meeting, and I wondered if additional dialogue would continue after my departure because some of my AR team members no longer seemed excited about participating in the study during the meeting. I reflected on the phrase "you may choose not to participate or withdraw at any time" on the consent form, and I was a little concerned about collecting quality data and meeting deadlines if team members withheld their participation. AR team members also completed their questionnaires to establish baseline information for scheduling our face-to-face semi-structured interviews. The AR study participants have returned their completed questionnaires in a sealed envelope addressed to me.

Due to a scheduled event at The University of Georgia on September 12, 2016, I was absent from the AR session and sent an electronic meeting agenda to the AR team. Dennis, the bus driver participant who was scheduled to share duties and responsibilities, best practices, and

common myths of a bus driver, canceled the presentation. Therefore, the focus of the meeting was the monthly quantitative Student Discipline Summary (SDS), with an emphasis on Rule 13 (Bus) Violations and the bus intervention program, titled Miles for Smiles. Each Friday following an AR meeting, each student-rider on a school bus with a thumbs-up from the bus driver (and less than two bus referrals each month) received acknowledgement from our Miles for Smiles Bus Intervention Program, which served as a way to evaluate the research study.

For the third and fourth AR team sessions on October 10, 2016 and November 14, 2016, respectively, the group analyzed SDS data for August through September 2016, including bus discipline infractions. During the second part of the AR session, the team divided into small groups to analyze quantitative bus discipline data, by infraction codes, grade level offenders, and route. The small groups shared the data at the conclusion of the meeting (see Figures 11, 12, and 13).
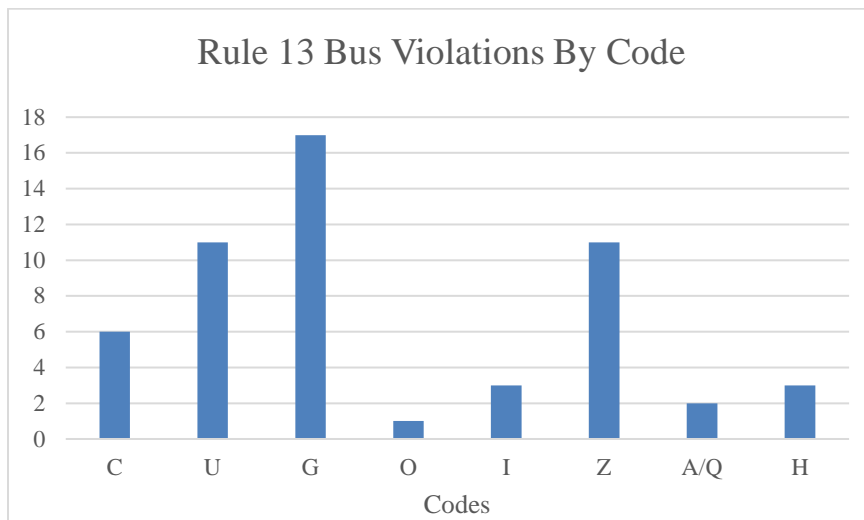
Figure 11. Rule 13 bus violations by code, 2016-2017
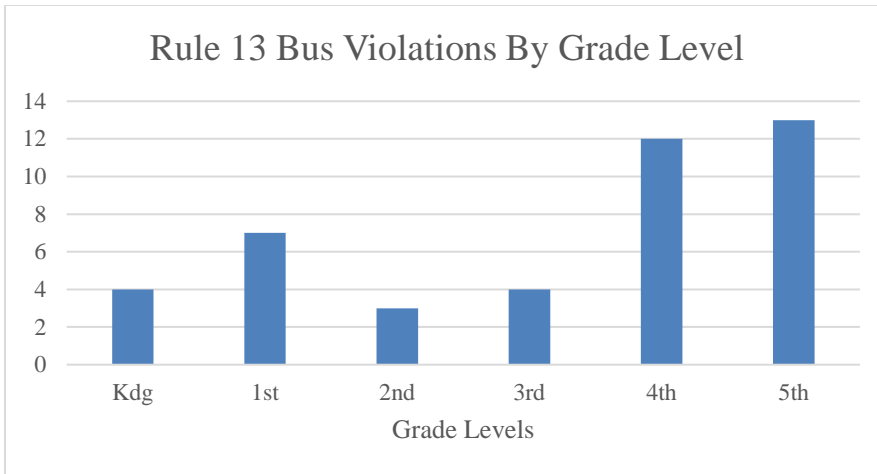
Figure 12. Rule 13 bus violations by grade level, 2016-2017
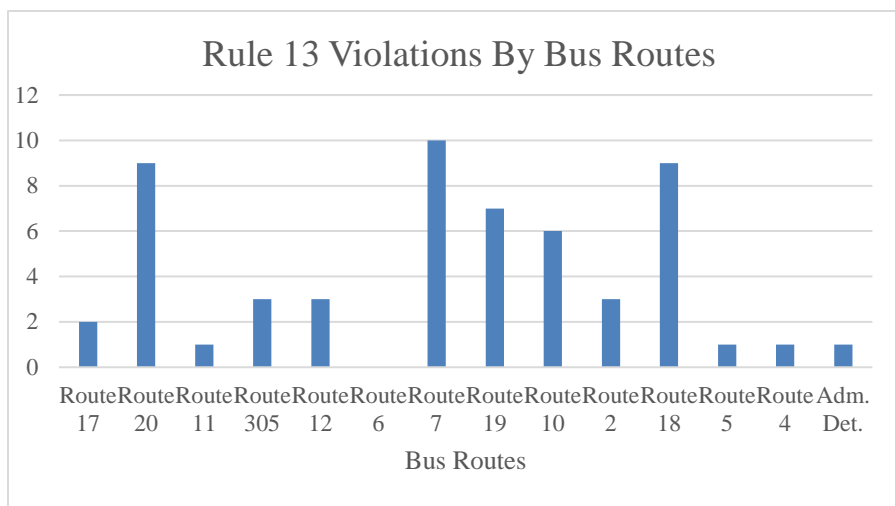
Figure 13. Rule 13 violations by bus routes, 2016-2017

On December 12, 2016, the AR team met to analyze bus infraction data by gender and explore research questions. The data revealed that 79% of the offenders are male student-riders, with some having two or more bus referrals and on campus infractions. The AR team requested time to reflect and respond electronically before the December 2016 winter break. Additionally,

we examined the Monthly SDS data from August through December 2016, including Rule 13 Infractions.

Bus Infractions By Gender

■ Male 34   ■ Female 9

Figure 14. Bus infractions by gender, 2016-2017.

Absenteeism

The bus drivers, AR team, and community members all had similar replies, except that the root of the issue shifted to another party. For example, the bus drivers stated that they are victims of family crisis at home or bad experiences at school. According to them, the students' learning environment is already ruined before the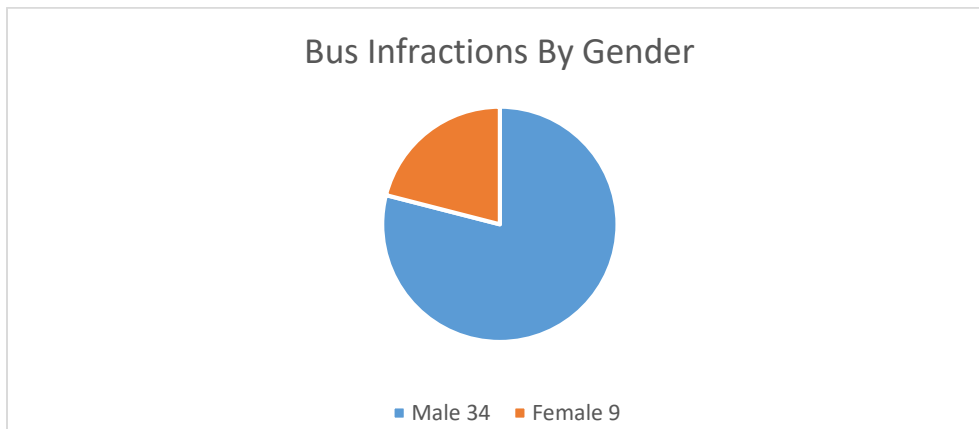y enter the bus and sometimes the student and parents do not get the message until after a bus discipline referral is written. **"**As a bus driver, I greet each rider in the morning and afternoon whether I have submitted a referral for them or not. I know for most of my riders I am the only way they can get to school each day. I know the student's attendance will suffer, but I am responsible for the safety on this bus" (Usher, interview, September 29, 2016). Wilkins, another driver, stated that: **"**It hurts the students when they get on the bus upset, walk into the school upset. I have to be strict so all of my student riders are ready to learn when they walk into class. I refuse to let one student impact the learning

of the others, so I turn in referrals" (Wilkins, interview, September 2, 2016). And according to another driver, Schoffner, he was "certain that bus referrals affect how the students learn and cause some to be absent from school. I tell them imagine the school bus is like a classroom (because you can learn anywhere). For the few bus referrals I turn in, I know I stop some kids from coming to school, but the parents must make them behave" (Schoffner, interview, September 28, 2016).

In contrast, the parents' perspective tends to view the situation of suspension in terms of its immediate effect on the child and his/her ability to get to school. "Suspended off the bus? Can't you put him in in-school suspension (opportunity room)?" "What about the other kids on the bus? Are they being suspended too?" "How am I going to get my child to school?" "If he can't ride the bus he won't be at school." From the perspective of the parent, a bus referral decreases the opportunity for their child to learn and attend school during a bus suspension. For most parents the school bus is their child's sole means of transportation to and from school each day, and they do not believe it is fair when their child is put off the bus. As one parent shared, "All ya'll (the school) do is kick kids off the bus. You don't care. I'm a single parent and I need all the help I can get. The school and bus drivers should, teach them what's right from wrong, make good choices, and listen to the rules and regulations" (Parent, personal communication, November 4, 2016). Additionally, when children get in trouble on the bus and are put off, they miss school, and it is hard for students and their parents to keep up with school work (Parent call, personal communication, January 27, 2017).

Members of the AR team shared that school bus infractions affect the students' learning through absenteeism due to the fact that "absences change the routine for students" (Dennis, November 14, 2016). After an absence, the students need time to become re-acclimated to

classroom expectations and assignments. Some students who lose bus privileges may not have

transportation to school, which increases chances for academic failure (Walker, AR team

meeting, June 14, 2016). However, the data reflect is significant impact on student attendance as

it pertains to school bus infractions during the first semester at XES. The student attendance

rating for XES is 96.47% which includes afterschool care patrons, car riders, and bus riders

(XES Attendance Report, February 2017). The average XES school bus rider with one or more

bus referrals has one absence from school, (see Table 8). The attendance and semester grades

(learning opportunities) of student bus riders with two or more bus violations were explored.

Fifty percent of the students noted below have perfect attendance, which includes a fifth grader

named Gene with a ten-day bus suspension. Luke, a second grader with multiple bus infractions

in 2015-2016, had only one referral during the first semester. Additionally, Ned and Yo-Yo have

five and six absences, respectively, which are due to multiple out-of-school suspensions (OSS)

during the 2016-2017 school year.

Table 8

Rule 13 Bus Data Form 2016-2017 –Student Learning and Absenteeism

Pseudonym	# of Referrals	Grade Level	Grades: B/O/A	Attendance	Note: OSS/IEP
Lala	2	K	On grade level	0 abs/89 days	No/No
Raj	3	1	On	1 abs/89 days	No/No
Luke	1	2	Above	18 abs/ 104	No-Gifted/No
Jack	2	3	Below	1 abs/105 days	No-/No-504
Ned	4	4	Below	5 abs/103days	Yes-2 OSS/Yes
Yoyo	4	4	Below	6 abs /103days	Yes-3 OSS /Yes

Gene	4	5	Above	0 abs/89 days	No-Gifted/No-10 days off bus

Achievement

"It's all connected. I say good morning to the students, because as a bus driver, I am part of both the school and community by teaching manners and how to behave. I tell the students, if you know how to behave, listen, and follow directions, then you can learn at school. When students get in trouble on the bus, it makes for a long day at school" (Dennis, interview, June 14, 2016). Other bus drivers echoed Dennis's perspective, such as the relationship between misbehavior on the bus and how it "costs some classroom learning time" for students other than the offender on the school bus. The research findings reveal however, that there is no significant relationship between school bus violations and student achievement. A sampling of school bus riders with multiple bus violations was analyzed, and the data revealed that students, regardless of number of bus referrals, earned an academic outcome congruent with their grade-level peers. Based on performance from WCPS Quarterly District Assessments (QDA), English/Language Arts (E/LA) Mid-Year QDA II, the third-grade student proficiency level increased from 11% to 28%, and students falling into the exemplary category rose from 2% to 6%. In fourth grade, the total proficiency level increased from 11% to 23% and exemplary increased from 2% to 6%. Our fifth-grade students in the proficient category increased from 21% to 38%, and the exemplary students rose from 3% to 7%. Not all learners are administered the QDA in the same manner. Kindergartners receive state-required performance assessments and screenings throughout the year, and the QDA is verbally administered to first and second graders, at a moderate pace. Additionally, student performance in kindergarten and first grade is evaluated with E, S, N, and

U (Excellent, Satisfactory, Needs Improvement, and Unsatisfactory), while second through fifth graders earn numerical and letter graders (A/100-90; B/89-80; C/79-74; D/73-70; U/69-0). XES students who have received only one bus referral are performing on (or close to) grade level. The students with two or more bus infractions, highlighted in Table 9 below, are a microcosm of academic abilities at XES.

Table 9

Achievement Outcome Quarterly District Assessments (QDA) English/Language Arts

Pseudonym	Mid-Year QDA 2	Mid-Year Averages: District/Area/XES	Mid-Year Comments
Lala	N/A	N/A	On grade level
Raj	77.8	70/78/72	Above
Luke	79.2	60/53/67	Above
Jack	35.7	41/39/37	On
Ned	30.4	31/22/21	Above
Yoyo	30.4	31/22/21	Above
Gene	29.4	30/22/20	Above

Most students with multiple bus referrals (in figure 26 above) are below the district's QDA E/LA average. However, each of the students in the sampling is statistically on or above the area and XES grade-level QDA E/LA average. Additionally, the percentage of mid-year academic growth for the selected students is similar to the XES gains, excluding kindergartners who only receive on-going performance observations.

Lala is a very energetic and playful kindergartner who receives Free or Reduced Lunch (FRL). Lala earned two bus referrals for hitting a classmate with potato chips and spitting on an older sibling. Lala is performing "Satisfactorily" on grade level in several content areas and behavior, with an "Excellent" rating in Reading/Language Arts. XES has very few

kindergartners, like Lala, who is reading independently during the first semester of school, which may be a benefit of attending a quality pre-kindergarten program.

Raj is a first grader rated as "Needs Improvement" in behavior and Language Arts. Performing below grade level and a FRL recipient, Raj was homeschooled until this year and is excited to ride the school bus full of peers. However, wiping snot on others, hitting a seatmate, and crawling on the floor have earned Raj three bus referrals. On November 10, 2016, I facilitated a bus driver-parent meeting to address the challenges Raj is having as a first-time bus rider. Raj's mother commented twice during the meeting that "I don't have a car, so when he is suspended off the bus, I keep him home with me." The learning outcome for Raj is negatively influenced by the number of bus suspensions.

Luke, a gifted second grader has received a bus referral for standing in the aisle and trying to pull the emergency exit door while the bus is moving (after several warnings from the bus driver). Luke is a gifted student performing above average in all content areas, with an 82 in Social Studies being the lowest first semester grade. Luke and his sibling (with three bus referrals) pay full price for their lunch and have similar attendance issues of 18 or more absences. However, after earning the bus referral, Luke has 72 and 75 averages in Gifted Spelling and Gifted Mathematics three weeks into the second semester of the school year. The absences from multiple bus suspensions for Luke and the older sibling haves caused both students to miss a significant number of school days and have negatively impacted their academic outcome.

Jack is a very impulsive third grader with a 504 Plan for Attention Deficient Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Jack is a transient student who has attended multiple schools and is performing below grade level in Conduct. The highest academic average is 78% in

Spelling, and the lowest is 50% in Science. A recipient of FRL and a follower, Jack's on-campus and bus behavior are very similar. The bus suspension was due to "crossing at the back of the bus" with peers.

The relationship between bus infractions and academic achievement has added additional challenges for Ned and Yoyo, both fourth graders receiving FRL, special education services, and with a history of on-campus discipline infractions. Both students have multiple bus suspensions of three or more days. Ned is totally disrespectful to the bus driver, uses inappropriate language, and steals personal/school property. Ned has an "Unsatisfactory" rating in Conduct, Science, and Social Studies, with "Needs Improvement" in all other content areas. Bus infractions, suspensions, and zero-tolerance discipline consequences have grossly influenced Ned's ability to reach the IEP goals and objective. Yoyo is a physically aggressive student who proudly states, "my momma told me if somebody hits me, hit 'em back." Yoyo's bus referrals were earned on the way to school, which transferred into the classroom. Yoyo struggles academically despite IEP academic accommodations.

Gene, the lone fifth grader with four bus referrals, receives FRL. Gene is an academically gifted fifth grader, with a 61 semester average in Spelling and all other content areas in the 90-plus range. Gene is impulsive on-campus and a distraction to the bus driver, due to crawling under seats, screaming at peers, and other rude behavior. The XES Gifted teacher is considering a transfer to a special needs bus under the Special Education program.. Due to Gene's accusations of mistreatment by the bus driver, a parent-transportation department meeting was held on December 12, 2016, following the fourth bus referral. Several half-truths from Gene were discovered during the meeting, which caused Gene's mother to apologize to the bus driver, and transportation department representatives. Most transportation-parent meetings

at XES end this way because the bus drivers present relevant documentation that supports the bus suspension and the importance of a safe bus environment. The XES Parent Perception Survey Report (2015-2016) states, that 98.3% of parents "believe my student attends a safe and secure school" and 86.8% "believe my student has a safe and secure bus ride." Additionally, 99.5 percent of parents "support the behavior policies at the school." As reflected in this data, bus infractions do significantly impact academic achievement, but still viewed with a high level of satisfaction by the XES community.

Action Research Process

The action research process has affected the number of bus infractions for students, which includes the involvement of bus drivers and the local school. The AR process has heightened my awareness and responsiveness of bus infractions for the students, which 95.2% of parents report XES "keeps me well informed" and 86.8% notice "school leaders at XES are responsive to my concerns" (XES Parent Perception Survey Report 2015-2016). I constructed a Rule 13 Bus Discipline Data document to provide information to the AR team (see the Appendices section), which consolidated the bus route, student gender, grade level, infraction code, behavioral history, consequence, and student attendance (at the time of the violation). I used methodical triangulation with the AR team, as well as administrators, to ensure the Parent-Student Handbook of XES aligns its content with the handbook of WCPS, specifically the School Bus Discipline section. The XES handbook and language is modified to suit the kindergarten through fifth graders it serves, including the declaration that "riding the school bus is a privilege" which can be lost if rules are not followed. The XES local handbook reiterates that school bus behavior is a safety issue and thus, drivers review the expected behavior with students and parents on a regular bus. Rules such as, but not limited to, following the bus

driver's directions, walking only in the aisles to enter or exit the bus, and sitting quietly and properly in an assigned seat are critical to a safe ride (XES, 2015-2016).

The action research process affects the number of bus infractions in a "neutral way" (Walker, AR team meeting, November 14, 2016). The bus discipline data increased from August through October 2016, with 18 violations for the year. Additionally, many of our students and families do not adapt well to change when they relocate to a new school, ride with a different bus driver, or travel a different route due to a sex offender moving into the area. T. C. Allen (2016), the State Director of Pupil Transportation, reported there were 13 student school bus fatalities (7 were elementary students), several injuries, and numerous near misses when students were exiting the bus during the 2010-2016 school periods. I observed two bus driver practices on one of the most challenging routes, as well as one bus route with fewer than five bus referrals for the 2015-2016 school year. Additionally, the years of experience and pre/post ride comments of the novice and veteran bus drivers helped to design an effective bus intervention program.

At the end of the first semester of the 2016-2017 school year, 60% of the buses reached the 50-mile mark. The bus routes that reached the Miles for Smiles goal were: 1, 4, 5, 6. 7, 8, 9, 10, 14, 301, 302, 303, 304, 305, and 306. This is a significant finding because 64% of XES bus drivers are new to XES, changed routes, and have 3 or fewer years of bus driving experience (Train, email, September 2016). On January 20, 2017, and February 9, 2017 the third through fifth graders and kindergarten through second graders, respectively, participated in a Miles For Smiles Bus Intervention Plan Celebration. The P.E. teacher organized several fun stations for the students inside the gym, such as hula-hoop, bean-bag toss, jump rope, dance, and freeze tag. Additional students played basketball, tag football, kickball, and other adult-monitored activities outside on the school grounds. Para-professionals, media center personnel, administrators,

instructional coaches, and intervention specialists, chipped in to make the event a huge success.

Additionally, the Miles for Smiles Behavior Intervention Program has significantly decreased the

number of violent bus offenses, while simultaneously improving school bus safety.

CHAPTER 6

ANALYSIS, CONCLUSIONS, AND, IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this action research study was to understand the impact of zero-tolerance discipline policies, which are initiated by the school bus driver, on school bus safety. The research answered three research questions: (1) How do school bus infractions affect students' learning opportunities through absenteeism? (2) What is the relationship, if any, between school bus infractions and student achievement outcomes? and (3) How does the action research process affect the number of bus infractions for students? This chapter explores implications for XES, area schools, and the WCPS district. Additionally, the influence of basic physiological needs, recurring themes, limitations, and the larger school-community context are addressed. Consequently, there is a need for further research.

The presence of violence, registered sex offenders, an annual shortage of bus drivers, and ongoing bus suspensions (resulting from the zero-tolerance discipline policy) impacts the lives of students, families, and staff of the XES community each day. Hierarchy of Needs Behavioral theorist, Abraham Maslow (1943), stated that children, being at the mercy of adults (for example, parents, drivers, and administrators), desire social acceptance in small and large group settings, in this case, settings such as, school and the bus. XES had very little influence outside its campus on societal ills, such as crime, violence and sex offenders residing in the community. Therefore, it was paramount that XES and WCPS personnel collaborate to eliminate digressions on the school bus and on the school campus by addressing the school bus driver shortage.

I suggest that WCPS district recruitment efforts target retirees, such as law enforcement, military personnel, retired educators (school teachers and administrators), and community members as school bus drivers and bus monitors. After meeting the established criteria of being 21 years of age or older and passing background checks, the district would acquire a workforce with a plethora of relevant skills, such as student behavior management experience, while simultaneously strengthening the school-community partnership.

I also argue that WCPS district should utilize video-recording devices as a means to document bus infractions and bus driver practices. The use of interior cameras would provide evidence of minor and major bus infractions while significantly decreasing my time investigating bus referrals and hosting transportation department-parent meetings. Consequently, I would recommend the XES school bus zero-tolerance discipline policies be revised to include a Parent-Student-Administrator conference as the consequence for the first bus offense. During this early-morning meeting the parent, student, and administrator would view a bus safety video and review and sign the Bus Intervention section of the Parent-Student Handbook. The suggestions mentioned above are transferrable to other schools and may contribute to future bus safety research.

Conclusions

The conclusion is based on the themes discovered during the research study.

Plan

It is the professional duty of the school bus driver to develop an effective plan of action for the student riders with whom he is entrusted.

Communication

Communication is paramount to establish and maintain a safe and orderly school bus. It takes great effort on the part of the bus driver, parent, and local school to manage student bus behavior. If one individual fails to maintain effective communication, it can grossly influence the fair and equitable implementation of zero-tolerance discipline policies, which inevitably impacts relationships.

Responsibility and Relationships

Adults must first take the responsibility of developing positive relationships, one incident or conversation at a time. It is paramount that the bus driver, parent, and local school listen to the students' accounts of what happens on the school bus. By offering due process to all riders, unnecessary lengthy investigations will decrease, and relationships, respect, and responsibility will improve for all stakeholders.

Survival

School bus drivers must survive navigating the daily traffic and onslaught of disrespectful actions from students and parents. The bus drivers must also survive the pressure of balancing student conduct management and parent communication while developing positive relationships with the community, XES, and their bus driver peers. Additionally, the bus drivers interviewed acknowledge the immediate need for professional development to help them survive the day-to-day encounters with student riders and minimize limitations.

<p align="center">Implications</p>

There are numerous implications for transfer of this study at the district, area, and local school levels.

District

The study revealed the impact of hiring and retaining quality school bus drivers, starting

at the district level. Since the bus drivers greet the students at the beginning and end of the day,

it is paramount that the best and brightest are recruited. The school bus driver is trusted to

implement an effective student management program that will meet the basic psychological and

physiological needs for student riders, such as a warm bus in the winter. There is a need for

additional behavior management training for the school bus drivers to ensure a safe bus riding

experience for all students and an increased focus on teaching and learning affective skills from

the moment the students board the school bus.

Area

The students of XES outperformed the students at neighboring elementary schools (WES,

DES, and FES) on the QDA II mid-year E/LA. With a decrease in violent bus offenses at XES,

the implications are zero-tolerance discipline policies, such as three day bus suspension for the

first offense, do not correlate to a positive academic outcome for students. Consequently, harsh

disciplinary consequences at the area's neighboring schools will inevitably increase the student

dropout rate, escalate the number of juvenile arrests, and contribute to the school-to-prison

pipeline.

XES

I analyzed XES data using a mixed methods approach incorporating AR reflective

dialogue, school-wide discipline data, observations, and semi-structured interviews of select bus

drivers. The three research questions were answered through integration of data from the action

research team meetings, bus driver interviews and the data collection process. Although XES is

a Title I school located in a violent area, it has been recognized by district and state officials for

its student academic achievement. However, the school leaders of XES can positively impact the lives of its students, bus drivers and parents through bus discipline policy reform and addressing the themes discovered in this study.

I argue that XES school leaders must revise its zero-tolerance discipline policy for school bus riders. The current practice of an automatic bus suspension for the first offense is not a deterrent to bad behavior for bus riders. I propose implementing a Monday morning Parent-Student-Administrator conference and Bus Safety Video screening at 7:15 as the consequence for the first offense. The consequence for the second offense would be Tuesday morning Administrator Detention from 7:15- 8:15, which includes contact with a school counselor. The consequence for the third offense would be a three day bus suspension and a Transportation Department-Parent-Student-Administrator meeting. For a fourth referral, a five day bus suspension and a mandatory counselor session would be scheduled.   I argue that the aforementioned five themes, Planning, Responsibility, Relationships, Communication, and Survival, would all be addressed effectively when the aforementioned revisions are made to the XES zero-tolerance bus discipline policy.

Limitations

There were several limitations during this action research study. However, the five variables that were difficult to measure in the study are as follows: 1) the shortage and experience level of the school bus drivers serving the XES community, 2) the impact of the Emotional Behavioral Disorder (EBD) program on school bus referrals, 3) the influence of classroom teacher, 4) the 50% increase in the number of car riders since the 2015-2016 school year, and 5) the presence of several registered sex offenders residing in the XES attendance zone.

Bus Driver Shortage

For the 2016-2017 school year, 64% of school bus drivers assigned to XES are new to the profession, assigned a new bus route, or were transferred from another WCPS area for confidential reasons (Train, personal communication, September 1, 2016). It is worth noting that trust was a major consideration for the bus drivers' choice to participate in the study. Some of the bus driver study participants had a professional or personal connection to XES and were willing to complete, sign and return the consent form. In the case of a novice teacher new to the XES community and profession, some participants had only driven a bus for a year, which is a limitation for the student riders and its impact on safety. The level of experience, limited amount of student management professional development training for minor and major infractions (unlike the classroom teacher), and ongoing recruitment and retention of school bus drivers also limited the study.

Emotional Behavioral Disorder Program

The second limitation of the study is the grossly significant impact of XES housing a special education Emotional Behavior Disorder (EBD) program, which accounts for a large percentage of school bus referrals and on-campus violations. It is difficult to compare XES to other elementary schools in the area such as WES, DES, and FES, who transfer their most volatile students qualifying for the EBD program to XES. XES provides students with Individual Education Plans (IEP), Behavior Intervention Plans (BIP), and 504 plans, including the option of riding a regular education bus when residing in the XES attendance zone. Thus, special needs buses primarily transport "out of zone" special education students to and from XES, in most cases with limited supervision.

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Classroom Teacher

The third limitation of the study is the influence of the classroom teacher on the social, emotional, behavioral and academic outcome of student riders with bus referrals. A highly effective novice or veteran teacher can significantly impact the basic psychological needs of a student, which could transfer to the school bus setting. A positive connection with the student, parent, and bus driver could decrease absenteeism while improving the instructional setting for the bus rider and classmates.

Car Riders

"My children will never ride the school bus. I have heard how the drivers talk to the children and the students are out of control" (Parent, personal communication, January 11, 2017). The fourth limitation is the increase in the number of non-school bus riders. Annually, the car rider team distributes an average of one hundred car numbers. But for the 2016-2017 school year, over 175 personal vehicles are registered to pick up one or more students each day between 2:45pm – 3:15pm, which excludes the number of students being transported by commercial (afterschool care) vehicles.

Sex Offenders

Schools are a microcosm of society, which includes the community school bus stops. Cornell and Mayer (2010) report increases in school violence are not due to a single problem with simple solutions, but rather a variety of problems, with chances of a student being an instigator, spectator, or victim of crime. The presence and transiency of an average of twenty registered sex offenders in the XES attendance zone adds a variety of unmeasured problems and challenges to the study. State law, specifically, O. C. G. A. § 42-1-12 Article 2 of the State

Sexual Offender Registry (Sexual Offender Review Board, 2017), states a sexual offender must notify the local sheriff department 72 hours prior to a change in address, including:

> "an area where minors congregate, which shall include all public and private parks and recreation facilities, playgrounds, skating rinks, neighborhood centers, gymnasiums, school bus stops, public libraries, and public and community swimming pools." (GBI, Sexual Offender Registration Review Board, 2017).

WCPS distributes letters to all XES parents of students when any modifications are made to bus routes, including area child care facilities. The goal of the district is to avoid student riders walking in front of the residence of a registered sex offender, thus eliminating potential encounters between students and convicted sex offenders. Students are commonly reassigned to another bus route due to sex offenders moving in and around the community. New and existing XES students may have experienced great difficulty when their bus route or bus driver was altered one or more times during the school year. The study was limited in this area and AR team members were completely perplexed about the influence of bus route scheduling due to the residence of sex offenders. Therefore, there is a need for further research.

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LOCAL SCHOOL RESEARCH REQUEST FORM

LOCAL SCHOOL RESEARCH REQUEST FORM

Name of School: R. L. Norton Elementary School

Name of Researcher: Anthony Williams

Position or Grade: Assistant Principal

A. **Research Project**

    a. Title: Impact of Zero Tolerance Discipline Policies on School Bus Safety

    b. Statement of Problem and research question: School bus referrals are one part of a larger number of discipline infractions. What and/or who influences bus safety the most?

    c. Subjects or population for the study: GCPS employees

    d. Reason for doing this research:

✔	Graduate Study at The University Of Georgia	University/College
	Publication/Presentation	
✔	Other (please specify) Professional growth: support teaching and learning	

    e. Dates research will be conducted: January 2016   to January 2017

B. All research and researchers **must** a) Protect the rights and welfare of all human subjects, b) Inform students and/or parents that they have the right not to participate in the study, c) Adhere to board policies and applicable laws which govern the privacy and confidentiality of students records.

C. This request applies to research conducted within and by local school personnel. All other research requests must be submitted by completing a GCPS Research Application and submitting it electronically according to instructions. For complete details and instructions, please visit our Web Page at the following link: http://tinyurl.com/ce7pmpm or you can simply go to gwinnett.k12.ga.us. When you open our webpage, click on "I want to" section.....Apply for Research Approval." This will take you to our webpage.

D. Principals ONLY need to approve Local School Research Requests. The copy sent to the Research & Evaluation Office is for filing purposes only. No further approval is necessary.

E. After approval by the principal, please forward a copy of this completed form to:

Via GCPS Courier:	Via US Mail:	Via Fax:
Colin Martin GCPS - Research & Evaluation ISC	Dr. Colin Martin, Executive Director Research & Evaluation Department Gwinnett County Public Schools 437 Old Peachtree Road, NW Suwanee, GA 30024	Colin Martin 678-301-7088

Principal's Signature   11/20/15   Date of Approval

APPENDIX B

IRB APPROVAL OF PROTOCOL

The University of Georgia

Phone 706-542-3199

Office of the Vice President for Research
Institutional Review Board

APPROVAL OF PROTOCOL

May 25, 2016

Dear Sheneka Williams:

On 5/25/2016, the IRB reviewed the following submission:

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Title of Study:	Impact of Zero Tolerance Discipline Policies on School Bus Safety
Investigator:	Sheneka Williams
IRB ID:	STUDY00002408
Funding:	None
Grant ID:	None

The IRB approved the protocol from 5/25/2016.

In conducting this study, you are required to follow the requirements listed in the Investigator Manual (HRP-103).

Sincerely,

Dr. Gerald E. Crites, MD, MEd
University of Georgia
Institutional Review Board Chairperson

310 East Campus Rd, Tucker Hall Room 212 • Athens, Georgia 30602
An Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action Institution

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APPENDIX C

RECRUITMENT FORM

Recruitment Form

Dear Staff/Parent/Guardian:

I am a graduate student under the direction of Dr. Sheneka Williams, a faculty member in the Department of Lifelong Education, Administration, and Policy at The University of Georgia. I invite you to participate in a research study entitled "Impact of Zero Tolerance Discipline Policies on School Bus Safety". The purpose of this study is to determine whether zero tolerance discipline consequences deter offenders, affect students' learning opportunities, and/or negatively impact the school-community partnership.

You are eligible to be in this study because you are 21 years of age or older, a local school staff member, school district bus driver, and/or parent or guardian of a school bus rider.

Your participation will involve small group bi-monthly meetings of one hour or less hosted by the local school. The group of nine members (or less) will complete questionnaires, interviews, analyze local school discipline data, and examine the Bus Policy section of the Parent-Student Handbook over a nine week period.

There are no known risks anticipated during this study. The potential benefits include an improvement in student attendance, academic achievement, overall school/bus climate, and the retention of school bus drivers.

No incentive or compensation of any kind will be provided for your participation in the study, which includes your attendance during multiple meetings.

If you would like additional information about this study, please feel free to call me at Norton Elementary School at (770) 985-1933 or send an e-mail to Anthony_X_Williams@gwinnett.k12.ga.us.

Thank you for your consideration!

Sincerely,

Anthony Williams

APPENDIX D

CONSENT FORM

Consent Form

You are being invited to participate in a research study entitled "Impact of Zero Tolerance Discipline Policies on School Bus Safety".

This research hopes to find out whether mandatory zero tolerance discipline consequences deter offenders. Your participation will involve allowing the researchers to use the information/data that were collected through your participation in "Impact of Zero Tolerance Discipline Policies on School Bus Safety" to be included in their research. The local school will record and monitor Rule 13 School Bus Violations. The bus violations will be weekly for the 2015-2016 school year. You don't have to do anything else.

Your participation, of course, is voluntary but would be greatly appreciated. You may choose not to participate or to withdraw your consent at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you agree to the use of your information/data for this research project, please simply sign on the line below; if you don't agree, none of your data will be included in the research and you can still participate in the program. If you decide to stop or withdraw from the study, the information/data collected from or about you up to the point of your withdrawal will be kept as part of the study and may continue to be analyzed.

The results of the research study may be published, but your name or any identifying information will not be used. In fact, the published results will be presented in summary form only. Researcher Anthony Williams will have access to your information/data for the duration of the study. The information/data collected will remain confidential and individual identifiers will be removed six months, or less after completion of the study. There are no known risks associated with this research. The findings from this project may improve student attendance, academic engagement, overall school and bus climate.

The researcher conducting this study is Anthony Williams, under the direction of Dr. Sheneka Williams, a faculty in the Department of Lifelong Education, Administration, and Policy, University of Georgia. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact him at Norton Elementary school, (770) 985-1933,Anthony_X_Williams@Gwinnett.K12.GA.US.

Questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant should be directed to The Chairperson, University of Georgia Institutional Review Board; telephone (706) 542-3199; email address irb@uga.edu.

Research Subject's Consent to Participate in Research:
I have read the above information, and have received answers to any questions I asked. I consent to take part in the study.

Anthony Williams	Signature	Date
Name of Researcher	Signature	Date

Name of Participant	Signature	Date

Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.

APPENDIX E

QUESTIONNAIRE

PROGRAM QUESTIONNAIRE

Please complete the items below (Information provided will be held in strictest confidence)

Current Grade Level _____ Date _____

Current Bus Route # _____ am _____ pm

Parent of bus rider(s)? [] Yes or [] No (If yes, please list grade level of rider(s) _____

Demographics

Age: _____ years   Teaching/Driving Years of Experience: _____

Ethnicity(select one):   **Gender**:   Male [ ]

Asian [ ]   Female [ ]

Black/African American [ ]   Transgender [ ]

Hispanic [ ]

White [ ]

Multi-Racial [ ]

Personal Reflection

1. What individual student behaviors influence the potential for school bus violence?

2. How can parents and bus drivers collaborate effectively to decrease minor and major Rule 13-Bus violations?

3. What modification in the Bus Behavior section of the Parent-Student Handbook, if any, will reduce parent/guardian complaints?

4. Of the total discipline referrals per school year, what would you estimate the percentage of Rule 13-Bus violations to be? Please select one:

     15% - 25% [ ]   26%-36% [ ]

     37%-47% [ ]   48%-58% [ ]

     59%-69% [ ]   70%-80% [ ]

APPENDIX F

INTERVIEW

PROGRAM INTERVIEW-

Please complete the items below (Information provided will be held in strictest confidence)

Current Grade Level _____   Date _____

Current Bus Route # _____ am _____ pm

Parent of bus rider(s)? [ ] Yes or [] No (If yes, please list grade level of rider(s) _____

Demographics

Age: _____ years   Teaching/**Driving Years of Experience:** ___

Ethnicity(select one):   **Gender**:   Male [ ]

Asian   [ ]   Black/African-American [ ]   Pacific Islander/Native American   Female [ ]

Hispanic [ ]   White [ ]   Multi-Racial [ ]   Transgender [ ]

Semi-Structured Questions

1. Did your ride the school bus as a child? Grade level?

2. How was your experience?

3. Did you have a "bad kid" on the bus? Any "violent behaviors"

4. Would you rate your child's experience as better, or as worse than yours? Why/Why not?

5. Which has the most influence on bus behavior the driver or parents? Why?

6. Are there any bus routes "tougher" than others? Please explain
7. How can the school help with bus safety?

8. What advice would you give a new driver?

9. How do school bus infractions affect students' learning opportunities through absenteeism?
10. What is the relationship, if any, between school bus infractions and student achievement outcomes?

11. In what ways, if any, does the larger school community context affect the school bus ride for students? (Explain, if study influences number of referrals?)

12. Did you read, sign and return the final page of the Parent-Student Handbook (2016-17)?

APPENDIX G

RIDE-ALONG OBSERVATION INSTRUMENT

SCHOOL BUS RIDE-A-LONG OBSERVATION INSTRUMENT

(Based on Maslow's Hierarch Of Needs/Motivational Model)

Directions: Please document observed information with a tally mark, check or circle

Route:_____ AM [] / PM [ ] Date: _____ Weather _____

PHYSIOLOGICAL NEEDS: basic needs, such as food, temperature regulation, elimination, rest, activity

- Seasonally comfortable bus temperature?   Y / N
- Evidence of food or drink in driver area?   Y / N
- Restroom or water break?   Y / N
- Signs of sleepiness?   Y / N

SAFETY: need for protection from harm or threats, importance of routines and familiarity

- Clear established routines/procedures for riders?   Y / N
- Rules reviewed?   Y / N
- Is there order/structure on the bus?   Y / N
- Driver has protective instincts?   Y / N
- Riders seem comfortable / happy?   Y / N

BELONGING: trust, acceptance, and being a part of a group (family, friends, work)

- Wave / Greet people at the bus stop?   Y / N
- Greet riders boarding and / or exiting bus?   Y / N
- Comments/Gestures: Positive _____   Negative _____

ESTEEM: -respect of self and others, a sense of competence in environment (school, work)

- Sense of competence from driver?   Y / N
- Sense of respect for riders?   Y / N
- Rider response to driver? Positive_____   Negative _____
- Any seasonal decorations?   Y / N

SELF-ACTUALIZATION: reaching full behavioral / academic/ work production potential

- How was the overall ride?
- Did driver and rider interact?
- Did driver comment about my presence on the bus (positive or negative manner)? Y / N
- Any 2016-2017 discipline referrals, parent calls, or student complaints?   Y / N

Score: _____ /20

Comments: