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Connections Between Students With Emotional and Behavioral Disorders and Gang Affiliated Youth: How Educators Can Play a Role in Prevention

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CONNECTIONS BETWEEN STUDENTS WITH EMOTIONAL OR BEHAVIORAL DISORDERS AND GANG AFFILIATED YOUTH: HOW EDUCATORS CAN PLAY A ROLE IN PREVENTION

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Abstract

This paper identifies the risk factors shared by students who receive special education services under the category of emotional and behavioral disorders and gang affiliated youth. It also recognizes the role an educator can play in the identification of these risk factors and the prevention of gang involvement. The connection between both focus groups is profound and often a result of an environment not chosen by the student. Through educator awareness, early intervention and ongoing efforts, students with emotional and behavioral disorders may be dissuaded from affiliation changing not only their lives but potentially future lives.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Concerns in Special Education

As the area of special education has progressed over the years, a disability category has continued to grow and develop that challenges services and resources available in both academic and community settings. Emotional and behavioral disorders (E/BD) are becoming more prevalent in society and more challenging for the system to accommodate the needs of students who qualify in this category. Unfortunately, many of these students are not receiving the services they require. Even with the growing numbers of E/BD identifications, there are still many students who are either being served incorrectly under an E/BD label or not being served at all even though they may qualify. This lack of education and service is leading to lower grades, higher drop-out rates and an overrepresentation of students receiving special education services in the juvenile justice system (Garfinkel, 2010; Kern, 2015). The responsibility is shared by all to create supports and programs that increase the success for students placed in the category of emotional and behavioral disorders and prevent a life of delinquency whenever possible.

According to a national survey conducted by the Council for Exceptional Children in 2005, roughly 33 percent of incarcerated youth were served under the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) for a disability (Quinn, Rutherford, Leone, Osher & Poirier, 2005). Of that 33 percent, the majority of those students received services under the category of emotional/behavioral disorder. These results have been supported by smaller studies as well, where large portion of youth in the juvenile delinquency system

have a disability (Cavendish, 2014; Simonsen & Sugai, 2013). This is a glaring realization as a society. The connection between incarcerated youth and students with disabilities shows how important an educator's role can be in the ultimate success of a student. For many at-risk youth, a teacher may be one of the only consistent adults in their lives.

Emotional and Behavioral Disorders

Mental Health has been an area of uncertainty with many stigmas surrounding the topic. In recent years, though, research has begun to shed light on important characteristics and intervention techniques to support those who experience mental health conditions.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004) uses the term emotional disturbance to describe a condition exhibiting one of more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree that adversely affects a child's educational performance:

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

A student who fits these criteria would receive services for special education under the label of emotional/behavioral disorders (EB/D). There is also a breakdown of psychiatric disorders that would qualify students to receive the label of EB/D; Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Oppositional Defiance Disorder (ODD) or Conduct Disorder (CD), depression or mood disorders, anxiety disorders and Schizophrenia or other psychiatric disorders (Forness, Kim & Walker, 2012). These conditions are determined by a medical professional, not a special education teacher. A student may have a condition above, but if it does not impact their education or academic ability, they would not qualify for services in school.

It is challenging to say how prevalent E/BDs are in schools today. One of the main difficulties in producing consistent numbers is deciding whether to look at the *point prevalence* or the *cumulative prevalence* (Forness et al., 2012). Point prevalence refers to testing a student at one point in time. While studies are occurring, this would count how many students are exhibiting a need for or are already receiving services under an E/BD label. Cumulative prevalence refers to students who have demonstrated a need or have received services at some point throughout their academic career. We know that cumulative prevalence is generally higher than point prevalence due to students who have disorders which include periods of activity and periods of rest, such as depression (Forness et al., 2012).

According to Forness et al.'s study (2012), a point prevalence of 12% and a cumulative prevalence of 25% were found using a cross reference of studies from the 1980's to the 2010's. These numbers are just estimates but help to point out a great gap

in service that is occurring in the special education field. Many students have or may have had symptoms in the past of an E/BD but very few per year are diagnosed and receive services for the disorder.

IDEA (2004) also states that students with special needs will be placed in the *least restrictive environment*. The goal is for all students to be educated in the general education classroom as long as it is appropriate and productive for the education of the focus student. However, research demonstrates that students who have an E/BD are placed generally in more restrictive education settings (Stoutjesdijk, Scholte & Swaab, 2012). This isolation can lead to many risk factors associated with graduation rates, delinquency and incarceration.

One of the links between students with emotional/behavioral disorders and a criminal record is an affiliation with a gang. Youth gangs are not only a concern for the academic community, but for the community as a whole.

Youth Gangs

Peter Gastrow (as cited by Owen & Greeff, 2015) define a gang as “an organized group of members which has a sense of cohesion, is generally territorially band, which creates an atmosphere of fear and intimidation in the community and whose members engage in gang-focused activity, either individually or collectively”(p.8). Alleyne and Wood (2010) add that it is a “durable group which is street-oriented and identify themselves around the illegal activity they participate in” (p.424).

Youth gang membership has been a growing concern over the past twenty-five years. Wood et al. (1997) reported that gangs were the primary reason for the increase

in violence at schools. They also reported that school administrators ranked gangs the second greatest concern for school safety, only to drugs. This great increase in violence and gang membership makes understanding the appeal of gangs a priority for educators and community members alike. To attack an area of concern, more information is needed before it is possible to create appropriate and effective interventions.

In 1997 it was reported that 5% of the general population, when gangs are present in the community, become members (Wood et al., 1997). According to the FBI 2011 National Gang Threat Assessment, there were roughly 1.4 million active gang members which make up greater than 33,000 gangs in the Nation. They account for 48% of violent crimes in most areas and up to 90% in others (FBI.gov). Included in these violent crimes are homicides, which in 2009, 15,000 citizens died from. Of these homicides, youth committed between 20-33% and over 50% of all other violent crimes (Zagar, Busch, Grove, Hughes & Arbit, 2009).

Looking at the statistics, it is clear there is a violence concern with these active gang members and a shocking realization of the youth involved. Unfortunately, once being a member of a gang and committing violent crimes, it is statistically likely that these students will commit further crimes.

In 2014, Scott examined the attitudes of incarcerated youth in regards to violence. What he found was that gang members held higher levels of violent attitudes than other institutionalized youth. It was also noted that gang members were on average a year younger than other incarcerated youths including on the first arrest and incarceration. These results would agree with Katsiyannis and Archwamety (1997) in

terms of recurrence of crimes. Violent attitudes of youths and the crimes that follow, stem from a variety of environmental and biological factors.

Shared Risk Factors

Looking through the many studies on youth gang affiliation, there is an overwhelming connection between students who receive special education services and gang members. Cavendish (2014) shows that one in three youth in a juvenile delinquency center receive special education services. In fact, they are four times more likely to be committed than their non-disabled peers. Students in both focus groups, gang affiliates and students with emotional/behavioral disorders, commonly overlap throughout many aspects of their lives. This study will focus on four areas of shared risk factors; individual, peer, family and school. It will also address specific demographics that are overrepresented in both groups of gang members and E/BD students.

It has been shown that students with behavior disorders and learning disabilities have the highest drop-out rates compared to their peers with other disabilities. These students who have dropped out of high school have a much greater chance of becoming members of criminal crews including gangs (Katsiyannis & Archwamety, 1997). One of the many reasons for a student to drop out is because they are not feeling successful in school. Students with an E/BD have the lowest overall GPA (grade point average) compared to their peers with other qualifying disabilities. The lower GPAs could be the

result of the time students with E/BDs spend outside of the classroom or even outside of school.

Teacher Role

Woven throughout this literature review will be the role of an educator. As educators are often seen to be first responders for youth, it is critical that they are made aware of these distinct connections and implement interventions before the potential connection becomes a reality.

Guiding Questions

The goal of this literature review is to answer the questions: What are the similarities between risk factors for students with emotional and behavioral disorders (E/BDs) and risk factors for youth who affiliate themselves with a gang? What role does educator awareness play in the identification of at-risk students? What services and resources are available for at-risk students to increase success in the community?

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

When considering the connection between students with an E/BD and youth gang members, risk factors will be looked at in four main categories; individual risk factors, peer risk factors, family risk factors and school risk factors. The review will focus on who has received, or been offered to receive, special education services under the category of emotional/behavioral disorders. It will also focus on students who have been either formally identified or self-identified as members of a gang and who may or may not be a part of the juvenile delinquency system.

Connections Between Both Focus Groups

Significant connections can be drawn between students who have an E/BD and youth who are affiliated with a gang. As stated above, there are four main areas of risk that will be looked at. There are also specific demographic traits that are susceptible to both E/BDs and gang membership. The shared demographics that are closely tied to both student with E/BDs and gang affiliated youth are; race, gender and socioeconomic status.

Shared Demographics

Students considered at-risk share many characteristics as individuals. The three most common that overlap between students involved in juvenile delinquency, specifically gangs, as well as emotional/behavioral disorders are; race, gender and income status (Brown, Higgins, Pierce, Hong & Thomas, 2003; Bullis, Yovanoff, Mueller & Havel, 2002;

Koffman et al., 2009; Melde & Esbensen, 2013;). Clearly, youth have little to no control over the situation that they start in. Therefore, these factors are of utmost importance to be aware of so proper early warning systems can be put into place.

Gender. Study after study has shown that there is an overrepresentation of male students in both special education and the juvenile corrections system (Alleyne & Wood, 2010; Mcneil et al., 2013; Wood et al., 1997). One of the major reasons posed to account for this overrepresentation is that male students experience a higher rate of alienation as compared to their female counterparts. Brown et al. (2003) completed a study about the perception of school life depending on disability, gender and race in the Southern United States across two high schools. This is a study that supported the notion that some demographics are inherently susceptible to risk factors associated with delinquency. In this study, 222 secondary students voluntarily completed a nine-item Demographic Survey as well as a 25-item Student Factors Questionnaire measuring their personal feelings about alienation. One major result that surfaced was that male students experienced greater degrees of alienation than female students. Alienation refers to an overall lack of a sense of belonging or an overwhelming feeling of being cut off from different social groups including friends, family and peers. As a generalization, male students are more susceptible to these feelings whether that is due to biology, social grooming or a sense of 'manhood'. This sentiment of alienation can drive a male adolescent to join an entity outside of himself which makes him feel like he belongs; one example being a gang (Brown et al., 2003).

Race or Ethnicity. Another shared demographic amongst at-risk youth is cultural background. Students from backgrounds that are ethnically and linguistically diverse face drop-out rates twice as high as Caucasian students (Brown et al., 2003; Ryan, Miller-Loessi & Nieri, 2007). They are also suspended more frequently and placed in special education classes more often not because they qualify for services, but because they show a pattern of academic failure. African American male youths are the highest population who are served under the special education category of emotional/behavioral disorders (Harris-Murri, King & Rostenberg, 2006; Wood et al., 1997; Zhang, Katsiyannis, Ju & Roberts, 2014;). Zhang et al. (2014) conducted a study to examine longitudinal trends of minority representation in special education services. This was using five years (2004-2008) of available data from mandated IDEA reporting systems and the U.S. Census Bureau. The guiding themes were; overall trends of racial representation in special education and how racial groups are represented in different disability categories. The results from this study echoed the overrepresentation of minority students who receive special education services, however, students who identify as Asian were underrepresented.

Socioeconomic Status. The final demographic that is overrepresented in both the juvenile corrections system and special education services are students from low income households (Alleyne & Wood, 2010; Koffman et al., 2009). This poverty could impact a student's consistency in school attendance, a parent's ability to find childcare for younger family members or an overall lack of emphasis on education due to the need for financial attainment. When students are faced with traumatic experiences,

including poverty, they look to gangs as a surrogate family of sorts (Dishion, Nelson & Yasui, 2005; Wood, et al., 1997). In a study about understanding the psychosocial characteristics of gang members, Wood et al. (1997) showed that over 50 percent of students involved in a gang came from households with annual incomes less than 15,000 dollars which is well below the poverty level. These tight conditions can place strain on families and each member within them.

Shared Risk Factors

Several studies (Esbensen & Osgood, 1999; Hennigan, Kolnick, Vindel & Maxson, 2015; O'Brien, Daffern, Chu & Thomas, 2013) separated risk factors into different categories depending on the relationship to the youth. Taking some advice from their studies as well as other glaring factors from research, the risk factors have been separated into four main categories; individual risk factors, peer risk factors, family risk factors and school risk factors. There will be overlap between many of these categories which shows how impactful the presence of some risk factors is for students. Studies have shown that the more risk factors that youth have (Hennigan et al., 2015; O'Brien et al., 2013), the more likely they are to participate in delinquent behavior such as gang involvement.

Individual Risk Factors

Individuals can have certain personality traits or behaviors that make them more susceptible for delinquent behaviors. Some of these are environmentally driven, others are just the personality of the student. On the simplest level, this is where risk factors may begin.

Dishion, Nelson and Yasui (2005) wanted to look at predicting adolescent gang involvement from middle school adaptation. In this study, 714 students and their families from three middle schools in the Northwestern United States were asked to participate in a study beginning in sixth grade and continuing through eighth grade. Students were paid $20.00 per assessment they participated in and staff members were asked to fill out a risk screening tool on participants. One of the major hypotheses of the study was supported by the results; that antisocial behavior predicted deviant peer affiliation and gang involvement. Alleyne and Wood (2010), Scott (2014) and Hennigan et al. (2015) agreed with these findings in their own work. A few of these antisocial tendencies may include lying, stealing and the inability to control anger. A few other areas of concern that Dishion, Nelson and Yasui (2005) found were the significant impact of academic failure and peer rejection. Both of these risks will be analyzed later in this review as these findings were supported by many other studies.

O'Brien et al. (2013) studied the models of relationships between gang membership and member selection. The three categories of membership recruitment were selection, facilitation and enhancement. Selection is when a gang goes after already violent youth. Facilitation is a model that the specific gang promotes delinquency within an individual. And the last, enhancement, is a combination of the two. Using this logic, adolescents who have antisocial behavior such as anger may be prime candidates for all three recruitment models. Scott (2014) analyzed the relationship between violent attitudes and gang affiliation. This study took a more in depth look into a larger study conducted in 2010. Extensive interviews were conducted

at all five state-level juvenile justice institutions in California. For this study, only male youth results were examined who specifically answered if they were or were not affiliated with a gang. One hundred, forty-seven young men considered themselves gang members and one hundred, thirty-eight did not consider themselves gang members. A significant difference was found in violent attitudes between gang members and non-gang members. Research also suggested that violent attitudes seemed to increase over time as gang involvement progresses. These results support the findings of O'Brien et al. (2013), that gangs may choose individuals who have violent tendencies and then enhance them following commitment to membership.

Students with E/BDs share many points of this risk factor. Lack of emotional control is one factor which may qualify a student for special education services in E/BD. Students who are receiving special education services also often suffer from low self-esteem just due to the stigma that follows the label around. Dishion et al. (2005) cited that some gang members had previous problem behaviors before joining. Students with E/BDs often have these behavior problems that can attract gangs who are recruiting. These connections can demonstrate how a student with an E/BD shares a risk factor with potential gang members.

Another individual risk factor is impulsivity (Alleyne & Wood, 2010; Ryan et al., 2007). This may be considered an antisocial behavior or it may be in the context of risk-taking. Youth who have trouble controlling their impulses may not see the consequences before engaging in delinquent activities. Often they do not have the tools necessary to understand a cause and effect relationship. This is consistent with research

on the perceptions of gang members (Hennigan et al., 2015). Overall, members of a gang put the needs of the gang before their own. Other youth do not partake in crime due to the perception of the likelihood of getting caught. One of these risk-taking behaviors may also be substance abuse. Gang members are disproportionately involved in drug use as compared to their non-gang peers (Melde & Esbensen, 2013; Ryan et al., 2007; Wood et al., 1997). Students with a lack of impulse control may not realize the long-term effects drug abuse can have on their lives.

The more risk factors an individual possesses, the higher his or her likelihood of joining a gang. A student who receives services for an emotional/behavioral disorder, simply by definition of the category, already displays many of these individual risk factors. This creates an easy bridge to cross into delinquent behavior and affiliation.

Peer Risk Factors

Peers play an extremely important role in the development of adolescents. According to Yiu and Gottfredson (2013), youth who have prosocial peers are less likely to participate in delinquent behaviors and/or gangs. This idea then supports that in the presence of delinquent youth, those who are vulnerable or susceptible to pressure will follow in their footsteps. Simply thinking in terms of time, the more that an adolescent spends with delinquent or antisocial youth, the less they are able to spend with more positive prosocial youth (Alleyne & Wood, 2010; O'Brien et al., 2013; Scott, 2014). Dishion et al. (2005) shared that when young people spend time with deviant peers,

they are not only at higher risk for delinquency but also substance abuse. These are factors that significantly increase a young person's likelihood of joining a gang which can provide a sense of belonging in the short term and in the long term, potential justification for their actions.

Owen and Greeff (2015) muse that from ages 13-19 there is a significant time of self- development where youth try to form their own identity. They desire to define their worth within society and ultimately wish to be affirmed by their peers (Mcneil, Herschberger & Nedela, 2013). Acceptance by their peers therefore becomes beyond a desire, it is truly a necessity to solidify their place in society. This sense of belonging can draw youth to become members to fulfill this need (Koffman et al., 2009; Scott, 2014). Bullis, Walker and Stieber (1998) conducted a longitudinal study examining the relationship between social and academic variables and arrest frequency for 11th grade boys whom at an earlier time, had been identified as having antisocial behaviors. The study took place across three districts in the metropolitan area of suburban Eugene-Springfield, Oregon. After narrowing their focus to the highest risk schools, 206 families (separated into two years of cohorts) participated in the study. Families shared similar demographics by racially identifying as white and of a lower income; including families on welfare or families without either parent employed. There were seven variables they focused on; antisocial behavior, academic skills, child antisocial, substance use, delinquency, deviant peer and the Walker-McConnell social skills rating. Two of the significant outcomes were the importance of; peer relationships and performance in

school. Although this study was not directly linked to gang affiliation, often delinquent behaviors and arrests are tied to gang involvement.

This reality make peer relationships an extremely powerful factor in the life of an adolescent. The peers that an adolescent not only surrounds themselves with, but also the peers that they are surrounded by without choice, can be some of the greatest influence on their development. Peer pressure has a great influence on all adolescents but at-risk students may respond in more significant ways (Alleyne & Wood, 2010).

Students who have an E/BD can be placed in alternative classrooms within a school and at times, even placed in programs outside of their neighborhood school. Within these programs, students can be exposed to individuals with a varying range of needs. This exposure to youth with higher needs may have a negative impact at a student's behavior. Watching the behavior of others may begin to influence their own and increase or create behaviors that were not present before. This isolation within a behavior program can place students at risk to develop behaviors that may not have been developed without it (Hennigan et al., 2015).

Family Risk Factors

As stated above, one appeal of gang membership is the surrogate family that it can provide. A study by Wood, Furlong, Rosenblatt, Robertson, Scozzari and Sosna (1997), examined the psychosocial characteristics of gang-involved youths. It was conducted in central California near Los Angeles involving 165 youth. Seventy-two

percent of them were male and enrolled in the county's system of care. The participants were an average age of 13.5 and from many cultural backgrounds with an overrepresentation of African American and Latino students in the county. Assessments were given to collect data on child and family descriptions, educational indicators, juvenile justice indicators and child functioning. Within this study, those who identified as gang members reported having negative family situations; 71% of students reported living in a home with violence, 22% had experience sexual abuse, 42% physical abuse and 44% of subjects had a caregiver with a felony conviction. These results indicate trauma that can happen within the family and create serious risk factors for youth to engage in delinquent behavior.

Students who have homes with a lack of parental management, familial criminality and gang-involved relatives tend to reinforce gang-related behavior (Alleyne & Wood, 2010). In fact, O'Brien et al. (2013) achieved results that showed only two reliable predictors of youth gang affiliation; parental monitoring and supervision. Alleyne and Wood (2010) also claim that family environment and structure, when weakened, can not only foster but reinforce delinquency.

During adolescence, youth are searching for their own moral compass and one of the easiest places to look is within their home and family. If a young person looks up to an adult who is already a member of a gang, this can be a motivating factor for them to join a gang as well. This goes along with the claim Owen and Greeff (2015) made, that when parents or guardians have a pro-violent attitude, this can place the youth in the

home at risk for sharing that same attitude and eventually acting on it (Alleyne & Wood, 2010).

Human beings also crave consistency and guidelines so a lack of parental management may push a student to look for places where there are rules. A gang can foster this need for expectations. When you are a member of a gang there is a code to live by and if you do not follow it, there are consequences. This street code often supports and even promotes violent behavior. When youth partake in delinquent activities in the name of the gang, they are able to justify their actions because they were simply following their code (Scott, 2014).

Trauma in the family is also closely linked to placing students at-risk emotionally, behaviorally and academically. This trauma can come in many forms; abuse (verbal, sexual and physical), substance usage, neglect, severe poverty and so on. This exposure creates a cycle of emotional trauma (Koffman et al., 2009) that can be both the cause and effect. Often, the result is externalizing behaviors such as aggression, conduct problems and oppositional defiance. Wood et al. (1997) showed that when youth are exposed to abuse at a young age, this may be a risk factor for becoming affiliated with a gang. When polling gang members, they reported higher cases of physical and sexual abuse than other youths. Research also shows that offending and other victimization occurs commonly following family or environmental violence.

This cycle of violence breaks the trust that children have with their guardians and therefore skews their view of authority figures overall. The lack of respect for authority,

or even at times the loathing of authority, can push students into joining others who feel the same and wish to go against the system (Scott, 2014). Alleyne and Wood (2010) assessed psychological and behavioral characteristics of known gang members, peripheral youth (youth who are involved in gang activity but not members) and non-gang members. Participants were recruited from five London schools with a mean age of 14.3. There were 797 youth involved; 566 boys and 231 girls. The survey was comprehensive with 89 items including information on demographics, gang membership, delinquency, perception of threat, social status, moral disengagement and attitude towards authority. Their findings supported that gang members were more anti-authority than non-gang youth. Gang members also placed a higher emphasis on social status along with those identified as peripheral youth. These feelings towards authority could have existed before affiliation or been developed as affiliation grew.

School Risk Factors

It is clear how much the school experience can shape one's view of the world, the view of others and the view of oneself. Success or failure in school feels significant as an adolescent because it is feasibly the first task on the way to adulthood. Both students who receive services for an emotional/behavioral disorder as well as youth affiliated with gangs have been failed by the school system in one way or another.

There are a variety of school factors that can impact youth. Discipline policies are an area where students are placed at risk as a result of action. We hear often of the achievement gap in education, but Booker and Mitchell (2011) take this further and share that there is also a discipline gap. This gap represents the tendency for African

American students to be overrepresented in disciplinary action, Hispanic students to be proportionally represented and Asian/Caucasian students to be underrepresented. Booker and Mitchell's (2011) study also showed that students who identified as white were given consequences for specific actions like smoking, vandalism and theft. In contrast, students who identified as nonwhite received consequences for much more subjective behaviors such as disrespect, excessive noise and threat.

Not only do these discipline records indicate a disproportionality, they have further impact on a student's ability to be in school. A study by Wood et al. (1997) showed that 22% of the participants were suspended for two or more days and another 22% had ten or more detentions for the year. In this particular study, these students were already affiliated with a gang but these results could still indicate a connection between discipline and affiliation. This is drawing on the connection isolation and gang affiliation have with each other. Many discipline models ultimately result in time spent away from their peers and teachers.

In a study by Booker and Mitchell (2011), they examined a Disciplinary Alternative Education Program (DAEP) that started under the mandatory of the Zero Tolerance policy. A DAEP is an alternative setting for students who have had significant interventions for behavior. These programs remove students from their neighborhood school and place them with peers from all over, who demonstrate behaviors as well. In their study, they examined three schools with DAEP programs in both urban and suburban districts of Southwestern Texas. 269 youth participated in the study; 72% male, 52% African American and 25% of the students qualified for special education

services. Samples were taken for six weeks of the spring semester in 2005 and 2006. Booker and Mitchell's (2011) aim was to identify why students were placed in this program in the first place. Their results showed that 80% of students were placed in these alternative education programs for discretionary reasons. This is another example of isolation which causes students to feel disconnected from their schools and therefore their education. As stated throughout this paper, isolation is a large factor in not only drop-out rates, but the tendency for students to enter into a gang. The results also showed that there was a racial disparity amongst reasons for students to be placed in the program. This reinforces the overrepresentation of minority students in both of the focus groups.

The same study by Booker and Mitchell (2011) also surveyed students who were part of the DAEP programs and asked whether or not they thought their suspension would help solve the recurring behavior. Majority students who were suspended out of school responded, "Not at all" while those who were suspended in school overwhelmingly responded, "A little bit". Their responses showed that the students with the most egregious behaviors were not impacted by their removal from school, which would negate the purpose of the punishment in the first place. Keeping kids out of school only increases risk factors for getting themselves into trouble (Smith, 2011).

Another growing area of concern is the access to a quality education. Public perception of a school can grossly impact the success or lack of success the school may have. A negative perception of a school due to behaviors can influence the demographics of a neighborhood which in turn impacts the hiring of teachers to the

school and ultimately impacts performance (Yiu & Gottfredson, 2013). Yiu and Gottfredson's (2013) research is an extension of earlier studies by Gottfredson analyzing how individual perceptions of safety and school climate of safety predicts gang involvement. Data was used from public, secondary schools in urban, rural and suburban areas from the original study in 2000. The sample included 284 schools with roughly 50 students at each school. In the assessments collected, information was gathered in three different categories; student characteristics (gender, race, age and gang involvement), community characteristics (concentrated disadvantage, family instability, immigration and crowding) and school characteristics (fairness of school rules, commitment to school and perception of school safety). The two greatest discoveries were that individual fear and a safe school climate directly affect gang participation. The perception of an unsafe school climate may be a reason that teachers are unwilling to work there. This perception, which is not always accurate, can lead to significant pitfalls for students.

The hiring of quality teachers has a direct correlation with student success (Yiu & Gottfredson, 2013). If the perception of the area is negative, quality teachers are often not wanting to work in that area. Immediately, this places the students attending those schools at a disadvantage due to less availability of highly-qualified and experienced teachers. This continues the concentration of disadvantage which may lead to more negative outcomes for all of those involved. Yiu and Gottfredson (2013) also shared that urban, low income and low achieving schools have less qualified teachers. Many teachers are leaving urban areas to move to suburban areas to teach instead. It is not

clear is this shift is due to the make-up of the community or the perception of a negative community.

This exodus of teachers is especially a concern in the area of special education. Special education teachers have the highest burnout rate and therefore have a high turnover rate. This has been a growing area of concern for administration and policy makers for over twenty years. In 2004, Billingsley looked at retention and attrition specifically for special education teachers. Two major reasons that teachers decide to leave a job or district were found to be; inadequate support from school administrators and student discipline problems. Although her findings suggest that teachers who are younger and less experienced tend to leave before their more experienced and aged counterparts, teachers with higher test scores also tend to leave at a higher rate than those who scored lower. These findings could suggest a few things. First of all, that newer teachers coming fresh from educator programs are not staying in the special education field therefore leaving a smaller pool to choose from as the more experienced teachers retire. Also, that the teachers performing higher on assessments are taking their knowledge of the field elsewhere. Ultimately, this revolving door of special educators is not only impacting administration in their hunt for qualified and committed teachers, but for the students they work with. Darling-Hammond and Sclan (as cited in Billingsley, 2004) say the flight of special education teachers is reducing student achievement and creating graduates with limited competence in the workplace.

The final risk factor that came up often in research, and involves almost all other risk factors, is disengagement from school (Cavendish, 2014). If a student does not feel

connected, socially, physically or academically, they lack the desire and the drive to finish. This lack of attachment can significantly impact a student's ability to achieve academic success.

Not only can disengagement be the cause of limited academic success, it can also be the result. Research has shown that a shared area of youth affiliated with gangs have experienced academic-related problems. Per a nation-wide study by Wood et al. (1997), 60% of the participants were reported by their teachers as performing below average or failing in school. This is a significant portion of the population that is not achieving at the level expected for their age. Cavendish (2014) also explored academic characteristics of both youth with and without disabilities in juvenile justice facilities. This study was conducted in Florida with 4,066 adolescents ranging in age from 14-19 upon their release from a residential juvenile center. Overall students with disabilities were achieving at similar rates as their peers without disabilities, however, as a whole the incarcerated youth showed they were in need of much more support and academic intervention before they were entered into the juvenile justice facility. Poor educational outcomes are found amongst youth who are involved in the justice system which can often be affiliated with a gang. If students feel failure, they may stop trying because they feel that there is no reason to anymore. Highly at-risk youth tend to fail more classes than other students. From a special education standpoint, students with E/BDs have the lowest grade point averages compared to their other special education peers (Cavendish, 2014; Wagner & Davis, 2006).

Figueire-McDonough (as cited in Winters, 1997) stated, “in an environment where academic success is defined as an exclusive goal, inept students will feel their lack of success and therefore search other careers…” (p. 455). Students who are receiving low scores in their academic grades could be demonstrating a lack of motivation and then they would not associate their grades with ability. However, a student receiving special education services may be putting forth effort and still receive the failing grades which could completely change their outlook on their ability. It is very clear in a school setting when a student is failing or succeeding academically. When a student is on the failing end of that, they may start to set their sights on more attainable goals and in some cases, this may lead to criminality. This could be because of the perception that a life of crime is easy to accomplish and provides instant and tangible results. This academic failure can stand on its own as a risk factor, but it can also be associated with other factors influencing that failure.

It is not a new fact that drop-out rates directly correlate with deviant and criminal behavior (Hernandez, 2002; Mcneil et al., 2013). When a student does not finish school they often lack the knowledge to participate in the career world but more importantly, they lack the opportunity. One of the greatest reasons for a student to drop out is disengagement from school (Wagner & Davis, 2006).

As shown above, disengagement can happen when students experience academic failure. It is easier to give up than to fail in most cases. A student may also become disengaged if they have negative relationships with teachers or staff members. This supports the risk factor of access to quality education. Finally, this conversation of

disengagement cannot occur without addressing the area of isolation. When a student is isolated, or has the perception of being isolated, it can have serious impacts on their level of engagement.

Students with disabilities may disengage themselves from school because they do not see the value in it. This may be due to the fact that they do not see themselves represented in the school and that school was not made for them. A student who participates in special education services can feel separated from their general education peers (Brown et al., 2003). Often these feelings can occur after being placed in a separate classroom, using separate hallways and in certain cases, attending a separate school altogether. These restrictions can easily lead to feelings of alienation and a lack of belonging to a larger community.

Prevention

Often, the programs put into place after a student has already been involved with a gang and committed a criminal act, are unsuccessful (Dishion et al., 2005). These programs can even push students in the direction of recidivism; which is the predisposition for a convicted criminal to reoffend. This is the reason that prevention is so important. If we can understand why a student may join a gang at a young age, it could help prevent their involvement and therefore reduce their overall risk for a life of

criminality. It is not to say it is a hopeless cause when a student is already involved in a gang, but it can be much more challenging. As educators, prevention is an area in which we can play a pivotal role.

Individual Prevention

Prevention on an individual level can be accomplished in a variety of ways. Some prevention ideas are geared towards factors outside of the adolescent themselves but these will also certainly impact the individual. There are also some prevention programs that start with the individual and work their way out.

A Whole Child Intervention approach was recommended by multiple sources (Koffman et al., 2009; Mcneil et al., 2013; Wagner & Davis, 2006). Research shows that targeting multiple aspects of a child's life can have a greater impact in the deterrence of delinquent behavior. Mcneil et al. (2013) suggests that when one part of a system is changed, it will impact all the other parts of the system because they are connected.

Juvenile Intervention and Prevention Program (JIPP). A study by Koffman et al. in 2009, focuses on the impact of a comprehensive whole child program that can support students who are at risk for gang involvement. This program, known as Juvenile Intervention and Prevention Program or JIPP, is a school-based gang intervention and prevention program in Los Angeles targeting at-risk students. The program started as an alternative to suspension that supported their positive behavior intervention policy. The Juvenile Intervention and Prevention Program (JIPP) was tested at Belmont High School in a neighborhood with the highest concentration of immigrants, non-citizens, low-income families, households with second languages and residents without a high school

diploma in all of Los Angeles. As stated previously in this paper, these socioeconomic factors significantly increase a student's risk for engaging in delinquent behavior. Belmont High School is a large school with a graduation rate 30 percent lower than the average in California. Students were chosen to participate in JIPP at Belmont High if they were identified as being a high risk of dropping out, becoming involved in gang activity or being already involved in the justice system.

The program runs in a three-module format, each running over a six-week period. The first module is based on resistance. This module is a biobehavioral physical training curriculum that is shown to reduce resistance to behavioral and psychological change. This portion of the program is run by the Rampart Division of the Los Angeles Police Department. The use of a strong authoritative figure is used to set clear boundaries and expectations for positive behavior as a JIPP student. A series of physical trainings are used to set clear boundaries and build self-esteem through physical proficiency. Goals are set and tracked from the beginning of the module to the end. Students are a part of this tracking system and even create goals they will carry with them the remainder of the entire program.

The officers in this program are put through a training on working with at-risk youth by a psychologist and must uphold certain ideals about the development of youth. The officers have a goal to teach discipline *for* the student, not *to* the student.

This module allows students to improve their self-esteem as they increase their physical prowess. It also alleviates the pressure for students to always be in their minds and instead be present with their bodies for six weeks.

The next module is focused on empowerment. Officers remain involved throughout the entire program by teaching classes on public speaking and job interviewing. They also use a curriculum called “Pillars of Success” which has lessons in trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring and citizenship. This module is where psychosocial intervention is introduced. An interactive software program called *Ripple Effects* is used to teach different lessons. These lessons are organized into categories; assets, academic/behavioral/social problems, and risk factors inside/outside of you. This software program has shown large success in eight different studies starting in 1999. It can positively impact behavior as well as school outcomes. The format is short bursts of learning accompanied by pictures, illustrations, videos and music.

One important point of the *Ripple Effects* curriculum is that it teaches replacement behaviors. When a behavior is needing to be eliminated, it must be replaced with another, most positive one. This replacement must occur or else another, often worse, behavior will take over and the cycle continues. This idea is consistent with a study by Smith (2011) about adaptive learning. Youth join gangs to fill a need and we need to redirect this need to more positive outlets. *Ripple Effects* promotes leadership skills and social responsibility to allow students to feel ownership in their education and ultimately, their lives.

The final module of the program has a leadership focus. It provides a credit-recovery program that counts towards graduation, along with many other opportunities. One of these opportunities is the chance to be a ‘Black Shirt’ with the

LAPD. This is the LAPD's program which recruits young men and women for futures in law enforcement.

The last piece of this program is the parent involvement. Interventions are delivered in the home and parents/guardians are required to attend an 18-week psychoeducational parenting class. This allows concurrent change to happen for the child and the family. Classes are offered on Saturdays to try to accommodate for a traditional work week, as well as offered in Spanish.

Results from this particular study in Los Angeles showed that there was a significant decrease in behaviors within the school. The number of days suspended decreased as well as the number of overall incidents decreased significantly. There was also a significant improvement in academics with 10% or more growth in both math and English test scores (Koffman et al., 2009).

As can be seen, this is truly a program focused on the whole child. It provides a fixed value of accountability as well as providing opportunities that a student may have never had without it. This is only a small study compared to many others, but it yielded positive results. Wagner and Davis (2006) conducted a national longitudinal transition study looking at the implementation of five principles they identified as exemplary practices for students with emotional disturbances. The five principles were; relationships, rigor, relevance, attention to the whole child and involving families and students in transition planning. This study used a nationally represented sample of middle and high school students receiving special education services across all disability categories. Focusing on the whole child principle, their results showed that there was a

disconnect between vocational interests of students with E/BDs and their preparation for the work world. If staff members are trained to identify risks specific to students with E/BDs, they would be able to provide information about services that will support the child as a whole and increase their overall success.

O'Brien et al. (2013) as well as others (Garfinkel, 2010; Mcneil et al., 2013; Wagner & Davis, 2006) suggest that to truly prevent delinquency and gang affiliation, we must look at multi-modal programs that include more than one domain of risk factors. It relates back to the idea that seeing a student as a whole can target more than just one risk factor at a time. When you make a change in one part of the system, it will surely impact the others.

Multisystemic Therapy (MST). Garfinkel (2010) examines the effectiveness of a Multisystemic Therapy (MST). This is a family and community based intervention that provides large support to increase family involvement which ultimately helps improve the conduct of adolescents. These approaches work with the family in their home setting and provide parenting skills to increase effectiveness. Adolescents are taught to examine their negative interactions and brainstorm methods to change these interactions by altering their responses. This connects a student's actions to a cause and effect chain and supports the development of replacement behaviors. Often these programs are developed specifically for the individual child incorporating family therapy, behavior therapy and parent training.

Programs like Multisystem Therapy or Whole Child Interventions are not always readily available in communities. Extensive programs require significant funding and professional support to create and maintain.

On an independent level, educators can create interventions in their own classrooms. Many of the skills that at-risk students are lacking can be taught in the confines of the classroom. A couple of these skills include self-advocacy and clear communication. These are skills that can be taught and supported in any classroom. Since teachers are at times the first line of defense, they are able to use this to their advantage and provide a wealth of knowledge to students. Building this self-confidence and independence in the classroom could possibly generalize to the rest of a student's life (Ryan et al., 2007). This is especially important for students who have an E/BD. They are in need of interventions and supports to help them handle the challenges as a result of their disability. Guiding students to learn about their abilities and their limitations can help create a self-confidence that they will use for future endeavors (Wagner & Davis, 2006).

Ryan et al. (2007) investigated the relationships students have with adults as predictors of delinquency including substance use, gang involvement and threats to safety. The study revolved around 342 ethnically diverse high school students in an urban, low income area in the Southwestern United States. A six-page self-administered questionnaire was provided to students examining different at-risk indicators. They discovered that some adult relationships seemed to a play a protective role in response

to substance use, gang involvement and threats to safety. Adult relationships had a more direct relationship in explaining substance abuse than explaining gang involvement. However, the prior use of substances directly correlated with gang involvement. This could imply that developing positive relationships could deter students from substance abuse which is a large individual risk-factor for gang affiliation. Ryan et al. (2007) also says that for students who are facing poverty, often school personnel can be more important influences than the guardians at home. This is a lot of power given to an educator and shows they can be pivotal in the life of a student. Developing meaningful relationships with students and acting as a role model will provide students with much needed support. Also, if students bond with teachers they are more motivated to stay in school, succeed academically and ultimately graduate, which eliminates another very large risk factor in their life.

Peer Prevention

When looking at risk factors on a peer level, there were two main areas that had a significant impact on at-risk youth; the desire for peer affirmation and the presence of delinquent peers.

When it comes to the desire for peer affirmation, this is an area of weakness for all adolescents. According to O'Brien et al. (2013), status, identity and companionship are universal needs of young people. This makes intervention around peer affirmation a challenge since it is a perfectly natural desire of a young person. However, teachers and other faculty can help foster a positive peer environment and watch closely for negative

impacts others may be having. Brown et al. (2003) says that making friends is an area that needs significant intervention. A teacher can facilitate this process at any age to support the growth of positive peer relationships.

This should be a particular focus for students who are served in the area of emotional/behavioral disorders. There are many stigmas that go along with being in special education classes. That being said, students who receive these services are at a greater risk for negative peer attention or bullying that may occur due to their disability status (Brown et al., 2003). Mcneil et al. (2013) cited a source that found individuals who were victimized were more likely to join a gang. Schools can create peer groups that foster a positive give and take between students. This can include students who receive services and students who do not. Allowing for, and monitoring these prosocial interactions can develop the companionship that youth are craving.

The second area where prevention efforts can be focused is on the presence of delinquent peers. A study by Hennigan et al. (2015), made the claim that often in prevention or outreach programs, youth who may never offend are exposed to other more severe delinquents. This unfortunately, can make a youth who was toying with the idea of delinquency look up to those around him or her who have committed crimes and begin committing themselves. The program is meant to help reach out to students who are at-risk but this may in fact place them at a greater risk due to the influence around them. This is particularly true in settings that have low supervision or structure. It is in these types of settings that escalations in problem behavior can occur (Dishion et al., 2005).

Often the community programs for at-risk youth are on a primary or tier one level that is not very effective for high risk students. These interventions become a catch all for a wide range of risk factors and behaviors. Research by Hennigan et al. (2015) suggests that there are different levels of intervention focusing deeper on the tier two interventions that impact higher risk youth. Separation must occur in both the depth of the program and the physical separation which would prevent lower risk youth from interacting or being influenced by more delinquent youth. It would also provide more structure and supervision to eliminate conversations that may idealize a gang lifestyle.

For educators, awareness will go a long way in the prevention of exposure to more delinquent youth (Wood et al., 1997). It is not only about recognizing the risk factors for gang affiliation, but also the appeal and how to combat that with more positive outlets (Dishion et al., 2005). Having conversations with families as well as students about negative influences may create an awareness that would not have been present before. Also, suggesting after school activities or clubs can provide a safe space for at-risk youth to fill their time. Peer influence is one of the most challenging risk factors to control. The best option is to be aware and create structured opportunities with prosocial peers as models (Hennigan et al., 2015).

Family Level Prevention

Similar to peer factors, risk factors on a family level are also areas that are challenging to control. Educators cannot change what a student's home life looks like, except in extenuating circumstances. With that said, there is one area that could have a drastic impact on family risk factors; family involvement.

Family involvement is an area that came up repeatedly in research (Garfinkel, 2010; Mcneil et al., 2013; O'Brien et al., 2013; Wood et al., 1997). The impact can be great in either direction; if a family is involved, or equally, if the family is uninvolved. Ultimately, the family knows the child better than anyone else in the equation. They know their child's strengths, weaknesses, experiences, needs, etc. Having the family involved can undoubtedly provide great insight about the child (Garfinkel, 2010).

As stated above, lack of parental management and involvement is a large risk-factor (Alleyne & Wood, 2010). Without the guidance of guardians, it leaves a student with limited direction and an uncertainty of the consequences to actions. When a family is involved in a child's life in a positive manner and included in interventions, there is a far greater impact. If at all possible, it is best to involve the family especially if that is where a student will be returned to after intervention (Garfinkel, 2010). This allows for planning with the family to support a student after delinquent behavior has already occurred. Garfinkel (2010) also identified community resources available to help increase and improve family involvement. There are multisystemic and functional family therapies that can support families in their home be more successful when navigating students with E/BDs and delinquent behaviors.

Currently, the system in place for guardians of students who receive special education services is not always a positive experience for those involved. In Minnesota, PACER, a parent and family information center for families of youth with disabilities, run surveys and studies to check the effectiveness of programming for students receiving special education services. One of PACER's reports showed that there was a significant

mistrust of special education system professionals. This was due to a parental feeling that there was a lack of culturally competent systems as well as the perception that the system is designed to not engage families (Garfinkel, 2010). This was echoed in research by Conroy (2012) with regards to our Culturally and Linguistically diverse families. Many of their perceptions were that their opinion does not matter. This perception guardians have, whether it is true or not, can obviously be a serious disconnect.

Family involvement has shown to prove important in the potential success for students with E/BDs and delinquent behavior (Alleyne & Wood, 1997; Conroy, 2012; Garfinkel, 2010; Owen and Greef, 2015). If a family does not feel connected to the system due to barriers in place, it will deter their involvement and could further delay progress made by the student. It is the role of the system to make families feel more comfortable in accepting support.

In the special education field, family involvement is not just a good idea, it is a legal obligation. Parents are a part of the IEP team and must sign off on all educational decisions or at least be provided ample opportunity to. The field of special education is also full of acronyms and jargon that few people are familiar with outside of the profession. This can be intimidating for families and can even seem condescending. Side-stepping the jargon (Conroy, 2012) can break a barrier which can foster a more productive relationship.

There is also a significant shift in perception once a student gets involved in the special education system. The reality is that guardians are not always prepared for the news that their student qualifies for special education services and they may not also

fully understand what a disability is in the American culture. What qualifies as a disability can vary across cultures (Conroy, 2012). Conroy (2012) noted that response to disability was at times related to cultural background. The special education system is currently deficit based which is not always aligned with how other cultures perceive ability. Being aware of a negative perception can be a proactive way to combat negativity towards the system itself. This can especially be a barrier when there is a culture or language difference between the teachers and the family. A cultural liaison is a resource that can be used to better bridge this gap (Conroy, 2012).

One way to grow the relationship between teachers and guardians is to advocate for more frequent meetings. These meetings can be formal or informal. Setting meetings should be done with caution and the schedule of the guardian should be kept in mind. The meetings should not feel like a burden but rather an opportunity to connect about the student that is shared by the guardians and teachers. The purpose of these meetings would be to not only discuss concerns but focus on achievements. Too often guardians only receive contact when something is wrong (Conroy, 2012). Opening a direct line of communication before there are major concerns will make it more comfortable to discuss concerns if they arise.

Another way educators can reach out is through the use of home visits. Counselors and teachers are allowed to make visits to the home, which can provide true insight into a students' life. This is an opportunity to establish relationships focused on connection, not to talk about concerns. Winter (1996) shared how home visits have changed over the years, once focusing on deficits and now focusing on empowerment. It

provides a safety where family are comfortable in their own space. It also shows a commitment to the student when a staff member spends their time to reach out to a family outside of school hours. Finally, the privacy that a home-visit allows can lead to candid conversations about parenting where questions can be answered without the criticism of others around (Winter, 1996).

Before adolescents commit themselves to a gang, they may have already been involved with the juvenile justice system. With that in mind, family involvement in the court system plays a similar role to that of family involvement in the school system. Garfinkel (2010) analyzed the court system and how families are supported, or unsupported in the process. The research has shown how the court system has proved to be unfriendly to families for many reasons. First of all, the process of court itself is a significant time commitment and this can put strain on already struggling parents. Parents fear losing their jobs because of time they may have to take off due to the limited hours that the courts provide. They also must worry about transportation for themselves and the rest of their family. Many families have more than one child and the court system does not provide easily accessible childcare options. If a family can get past all of these logistics, they are faced with many roadblocks within the actual system.

Often a student who is entering the correctional system will be assigned a public defender. The individual assigned is not required to meet with the parents, nor would they have time if they wished too. Caseloads for public defenders are large and allow for little time for each family (Garfinkel, 2010). This provides minimal information to the families as they enter a long legal process without any roadmap.

If the previously mentioned challenges are not enough, there are many parents who are not originally from the United States and must navigate their own obstacles. Translators are not always available which provides a large language barrier between parents and correctional system members (Conroy, 2012). Being linguistically sensitive can provide a bridge for trust and understanding. To truly make a family welcome goes beyond a translator. A cultural liaison can provide support for both parties involved and allow for a much more positive experience.

In both the case of a student receiving special education services as well as students involved in the juvenile delinquency system, family support is essential. Another way to support the family would be to provide the opportunity to connect with families who have shared a similar experience. This can provide an outlet that has a shared experience as well as one that can share advice. The connection has shown to help prevent gang affiliation as well as recidivism (Conroy, 2012).

As stated above, educators have little control over the risk factors that a student may face due to their family life. However, awareness is one of the best ways to be proactive when working with students. Wood et al. (1997) suggests that this awareness may help to

"a) proactively prevent gang association,

b) recognize and serve youths' emotional and behavioral health needs more accurately,

c) reduce gang-related violence in our schools and

d) provide collaborative, tailored service that reach beyond the criminal justice system." (p.9)

Knowing a child's background can provide insight into their personality, behavior, likes, dislikes, ability, outlook on education, etc. Having conversations alone may open a door to connect with a student and allow you a glimpse into their life. This may not be a research-based intervention, but it can create a connection and understanding that would not be there otherwise.

School Level Prevention

Bullis, Walker and Steiber (1998) argued the point that for many adolescents, school is a stable force in their lives. This stability provides an opportunity for programs and interventions that could help support the youth and counteract the risk factors they may face. The school environment itself lends a platform for whole child interventions by creating partnerships between staff members, families and community organizations that can support at-risk youth. With that said, there are four areas of focus for school risk factors associated with school; disengagement, discipline policies, and access to quality teachers.

Disengagement. Disengagement is a huge area of risks to combat for students. This disengagement occurs due to lack of interest in school, relevancy in learning topics, absenteeism, isolation, academic failure, positive school relationships and many more. Almost every risk factor that is associated with school could be tied to disengagement whether the risk factor causes disengagement or the disengagement causes the risk

factor. The bottom line is that students need to feel more engaged in their school experience to achieve positive results(Winters, 1997).

Research shows that one of the characteristics of an incarcerated youth is that they have a passive learning style (Winters, 1997). This passive style can eventually generalize its way into other aspects of life, creating an individual who is not actively engaged in anything. Students allow learning to *happen* to them instead of engaging with the material and asking deeper questions. One way to counteract this is to make the learning relevant and provide students with some voice in their education.

Harris-Murri King and Rostenberg (2006) say that through learning opportunities, students can be engaged which would limit behavior incidents and potentially special education referrals. Relevance may be a factor at play here. Students who are facing challenges outside of school desire to be informed why what they are learning is relevant. If we make activities in the classroom relevant to the lives of students, their culture and their future, it could provide the engagement necessary to keep them there (Smith, 2011). Winters (1997) showed that students often have high monetary aspirations but fail to make the connection between the education they attain and the job opportunities their education allows for. This is a conversation and on-going learning opportunity to keep youth engaged and show them the purpose of their education. Making that direct connection may engage more students in their learning and motivate them to pursue an education for their future goals. Winters (1997) also showed that the gap between these economic goals and educational expectations, is a large predictor for

delinquency. This is supported by the Strain Theory (Owen & Greeff, 2015) where humans turn to criminality when their economic goals do not align with their employment opportunities. Instilling a clear understanding of the connection at a young age could curb some of this shock for the future and hopefully deter criminal behavior.

Another important factor for prevention of disengagement is to provide a sense of control. Werner (as cited in Winters, 1997) says that “inmates, by virtue of both their background and the prison setting, tend not to see themselves as creatures of their own destinies but rather, see the control of their lives in the hands of others” (p.453). Brown et al. (2003) echoed this idea that when students feel powerless it is due to them lacking the control over events in their life. This idea of a lack of control directly mirrors the feelings of many youth who eventually become involved in criminal activity.

The idea of control is a theme when discussing involvement with a gang. Many of the youth who become affiliated have situations in their lives they do not have control over and choose a life of delinquency because it is a decision they can make on their own.

Students who are served in special education have little to no control over the classes, peers and teachers they would like to be around. Often programs are small and students are limited with their choices if they must receive services for more than one area in special education.

Students need to be provided with a sense of control in aspects of their lives. Home life is not an option because that cannot be controlled for by an outsider except in extreme cases. Therefore, control needs to be given in an educational setting. This

control will provide students with a sense of responsibility, autonomy and accountability.

Control can be provided in variety of ways. Whether it be choice in how to represent what they have learned in a unit or choice in which format to present findings in. It can also be provided in terms of electives. Providing students with more opportunity for choice in their schedule could help increase their level of engagement and enjoyment in their school experience. Ultimately, giving the control back to students may empower them to have hope in their lives where they saw none before (Koffman et al., 2009).

For students receiving special education services, this can be more complicated. Often their classes are chosen for them due to scheduling matters and having only a few sections of special education courses. This is where the idea of inclusion truly takes form. Although students with special education needs must have specially designed instruction in areas they qualify for, it is best to keep students in as many general education classes as possible to allow them to feel connected to their environment and experience social interactions with their general education peers (Wagner & Davis, 2006).

Discipline. Another risk area was in the discipline system. Booker and Mitchell (2011) used the term “discipline gap” when referring to the overrepresentation of certain racial groups in different disciplinary action. To lessen this gap, a clear place for growth is bias within educators. Whether intentional or not, all humans have an innate bias because of who they are, how they were raised and where they currently are in

their lives. Exclusion from the classroom is a large factor for both students with EBDs as well as students who are at risk to become affiliated with a gang. There is inconsistency with guidelines and expectations of behavior in the classroom (Booker & Mitchell, 2011). Too often are students from non-white backgrounds receiving consequences for their behavior. Looking at the students who are receiving the most disciplinary action suggests that this discipline gap may be a result of a lack of cultural competency and understanding. There is an obvious connection between cultural background and disciplinary action as well as recidivism with these behaviors.

PBIS. Often when behavior concerns increase, so do the number of negative consequences. However, this has not always shown to be effective especially with students who have significant behavior concerns (Simonsen & Sugai, 2013). To try to reduce the negative, reflexive responses, upwards of 22,000 schools (Bradshaw et al., 2015) have adopted their own Positive Behavioral Intervention and Support programs (PBIS). This system helps guide decisions about the implementation of research-based behavioral and academic practices and interventions. Smith (2011) states that it consists of four elements; data which guides the direction of practices, outcomes which support the achievement both academically and socially, practices which support student behavior and systems which support the behavior of staff. This system works in three tiers where students at the first tier receive the lowest amount of support and the students at the highest tier receive the most. When students are not responsive in one tier, they are moved up in the system where more interventions are put into place. The benefit of this system is that since it is schoolwide, everyone in the school is expected to

participate on each level. This creates a sense of cohesion among staff members by holding high expectations for all students (Smith, 2011). Another benefit is the significant decrease in office referrals it can provide. Bradshaw et al. (2015) found that when a PBIS was implemented with fidelity, there was a 20-60% decrease in office referrals. Fewer office referrals means fewer suspensions which decreases the time many students spend away from their academics and other peers.

In Bradshaw et al.'s (2015) study they looked at 31 high schools across Maryland all implementing PBIS. These schools had a diverse population with 45.7% of students identifying as a minority, 35.3% of students on free and reduced lunch and 5.1% receiving special education services. A password-protected online survey was given to students regarding their perception of school climate and their experience with bullying in the school. Results showed that schools with higher baseline rates of bullying implemented the PBIS systems with greater reliability. This may suggest that schools with greater rates of bullying are more propelled to use a PBIS system and ultimately see more results. Since victimization is a risk factor for youth, utilizing an effective PBIS system could help mitigate that particular risk.

Simonsen and Sugai (2013) argue that these PBIS interventions would be equally as effective in both alternative education placements and restrictive placements. Students are placed in these programs due to behavior that was impacting their ability to be successful in the general education setting. Traditionally in a general education setting, students with significant behavior concerns would bypass tier one and tier two

interventions and jump straight to tier three due to the considerable support they require. However, the beauty of a PBIS that is unique to a school allows for changes to be made to fit that program. If students are in the alternative setting because of their behavior, the tier one strategies for the PBIS would reflect behavior concerns for the majority of the school (Simonsen & Sugai, 2013). The system becomes tailored using the typical student within the alternative program. This specialization allows for more levels of intervention and more tools for teachers to try before moving to the highest level of intervention. It also provides a system with more prevention and positive reinforcement to support students and staff.

Culturally Responsive RTI. Another prevention method is the use of a behavioral Response to Intervention (RTI) system which is very similar to PBIS (Harris-Murri, King & Rostenberg, 2006). Many programs have moved in the direction of culturally responsive behavior interventions. This prepares educators to work with and understand students who come from different cultural backgrounds than their own. As stated above, the inherent human bias provides a subjective platform for educators to create their own discipline rules.

Response to Intervention (RTI), was originally used as an alternative model to identify a student with a specific learning disability. Previously, identifying a student with a specific learning disability used a severe discrepancy model that looked at the relationship between a student's ability and achievement based on scores from a standardized assessment. Research has shown that this IQ discrepancy model may contribute to the disproportionate representation of culturally and linguistically diverse

students in the special education system. According to Harris-Murri, King and Rostenberg (2006) the RTI model, indicates “an inadequate change in target behaviors as a function of intervention” (p. 780). This brings in factors outside of the student that may impact their learning including interpersonal and institutional factors. This RTI model is starting to be applied in the evaluation for other disability categories including emotional/behavioral disorders.

Part of the appeal of a RTI model is that it is a proactive program. Harris-Murri et al. (2006) claim that often the special education evaluation system is seen as a “wait to fail” system that only provides help once a student has shown significant challenges in school and may qualify for special education services (p. 780). RTI begins with evidence-based interventions before any special education referral may occur. This process requires that the general education system be actively involved in interventions which could benefit not only individual students, but whole groups of students.

There are a few different basic versions of RTI but for our purposes we will focus on the model presented by Klinger and Edwards in 2006. They split the RTI model into four tiers. The first tier holds the general education teachers accountable for providing all students in their classrooms with high quality instruction. The second tier provides intensive research-based interventions for a smaller group that are not responding to the first-tier initiatives. Tier three is a team approach that develops new interventions specific for a select few children who are not responding to the first two tiers. In schools this may be called a Child Study Team, Teacher Assistant Team, Student Intervention Team or other various names with a similar purpose. At the fourth-tier level, moves are

made towards a special education referral to evaluate the academic deficits a child may be facing. If a similar model were to be used to identify behavior disabilities, the fourth tier would be an evaluation for an emotional/behavioral disorder.

Harris-Murri et al.2006) argue that this RTI approach to behavior could be a key method in limiting the disproportionate representation of culturally and linguistically diverse students in the E/BD category. This model would shift the focus from a deficit type model, to more of a risk model, focusing on outcomes. It also minimizes the bias that could arise from teacher referrals where they have provided little to no intervention data. Also, since the tiers begin in the general education classroom, general education teachers are provided with extra support before students reach a level where special education services would be needed.

A challenge the study addressed is that in an academic RTI model, there are proven interventions that work for students with specific needs. When it comes to social and behavioral needs, different aspects need to be taken into consideration; it is not a one size fits all scenario. A student's cultural and linguistic background must be considered. As well as the teacher's background and inherent bias working with the student. This requires creating and using curriculum that accounts for the different backgrounds of students and the teachers who work with them.

This is where the idea of culturally responsive instruction and practice comes into the picture. The classrooms that uphold this standard take into consideration the cultural backgrounds of students and staff in the room and make connections between not only the humans involved, but also connect these backgrounds to the curriculum

used. It is suggested that if culturally responsive methods are applied to the first tier, it can have a profound impact on students in the classroom (Harris-Murri et al., 2006).

Access to Quality Education. Finally, access to quality education is an area for intervention. Unfortunately, this is an area that teachers have little control over. Wagner and Davis (2006) share from their study that less than half of the students they were working with, had teachers with special education training or any training in behavior management. As teachers, we can choose continuing education classes that help support special education and at-risk youth in the classroom. Teachers can also request to their administrators the need for more comprehensive training related to trauma, emotional disturbances, and positive discipline. This is an area that needs support beyond an educator's ability. If administrators wish to keep their special education teachers in general, there is a demand to address common areas of need. Taking an overall approach to create a more positive working environment, where a teacher feels safe and supported, will improve the overall retention and production of the staff (Billingsley, 2004).

CHAPTER III: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Summary of the Research

Research has shown that students served under the disability category of emotional/behavioral disorders (E/BDs) share many risk factors that youth who are affiliated with a gang face. In fact, being a student who receives special education services in general may make students more susceptible to joining a gang as well.

The first risk factors that students served in the disability area of E/BD and youth affiliated with a gang are demographic areas including; gender, race and socioeconomic status (Brown et al., 2003; Bullis et al., 2002; Koffman et al., 2009; Melde & Esbensen, 2013). Students who are male tend to be overrepresented in not only the juvenile system but in special education services for E/BDs (Alleyne & Wood, 2010; Mcneil et al., 2013; Wood, Furlong, Rosenblatt, Robertson, Scozzari & Sosna, 1997). There are varying theories behind this connection but alienation was a common denominator for male students in both scenarios (Brown et al., 2003). Students with ethnically diverse backgrounds are also at higher risk for being associated with a gang as well as being labeled with an emotional or behavioral disorder (Harris-Murri, King & Rostenberg, 2006; Wood et al., 1997; Zhang, Katsiyannis, Ju & Roberts, 2014). Finally, students who came from homes with lower incomes were also at risk in both groups Alleyne & Wood, 2010; Koffman et al., 2009). Poverty can be considered a traumatic experience which could lead students towards a gang family (Dishion, Nelson & Yasui, 2005; Wood, et al., 1997). Also in the area of special education, trauma is a leading factor for students who qualify in the area of E/BD (Koffman et al., 2009).

Placing aside the demographics that place students at a higher risk for being a part of both focus groups, there were other areas that were examined for risk factors as well. Many studies compartmentalized these risk factors into categories as they relate to the student; individual risk factors, peer risk factors, family risk factors and school risk factors (Esbensen & Osgood, 1999; Hennigan et al., 2015; O'Brien et al., 2013).

An individual may possess risk factors by virtue of their personalities or traits they have picked up from the environment. Two areas that showed the greatest risk were antisocial behavior and impulsivity (Alleyne & Wood, 2010; Dishion et al, 2015; Hennigan et al., 2015; O'Brien et al., 2013; Scott, 2014). This antisocial behavior could include stealing, lying, cheating or the inability to control anger. Gang members are chosen at times due to their already violent attitudes that stem from uncontrolled anger (O'Brien et al., 2013). They also tend to commit more crimes reinforcing the lying and stealing points of the antisocial behaviors. For students to qualify in the area of emotional or behavioral disorder, they need to show pattern of behaviors over a significant period of time that show their inability to adapt and succeed under normal circumstances due to either deficits in their emotional processing or the inability to control behavior (US Department of Education). Impulsivity can be associated with gang members and their substance abuse. They are far more likely to be involved in drug use than non-members (Melde & Esbensen, 2013; Ryan et al., 2007; Wood et al., 1997). Without impulse control, they are unable to see the long-term repercussions of their actions.

Moving just outside of an individual are the peers that surround them, providing their own set of risk factors. Socialization is a large part of adolescence and as it is a delicate time for self-discovery, peer affirmation plays a large role in that development of self (Mcneil, Herschberger & Nedela, 2013; Owen & Greeff, 2015). Therefore, when students are surrounded by deviant peers they are at a higher risk to participate themselves (Alleyne & Wood, 2010; O'Brien et al., 2013). At times this exposure to deviant youth is not the choice of a student but rather the choice of the placement they are in. This is particularly true for students with E/BDs (Hennigan et al., 2015).

Family is an area of a student's life where there can be significant risk factors. A lack of parental monitoring and involvement has shown to be common amongst students who are affiliated with a gang (Alleyne & Wood, 2010; O'Brien et al., 2013; Wood et al., 1997). Without the guidance of a parental figure and family unit, children look to gangs to fill the role of protector and disciplinarian (Alleyne & Wood, 2010; O'Brien et al., 2013). If a family unit is present, another factor may be abuse. When a student experiences trauma from some type of abuse this creates a cycle of emotional trauma that can result in externalizing behaviors towards others (Wood et al., 1997).

Finally, a student's experience in school can create significant risk factors for students in both focus groups. Since the goal of school is to show success academically, this can be an area of concern when a student is not performing at the expected level. This lack of success could influence disengagement from school or be the result of the disengagement. When a student does not feel connected to school they lack the drive and motivation to finish (Cavendish, 2014; Winters, 1997). This disengagement can lead

to higher drop-out rates which has a direct correlation with deviant behavior (Hernandez, 2002; Mcneil et al., 2013).

Students with the demographic risk factors shared previously also face a discrepancy in the area of discipline in school. There is a discipline gap which leads to higher rates of absenteeism, higher levels of disengagement and an overall feeling that students have no control over their current situation (Booker & Mitchell, 2011; Wood et al., 1997).

Also in these communities of need where there are high delinquency rates and a high presence of E/BDs, there is a challenge to provide a quality education. Teachers are not staying in schools with perceived negative communities but rather eloping to the suburban areas (Yiu & Gottfredson, 2013). This is bringing in teachers with less experience and training which can impact a student's overall academic success, particularly those receiving special education services (Billingsley, 2004).

It is clear that the more risk factors a student possesses, the greater their chance of engaging in delinquent behavior and ultimately may lead to gang affiliation. Looking through the research it is also made clear that no single factor shares a guaranteed link with gang membership (Alleyne & Wood, 2010). With that idea in mind, it makes intervention a daunting task. It is challenging to narrow in on one area when there are so many that show to have a connection with gang membership.

To address prevention in the area of individual risk factors, studies suggest a whole child approach which supports the student on a variety of levels (Koffman et al.,

2009; Mcneil et al., 2013; Wagner & Davis, 2006). Some may call these 'wrap around services' but ultimately, it is about targeting multiple aspects of a child's life in the hope that change in one area, will impact overall change in all areas (Mcneil et al., 2013).

For peer risk factors, it was more challenging to find interventions that can be controlled. Teachers have the ability to create opportunities in class for socialization which could support positive peer interactions (Brown et al., 2003; O'Brien et al., 2013). Creating spaces for students to get to know one another in a safe manner could also help minimize victimization that may occur which pushes students in the direction of gang affiliation (Mcneil et al., 2013). The other prevention tactic would be to limit the amount of time students are exposed to deviant peers. This may require reassessing the setting a student in placed in or refining the groupings of outreach programs (Dishion et al., 2005; Hennigan et al., 2015). Awareness of delinquent youth and their impact that they can have on others can help prepare educators to better support all their students (Wood et al., 1997).

Family risk factors were said to be the area that educators have the least control over. The main tactic identified to decrease risk factors associated with family is to increase family involvement (Garfinkel, 2010; Mcneil et al., 2013; O'Brien et al., 2013; Wood et al., 1997). Creating positive ways for families to be involved in their child's life with the necessary support can significantly improve results for the child. If families feel connected to the system and a part of the process, positive changes can be made (Alleyne & Wood, 1997; Conroy, 2012; Garfinkel, 2010; Owen and Greef, 2015). This connection can be fostered through the setting of more frequent meetings with positive

agendas (Conroy, 2012), home visits to allow for a safe space for the family (Winter, 1996) or just spending time to get to know the family to be aware of challenges that may occur (Wood et al., 1997).

Finally, school factor prevention is where teachers are at the forefront. Engaging students in their learning can provide more opportunities for them (Harris-Murri, King & Rostenberg, 2006) which in turn, reduces behaviors. A way to engage students is to make learning relevant to their current lives (Smith, 2011; Owen & Greeff, 2015; Winters, 1997) to keep them engaged now and hopefully increase their success in the future. Another important area that was identified in school was discipline. Creating concrete discipline models that allow for minimal bias will reduce the amount of time students spend out of school and maintain a positive connection with their school community (Booker & Mitchell, 2011).

Quality teachers must be available to students who are at-risk as well. To accomplish this, schools need to provide appropriate training to work with students who have behaviors (Wagner & Davis, 2006). The district and administration also need to foster an environment where teachers feel supported and valued to keep them around for students (Billingsley, 2004).

Limitations of Research

A huge limitation that was repeated across many studies was the sample size of studies. There are few large studies done with gang affiliated youth that have been published to date (Wood, et al., 1997). There is also just a lack of research on youth

prison gangs in general (Scott, 2014). This could be due to the fact that gang members do not want to expose themselves or the fact that gang life can be an intermittent commitment. Either way, the lack of data on gang members makes it challenging to create interventions that would be appropriate and effective for preventing involvement. Another limitation is identifying students who are affiliated with a gang in general. Many will self-identify after they have left a gang, but it can be challenging for students to claim gang affiliation when currently involved. The number of youth who are a part of these street gangs is unclear which can very much skew the data in our research.

From a special education standpoint, emotional/behavioral disorders is the most challenging disability category to track due to its inherent subjectivity. It is hard to know how many students truly qualify under the category or who have been mislabeled. E/BDs are also under diagnosed in many populations which can skew the data.

There are limited number of studies where E/BDs and gang affiliated youth are compared against one another. Often special education services are apparent in the gang research, but are traditionally served under the disability category of specific learning disabilities which would relate to the academic risk factors. Making a clear connection between students with E/BDs and gang involvement could help shed light on the pull for students to participate.

Future Research

Zhang et al., (2012) mentioned that the makeup of special education percentages has not changed in ten years ago, even after the IDEA mandate. The trend in overrepresentation of minority groups in special education has not changed in the past ten years. They have also said that IDEA has unintentionally caused a re-segregation of African American youth in Special Education. Often when a student is placed into special education services they remain there for their entire educational career. This allows them limited experiences in the general education academic setting because of the reliance on special education classes. To further explore this idea, future research could be looking at control groups within special education services and those in the general education system. This could help track how risk factors may change depending on where they are served on an educational level .

Family risk factors are one of the most challenging areas to provide intervention for students. Educators have little control over what goes on inside a student's home. There is research supporting types of family therapies that can help provide structure and stability in a home that adolescents are missing and pushes them into a life of delinquency (Mcneil et al., 2013). Information about these therapies and accessibility may be important for educators to be aware of and to locate their role in that process. It would also be interesting to explore the idea of a student being removed from the home during their education which could be a boarding style school. Often boarding schools are expensive programs for elite students. However, this may be an excellent opportunity to control for family and environmental factors that could not be controlled

for in the past. As the research has shown, the more risk factors an individual has, the greater their chance for delinquency. Eliminating any of these factors during some of the most vulnerable times of a student's life could impact their future outcome.

Another area for future research is on violence. Scott (2014) discusses the need to look at the relationship between gang membership and violent or aggressive attitudes. Little is known about this topic and the impact could be great when discussing focuses for intervention. Melde and Esbensen (2013) also look at the origin of violence within a gang. Did it come with an individual before affiliation or was it fostered in a gang environment? This area of research could lead us in the direction of how violence impacts an individual's desire to join a street gang.

Professional Implications

What this means as a professional is that we are on the front lines for identifying risk factors and pointing students in the right direction for intervention. Many students who are deemed 'at-risk' are incorrectly identified according to Hennigan, et al. (2015) which limits resources for those students who truly need it. By having a better screening system for risk factors, youth could receive the interventions that are appropriate for their level of risk. With this said, true individual interventions need to be created for at-risk youth that will target the specific risk factor identified. This may mean outside resources but it also may mean making changes in the classroom to mitigate risk factors for all students in the room.

Academic success is a significant risk factor for a student to get involved in delinquency. Disengagement was one of the largest reasons a student would not achieve academic success. This is an area that educators are able to make some changes in. Although teachers are locked into curriculum in districts at times or asked to teach to the test, there must be a way to engage students in their learning. In a society where all answers are at our fingertips, we are combating a movement of instant gratification. This may not be something we can fight but instead embrace the technology and create lessons relevant to the interests and strengths of our current students. Many teachers in the field currently are not millennials and therefore do not have the knowledge of the current generation. However, that does not mean that it cannot be learned. Teaching necessary content using relevant strategies is a way to engage students. Relevancy is a key factor; not just when it comes to the use of technology but also relevancy to a student's life. Many students who are at-risk face challenges at home that they are unable to avoid. Lessons in school become trivial compared to real-life situations that place students into a fight or flight mode. Communicating to students why lessons are important or what they would use them for, helps bring relevance to their learning and gives them a future to picture.

Preparation was an area that the research showed was severely lacking as well. Wagner and Davis' (2006) study showed that only 27.7% of students with emotional disturbances had a teacher who completed at least eight hours of education in the past three years about supporting students with disabilities. Of these same students, only 37% had teachers who received any sort of training in behavior management. This

shows that teachers are unprepared and not receiving adequate resources themselves to support the needs of students with behavior. This a shocking point that can possibly explain many of the challenges that E/BD students face in the classroom. It is not only the responsibility of teachers to seek educational opportunities in this area, but even more so on the teacher preparation programs and the district for continuing professional development. If true change is to come for students with E/BDs and other youth with behavior struggles, priority must be given to training those professionals around who work daily with students.

Another implication is creating positive and lasting connections with students and their families. This connection alone can make a student feel tied to school and want to come every day therefore eliminating absenteeism which has shown to be a significant contributing factor to drop-outs rates.

At some point, the teachers need to have support from their administration and superiors to provide training on bias. This could reduce the discipline gap and make more clear and concise expectations for ALL students.

Conclusion

O'Brien et al. (2013) reports that most youth who identify being in a gang report only being a part of the gang for less than four years and most of the time, only one to two years. It also shows that the average age of initiation is 13 (Wood, et al., 1997). Alleyne and Wood (2010) and Mcneil et al. (2013) echoes this with noting that entry of a gang is at highest risk for students 12-18. This small amount of time during adolescent

development can literally impact the remainder of a person's life. O'Brien et al. (2013) noted that "it's timing during the life course….suggest it may well have effects that cascade throughout the person's later development" (p. 423).

If we want to end this cycle, we have it cut it off at the knees. Research shows that gang affiliation can not only impact the individual but also their dependents. There is an increased rate of teen pregnancies affiliated with gang members and the climate in which these children are raised can also become violent according to research. This would start the cycle all over again for the next generation. When youth become involved in a gang it pushes them out of their childhood and rushes them into new roles that are not age appropriate which they struggle to handle (Brown, Hippensteele & Lawrence, 2014). If we can develop programs that use interventions for the whole child now, it could potentially impact generations to come.

Preventative measures are the most successful way to keep students out of gangs. Once a student is affiliated, it can have lifelong impacts extending generations. This can be a cycle that will continue to be repeated if someone does not break it (Mcneil et al., 2013). Prevention is the best way to combat this epidemic of youth street gangs.

An alarming piece of information was brought to light in an article about gang participation (Yiu & Gottfredson, 2013). Urban schools as a whole and specifically urban, low-income, low achieving and non-white students have less qualified teachers. Part of this is due to the fact that teachers are leaving urban areas to move and teach in more

suburban areas. The US Department of Education took a poll and it showed that 45% of teachers who left a school but stayed in teaching reported that student misbehavior interfered with their teaching and that is why they left. 39% of teachers who left the profession altogether reported the same. Another 29% of teachers who worked in these high-poverty, urban schools stated that they left due to working in an unsafe environment.

This is a vicious cycle. Quality teachers are leaving areas of high-needs because of the misconduct and unsafe behavior that can occur in these settings. However, the lack of quality teacher is part of the driving force for these behaviors to occur. If we want to support the needs of students as well as teachers, this pattern needs to be broken or rather, mended to meet the needs of all humans involved. This is a calling beyond the teachers. Administration, superintendents, policy makers, need to look at the cold, hard facts of what is happening to our urban schools. There is a shortage of teachers due to the dissatisfaction of their career. To counter this shortage, many states are lowering their standards for attaining a teaching license. This provides less coursework, observation hours and student teaching time, leaving the new population of teachers underprepared for an extremely challenging job. It also leaves students with teachers who are unable or unwilling to provide them the education they desperately need and deserve.

Koffman et al. (2009) said “If young people have undergone personal trauma and we expect them to not dropout, we must provide training to survive and to change unjust social systems” (p. 242). We need to provide support for students who have

experienced trauma. These students are many of our students with emotional or behavioral disorders. Without programs that can effectively provide life skills for students to succeed, they will continue to show up in the corrections system and this overrepresentation will continue. We have an opportunity to make true change not only for the generation that we are currently working with, but for generations to come. The next time we think that it is 'not our problem' remember that this is not an isolated issue. It impacts families, schools, neighborhoods and communities. In some cases, full cities are run by street gangs. We must remember that before these children became gang members, they were struggling students like many of us know and love. There is a way to keep them that way and to support their development as a positive individual. We have a responsibility, not only as educators, but as human beings, to empower individuals and provide opportunity to thrive in the world we all share.

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