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Factors Contributing to School Placement
for Students with Emotional Behavioral Disorders

Colleen Weis

A dissertation submitted to the faculty of Bethel University
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education

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C 2018

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Abstract

Students with Emotional Behavioral Disorders, in combination with significant and chronic behaviors, are often placed in alternative educational settings. No clear rationale is used by school districts to determine educational placement, and schools rely on a variety of settings to provide instruction and services to students with disabilities. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the narrative regarding student placement in restrictive settings and the individual and institutional rationales for student transitions. It also studied the narratives supporting students' return to a less restrictive educational placement. Participants were school district representatives in one Minnesota county who served on Individual Educational Placement teams determining appropriate education placement for students with disabilities.

This study found that multiple individual and institutional factors impacted the decision to transition a student to a more restrictive setting as well as transition a student to a more traditional educational placement. Eight themes emerged from interviewee responses specific to each research question. These themes included: student behavior and disposition, lack of school resources, collaborative culture and shared processes, receptive home district school, negative staff mindset, lack of student readiness mindset, inconsistent standards, and lack of communication and collaboration.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Attending school with like peers, participating in extracurricular activities, and choosing from multiple academic electives are the experiences most often thought of when the term school is discussed in the United States. This traditional school experience is the anticipated norm for students and families, yet a subgroup of children is less likely to encounter the education the majority take for granted. Students with dual-sensory impairments, multiple disabilities, and emotional behavioral disorders are among those most likely to be educated in separate schools (Kurth, Morningstar, & Kozleski, 2014). These schools are isolated from the general educational environment, and students do not have access to non-disabled peers. According to Kurth et al. (2014), students who have dual-sensory disabilities are more frequently placed in restrictive educational settings when compared with students with high-incidence disabilities. Dual-sensory disability is defined by a disability that affects both vision and hearing, the combination of which causes an impairment in the ability to acquire information, communicate, or function within the environment (Kurth et al., 2014). A high-incidence disability is the most prevalent disability category and typically includes students with emotional and/or behavioral disorders, learning disabilities, and mild intellectual disabilities (Kurth et al., 2014).

Background of the Study

Historically, children with disabilities have been slighted and even shunned by public education, and it was not until the 1970s that students with disabilities were protected under the law (Yell, 2012). Since the implementation of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975,

tremendous growth and protection have been afforded to this group. Guidelines were established for educational placement for students with disabilities through the passage of the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) in 1990. Under the Individuals with Disabilities Act, education for students with disabilities is one that is: provided at public expense, meets the standards of the state educational agencies, includes an appropriate preschool, elementary, or secondary school education, and includes the protection of parental rights (Yell, 2012; Public Law 108-446 – 108th Congress).

Student placement is determined through development of an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) which is discussed and evaluated annually (Hoge et al., 2014; Yell, 2012). An IEP is a legal document which contains a plan that is developed for special education students specifically related to their strengths and needs. It explores the need areas, the student's present levels of performance, goals, and objectives relative to performance standards and the general curriculum, and the extent of participation in and accommodations within the natural environment (Minnesota Department of Education, 2015). School districts rely on alternative settings to educate students with significant behaviors, and from 1997 to 2002, the number of alternative schools tripled (Hoge et al., 2014). Nearly 13% of students with EBD are being serviced through IEP's in separate alternative educational settings (Van-Gelder, Sitlington, & Morrison Pugh, 2008).

One of the goals of the alternative setting is to provide students in these placements an opportunity to redirect themselves and receive the support and skills they need to be successful (Lampron & Gonsoulin, 2013). It is rarely a student's preference to be educated in an alternative setting, but students often benefit from the existence of this viable option (Ryndak et al., 2014). Separate settings are designed to deliver specialized,

highly effective educational programs to allow students with EBD to improve their behavior and make sufficient levels of academic progress (McLeskey, Landers, Williamson & Hoppey, 2012). The objective is for these students to return to their general educational placements and not have their entire educational career in these restrictive educational environments. In general education classrooms students see models of typical age-appropriate behaviors and students with disabilities benefit socially from being able to observe these behaviors first-hand (Van Gelder et al., 2008). Unfortunately, students with disabilities continue to be segregated in school settings. According to Van Gelder, Sitlington, and Pugh (2008) students with EBD are more often served in more restrictive settings than any other student disability category.

According to Kurth et al. (2014) and Ryndak et al. (2014), little progress has been made to reduce the number of restrictive setting placements for certain groups of students, especially students with EBD. Very few students move out of this educational appointment, instead, the restrictive setting often becomes a terminal placement for students with significant disabilities (Kurth et al., 2014). States are not required to monitor and plan for the reduction of students with disabilities who are being educated in restrictive settings (Ryndak et al., 2014). Educational policies affect instructional placements of students with disabilities as well as their access to general education curriculum. Despite laws and policies to the contrary, this population of students is being placed in restrictive settings without plans in place to reintegrate into the general educational environment (Ryndak et al., 2014).

The low rate of success for students with Emotional Behavioral Disabilities (EBD) transitioning out of restrictive educational placements is a growing concern

among educators (Kurth et al., 2014). Finding the most appropriate placement or Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) for students with disabilities can be a highly contentious decision (Hoge, Liaupsin, Umbreit, & Ferro, 2014). Self-contained classrooms and separate educational placements are the most widespread service options for students with EBD (Van Gelder & Sitlington, 2008). However, these placements restrict the students' opportunities to practice and gain the skill of good decision-making, which is an expectation of students upon returning to a general education placement (Hughes, Cosgriff, Agran, & Washington, 2013).

Statement of the Problem

Emotional Behavioral Disorders refers to a disability classification that is used in an educational setting in order to provide special education and related services to students who have poor social or academic adjustment that cannot be better explained by biological abnormalities or a developmental disability (Hoge et al., 2014). Students with EBD, in conjunction with significant and chronic behaviors, are often placed in alternative educational settings. Alternative educational settings include any setting or program other than the student's current placement that enables the student to continue to receive educational services according to his or her IEP. When students with EBD exhibit chronic behaviors that impede the learning of themselves or others, or are so dangerous that they pose a risk to themselves, peers or staff, alternative settings are often chosen to address and service their specific educational needs (Hoge et al., 2014). Finding the most appropriate placement or Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) is a daunting task, especially for students with significant disabilities. Educators must consider all factors before coming to a conclusion that is appropriate for the student in

question. Educational placements are to be based on factors specific to the severity of disability and behavioral impact upon the student population. However, Hoge et al. (2014) discussed placement decisions as being based on a multitude of factors, only some that are related to student academic and behavioral performance.

Students learn necessary academic and behavior skills from educators as well as their same-aged peers (McLeskey et al., 2012). In order for these skill sets to be acquired, students need to be in the most appropriate setting so that these skills can be obtained. Leinhardt and Pally (1982) stated that separating students overly stigmatized them and condemned them permanently to the bottom track and lowered the overall expectation for them. Segregation deprives students of the necessary contact with students who are different from them, intellectually, racially, economically, and ethnically.

When students are excluded from the general educational environment, they miss out on social and academic opportunities. Hughes et al. (2013) stated that the "exercise of self-determination skills (e.g., choice making, problem-solving, self-advocating) and active involvement in transition planning is positively related to inclusive settings" (p. 3). The researchers advocated for the need to increase inclusiveness in order to foster students' self-determination and post-school success (Hughes et al. 2014). These opportunities are typically only available in the general education setting, and all students would benefit from being a part of it.

Educators and researchers agree that the needs of students with EBD are complex and difficult to address in a general education classroom. In a study by McLeskey et al. (2012), it was found that between 1990 and 2007 42% of students identified as a student

with EBD were educated in separate settings for most or all of the school day. This occurred in spite of the research by McLeskey et al. stating that these students can be successfully educated in the typical classroom for a portion of the day and documenting that many benefit from well-designed inclusive programs.

Administrators and due process facilitators have interpreted the principles of LRE, student involvement, and progress monitoring in such a way that it perpetuates segregation rather than increasing and improving access to the general education curriculum. The concept of higher educational segregation of students with EBD by Ryndak and his team (2014) has been rebutted by a study by McLeskey et al. (2012), who found that there has been a recent decline in overall placement of students with disabilities in more restrictive settings. However, the researchers noted in their study that students with EBD have a higher likelihood of being placed in restrictive settings as compared with students with learning disabilities (LD).

Purpose of the Study

Students with EBD make up 8% of the total special education population yet comprise 44% of all students with disabilities that are being placed in restrictive settings (Hoge et al., 2014). Hoge et al. found that no clear rationale was used by school districts to determine restrictive setting placements, but that schools relied on a variety of settings to provide instruction and services to address the challenges associated with educating students with emotional behavioral disorders. The researchers further stated that demographic factors have an impact on placement in these restrictive settings, which include student gender, racial or ethnic background, and socio-economic status.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the narrative regarding student placement in restrictive settings and the individual and institutional factors that contributed to students' continued placement. It also studied the narratives supporting students' return to a less restrictive educational placement.

Research Questions

The objective of this research was to identify the rationales that contribute to student placement in a restrictive educational setting, prevent students from transitioning to a lesser restrictive setting, and increase students' rate of successful transition to a less restrictive setting. The factors explored were placed in two categories: individual or institutional/district. During the course of this study, the following research questions guided the investigation:

- What is the narrative regarding the rationale for the initial placement of students with Emotional Behavioral Disorder in restrictive educational settings?
- What is the narrative that supports students with Emotional Behavioral Disorder in transitioning to a less restrictive setting?
- What is the narrative regarding the factors that inhibit students with Emotional Behavioral Disorder from transitioning to a less restrictive educational setting?

Significance of this Study

According to Ryndak et al. (2014), students with disabilities are among the most segregated students in our schools. Almost half of the students placed in segregated settings are students with EBD (Hoge et al., 2014). Students qualifying for EBD services are disproportionately students of color and lower socioeconomic status who have had maladaptive behaviors in the school settings (Lampron & Gonsoulin, 2013). By

exploring these issues, educational policy surrounding LRE can be examined, and the topic of policy reform can be addressed.

McLeskey et al. (2012) asked for further research into why students were being placed in alternative educational placements. There were no obvious student skills gained in these placements and it was a detriment to the student's educational progress. The study brought attention to the need to evaluate state and local policies in regard to placement issues. The researchers recommended examining the policies to focus on district accountability and requiring increased documentation in order to educate students with EBD in the LRE.

How students successfully leave restrictive placements is a current hot topic of study. Policy and guidelines, albeit unclear, have been established to determine how students are placed, but no clear policy exists to regulate how students transition to a less restrictive educational environment. According to DeMonte (2010), the presumptive LRE is the setting in which a student's same-aged nondisabled peers are being educated. Educational policy is needed to outline how educators, families, and students ensure that a determined placement for a student is the least restrictive of all available alternatives according to the levels of needed support. The process must include active participation of students and their families in the IEP process to make a traditional setting with nondisabled peers a priority (Hendrickson, Smith, Frank, & Merical, 1998). An important step in the process is to differentiate students who require intensive educational programming (i.e. significant behavioral needs, which may include physical and/or verbal aggression towards self and others) from those who have challenging emotional, social,

and behavioral needs that could be serviced in a more inclusive, integrated setting (Hendrickson, Smith, Frank, & Merical, 1998).

Educators are bound by LRE and a Free and Appropriate Education (FAPE) to provide the most appropriate setting for educating students, regardless of disability or non-disability. To educate a student in a setting that is not appropriate and violates LRE is both a disservice to that student as well as a violation of federal mandates (Yell, 2012). This study expounded upon the rationale behind placements of students with EBD. Examining the factors such as reasoning, thought process, and policy that impact placing students in a segregated setting, this study aimed to understand how to reintegrate this population of students into the general curriculum. Findings may be used to ensure student placements are in accordance with special education law and policy as well as guide policy regarding reintegrating students in the general education setting.

A study by McLeskey et al. (2012) determined additional research would need to be done in order to understand why students are being placed in restrictive settings. This study investigated changes in national LRE placement trends for students with disabilities from 1990 through 2008. The authors analyzed state-level data that was collected from the U.S. Department of Education. It was noted that the number of students with disabilities increased approximately 13% over the 18-year period. Along with the increase in the number of students identified for special education services, it was found that the placement of secondary students with disabilities in general education environments increased by more than 191% (McLeskey, et al., 2012). However, elementary students with disabilities in general education environments only increased by 59%. Secondary students continue to be educated in more restrictive settings than do

students at the elementary level. McLeskey's team noted that this is partially explained by the increased identification rate for secondary-level students, as compared to elementary students. This is supported by the data that shows secondary students identified with disabilities grew by 25%, as compared to the 6% growth in elementary students during the same time period. Data supported the assertion the students in this particular study were not obtaining benefits from highly restrictive placements and could significantly benefit from being placed in the general educational environment. Ryndak et al. (2014) concurred, stating that “students in segregated settings engaged in tasks related to district curriculum content standard at approximately half the rate of matched sample peers in general educational settings” (p. 71). Artiles, Kozleski, Trent, Osher and Ortiz (2010), also found that students with disabilities who spend more time in general education classrooms perform closer to grade level than their peers in pull-out settings, and have higher achievement test scores.

The perception of self-determination or the ability to make independent decisions, for students with EBD in different educational placements can vary greatly (Van Gelder, Sitlington, Morrison, & Pugh, 2008). The educational placement, or the restrictive state of it, directly impacts the self-determination of the individual student. Recent studies have examined direct instruction on student choice making and its impact on students' academic skills, yet few studies specifically focus on students with EBD (Van Gelder et al., 2008). Van Gelder et al. (2008) stated that additional research was needed in order to relate the effects of different educational placements on students with EBD.

Findings from this study will provide guidance to school district personnel toward developing clearer protocols for decisions regarding least restrictive environments and

aid districts in effectively analyzing their current setting transition practices. Ultimately, the aim of the study was for students to receive the best educational services in the most appropriate and least restrictive environment, based on their individual needs.

Definition of Terms

Alternative Education: may include a mix of resource and regular education classes, separate classes within a student's school, separate schools, residential and hospital settings, and home-bound instruction (Villarreal, 2015).

Emotional Behavioral Disorder (EBD): is characterized by excesses, deficits or disturbances of behavior. The child's difficulty is emotionally based and cannot be adequately explained by intellectual, cultural, sensory general health factors, or other additional exclusionary factors. (<https://www.behaviordisorder.org>, 2008; Ruehl, 1988)

Federal Settings (I-IV): refers to the percentage of time a student spends in special education: I: 0-21%, II: 21-60 %, III: 60 % or more, IV separate special education site (Minnesota Department of Education, 2015).

Free and Appropriate Education (FAPE): refers to an education that is free and meets state standards. An appropriate education conforms to the student individualized education plan and includes parent participation (Yell, 2012).

Individualized Education Plan (IEP): is a legal document which includes a plan developed for special education students specifically related to their strengths and needs. It explores the need areas, their present levels of performance, goals, and objectives relative to performance standards and the general curriculum, and the extent of participation in and accommodations within the natural environment (Minnesota Department of Education, 2015).

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA): provides a statutory entitlement to services for eligible students in public schools and in juvenile corrections (Krezmien, Mulcahy & Leone, 2008).

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE): refers to the decision made by an IEP team which determines the amount of time a student with disabilities spends in the general education setting with non-disabled peers. The term infers that students with disabilities have rights to be educated with non-disabled peers, to the greatest extent possible. The student will also be provided with supports to achieve their individual goals if placed in a setting with non-disabled peers (Yell, 2012).

Mainstream: refers to instruction in the general educational environment (Leinhardt & Pally, 1982).

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS): organize evidence-based practices into an integrated continuum of supports that help to teach and support appropriate student behaviors, thereby creating a more positive school environment. (Lampron & Gonsoulin, 2013).

Organization of the Remainder of the Study

Chapter Two reviews the literature relevant to this study including the Least Restrictive Environment and its history, Emotional Behavioral Disorder as a disability category in special education, the factors influencing the placement of students in alternative educational placements, Positive Behavioral Intervention, and Supports, and the theories supporting the study. Chapter Three describes the research procedures and methods. Findings are presented in Chapter Four; with Chapter Five discussing the implications of the findings and providing suggestions for further research.

Chapter II: Literature Review

The literature review begins with a discussion and history of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) and Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). It transitions to the factors influencing the placement of students in alternative educational settings. Demographic and environmental factors influence the decision behind placing students in these settings and are discussed in great detail. The special education category Emotional Behavioral Disorder (EBD) is defined. The chapter includes a review of studies focused on a research-based practice being implemented in schools, Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (PBIS). The literature discusses a variety of student placements, which include general education, alternative separate facilities, day treatment, and juvenile detention. The chapter concludes with a synthesis of pragmatism as a theory driving research.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act

The Congressional intent of the Individuals with Disabilities Educational Act (IDEA) is that children with disabilities should be educated in the general education setting to the extent possible and appropriate and that special education is a service, or set of services, rather than a place. Special education services should take place in the general educational environment whenever possible, with the goal of students gaining the skills necessary to participate in society in the same manner as those students without disabilities (Hyatt & Filler, 2011, p. 1033). States must also make free, appropriate public education available to "any individual child with a disability who needs special education and related services, even if the child has not failed or had been retained in a course or grade, and is advancing from grade to grade" [§300.101(c)(1)].

IDEA mandates that students receiving special education services participate in educational experiences with non-disabled peers and included transition components in the legislation. An emphasis on transition aims to increase student independence and long-term success. Students with an IEP are guaranteed services and supports until the age of 21. Because of this, school districts and families discuss how services and supports are delivered once students graduate from high school. With IDEA, schools are required to develop transition plans to allow these students to enter the world of the workforce. Schools are required to enter into collaborative relationships with outside agencies to develop plans that equip these students to enter the workforce. These relationships help to fund transition services and programming (Ysseldyke & Algozzine, 2006).

Emotional Behavior Disorders

Emotional and Behavior Disorders (EBD), according to Kauffman, Hallahan and Cullen Pullen (2017) and Ruehl (1988), is also referred to as Emotional and Behavioral Disorder, Behavioral and Emotional Disorders, Mental and Behavioral Disorder, and Emotional Behavioral Disability. Research by Ruehl (1988) stated that this is a category within special education that is not precisely defined, causing disagreement among specialists. According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition (DSM-IVR), no exact heading exists for EBD, but a number of different diagnoses can be considered to fit into this category. The category of EBD contains other disorders which include: communication disorders, attention-deficit, and disruptive behavior disorders (ADHD, Oppositional Defiant Disorder), feeding and eating disorders,

tic disorders, elimination disorders, separation anxiety disorder and selective mutism (Council for Exceptional Children, 2017).

In an article by Ruehl (1998), EBD within IDEA is defined using five characteristics; according to the definition, one or more of these traits must be evident over a significant period of time to a degree that has an adverse effect on the educational performance.

The five categories are: a) an inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors, b) an inability to build or maintain interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers, c) inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal conditions, d) a general mood of unhappiness or depression, and e) a tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears aligned with personal or school problems (Ruehl, 1998, p. 185).

Students with EBD, as compared to students without behavioral problems, tend to display higher rates of inappropriate behavior and lower rates of positive, or appropriate behaviors (Landrum, Tankersley & Kauffman, 2003). These students also tend to experience academic difficulties that are related to their behavioral deficits and typically have social difficulty in relating to both peers and adults. It has also been found that by the time this population has been identified as EBD, the students already have a lengthy history of challenging behaviors and are well on their way to academic and social failure. EBD seems to be a lifelong disorder, even with preventive efforts (Landrum et al., 2003). As a result of these challenges, it has been found that students with EBD as the primary disability area have the highest high school dropout rate among special education students and students in general (Johnson, 2007).

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Historically, court decisions and legislative actions regarding educating students with disabilities followed a path similar to racial segregation. *Plessy v. Ferguson* was the 1896 United States Supreme Court decision which provided legal authority and recognition of the concept of "separate but equal" in regard to race. The idea of "separate but equal" applied to special education, and this practice existed until 1954 with the landmark decision of *Brown v. Board of Education*. The Supreme Court reversed its declaration of "separate but equal" and stated, "We conclude that in the field of public education the doctrine of 'separate but equal' has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal" (Hyatt & Filler, 2001; Yell, 2012). This court decision helped to fuel the civil rights movement and provided support to the disability rights movement.

The determination of *Brown v. Board of Education* exposed the disparities in educational opportunities for children with disabilities, especially those with significant disabilities. In the 1960s, Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) was being discussed in the professional literature. The literature explored the idea that educational placement of least (general education class) to most restrictive (residential treatment facilities) is a continuum. This continuum expanded in the 1970s to service most children with disabilities in the regular classroom, while those with more intensive needs placed in more restrictive settings. In the years that followed, many argued against the continuum model and cited the following concerns. The continuum of educational placements for special education:

- (1) confuses segregation with intensity of services by implying that the most intensive supports require segregation, (2) provides an assumption that the rights

of people with disabilities will be restricted, the decision is only how much, and (3) is based on a "readiness" model requiring individuals to earn their way back to less restrictive settings (Hyatt & Filler, 2011, p. 1035)

The least restrictive environment (LRE) is a pillar of special education law since its enactment in 1975, yet it has been one of its most contentious principles (Hyatt & Filler, 2011). The purpose behind Hyatt and Filler's (2011) work was to address the controversy surrounding LRE by providing a clear explanation of LRE while differentiating it from the plethora of alternative placements. The researchers discussed the possibility that more than one LRE exists for students. The failure to correctly understand and implement LRE can result in illegal and needless violations of the civil liberties of students with disabilities (Hyatt & Filler, 2011).

Gruenhagen and Ross (1995) explored the history of LRE and highlighted the 1989 case of *Daniel E.R. v. State Board of Education*. This case involved a six-year-old Texan boy with Downs Syndrome as well as a speech and cognitive impairment. He was enrolled in a program that allowed him access to non-disabled peers. After some time, he began to have difficulties and it was suggested that his placement change to better suit his increased support in the classroom. The parents disagreed which eventually led to mediation and the court process. The court determined that the student was being served in an appropriate placement and used a two-part test to decide the LRE. This test became the basis for other courts when determining LRE. The court argued the test for appropriate educational placement of a student with disabilities include:

- 1) whether education in the regular classroom, with the use of supplemental aids and services, can be achieved satisfactorily for a student, or if it cannot and the

school intends to provide special education services or to remove the child from the regular education and 2) whether the school has mainstreamed the child to the maximum extent appropriate. (Gruenhagen & Ross, 1995, p. 4)

Ryndak et al. (2014) noted there had been an emergence of a prominent role in federal monitoring and enforcement policies in regard to LRE. This shift in policies is toward a more comprehensive school reform that supports the service of students with disabilities in the general education setting. The authors found that the debate continues over the "role of inclusive schooling within the larger context of educational reform" (Ryndak et al, 2014, p. 70). The current principles of LRE are inadequate since states are not required to decrease the number of students with disabilities who receive their education in the most restrictive settings. They further suggest that LRE should be eliminated and replaced with a "notion of nonrestrictive environments" (Ryndak et al. , 2014, p. 71). Much progress has been made in moving students with high-incidence disabilities into the general educational setting, however, this cannot be said for students with significant disabilities. Educators have not reached a consensus regarding the interpretation of LRE. General education should always be the starting point when determining placement (Marx et al, 2014, p. 49).

According to Kurth et al., (2014), little progress has been made in reducing restrictive setting placements for students with disabilities. Few students, if any, actually move out of restrictive settings; these placements appear to be terminal for students with significant disabilities. This segregated, alternative setting is deemed appropriate for a specific group of students who have academic and behavioral needs that cannot be met in a traditional setting. Being in an isolated environment deprives them of the necessary

contact with high academic achieving students and students with racial and economic diversity. Research showed that placing children in segregated settings away from the mainstream has a demoralizing effect on student self-esteem and also lowers students' sense of academic competence (Leinhardt & Pally, 1982; Rittner, 2016). In the same vein, Leinhardt and Pally (1982) determined that students in special education did better than or equal to typical students in regular education class controls. These researchers noted that educational systems resist change in service, leading to lags between what we know about educating students with disabilities in the general education classroom and what actually occurs in practice.

According to Kaufman and Hallahan (1995), inclusion is based upon five assumptions:

They are (a) students are more alike than they are different, (b) good teachers can teach all students, (c) all children can receive a quality education without singling out those that have unique needs (d) education outside the regular educational environment is not needed for anyone, and (e) physically separate education is inherently discriminatory (p 128).

Kaufman and Hallahan (1995) continued to state that little research has focused on the impact of inclusion upon students with disabilities, specifically those who fall into the severe to the profound category. Full inclusion for students with disabilities into general education classrooms is the ultimate goal, but not always possible or appropriate.

Jackson (2014) wrote against legitimizing segregation for students with disabilities, specifically intellectual disabilities. Ryndak et al. (2014) argued that the principles of LRE and involvement and progress in the general education curriculum

have been interpreted in a way that encourages segregation, rather than increasing access. IDEA does not specifically require students to learn the general curriculum in a general education context, and therefore different interpretations of what constitutes access exist. Jackson (2014) stated that school districts need to use the same curriculum for all students and begin to mandate that other instructional outcomes (individual goals for students) be written as supports and adaptations rather than an IEP goal. The districts need to implement policies that mandate general education grade-level curriculum as the only curriculum to be used with all students. If this change were to be made, it would allow students' access to general curriculum and a more inclusive environment (Jackson, 2014, p. 159).

Van Gelder, Sitlington, and Pugh (2008) argued that students with disabilities should be included in the general education program since restrictive settings create a more challenging environment for students to access the general education curriculum. The authors found that programs do not provide the knowledge and skills that students need to fully return to normalized educational settings. The other side of the argument cited research that stated that students who demonstrate extreme behaviors are often poorly served in inclusive settings and educators must be cautious about students with EBD being successful in the inclusive environment (Van Delder et al., 2008).

According to DeMonte (2010), educating students, specifically preschoolers in the LRE, is dependent upon a community-specific standard where the presumptive LRE is the setting in which a preschool child's same-aged non-disabled peers are being educated. When a child can be successfully educated in this setting with the appropriate services and supports, LRE will be met. Marx et al. (2014) discussed placement of

students with disabilities, to ensure meeting the LRE mandate. It was found that too often placement was based upon the disability label, rather than the individual services that the student required (Marx et al., 2014). It is important to meet the needs of the student through placement, instead of looking at special education as a placement (Marx et al., 2014).

Factors Impacting Student Setting Placement

Placing students in highly restrictive settings is complicated and controversial (Hoge et al., 2012). Determining the appropriate placement for students with unique behaviors is especially challenging to special educators. No clear and consistent rationale or explanation exists as to how students move from setting to setting. Hoge et al. (2012) continued to state that placement decisions are based upon a multitude of factors, only some that are directly related to student academic and behavioral performance.

A study by Hoge et al. (2012) looked at the factors considered when making placements into and out of alternative schools. The study used three school sites located in the Southwestern United States. Each of these schools was an alternative school serving students with EBD. Each of the sites met eight criteria in order to be selected. These included: approval by the state as an Alternate Educational Placement (AE) for student with EBD, be included in the continuum of service delivery option with the local school district, be housed in a classroom or building on a General Education (GE) campus or a separate site with the district, have no more than 12 students per classroom, staffed by at least one teacher and one paraprofessional, able to regularly provide a mental health component, and able to provide local case management. The three schools included a separate alternative AE for students with EBD, a school housed on a separate

campus, and a private self-contained school for students with EBD that contracted with multiple school districts. At the conclusion of the study, three significant findings were cited. These included limited transitions of students back to less restrictive settings, a greater number of factors and criteria needed to be met to exit than to enter, and the student's return to a less restrictive setting was not contingent on the factors that placed the student into the alternative placement. However, in order for the student to be successful in a less restrictive setting, it is imperative to consider and discuss the factors that removed the student from their previous educational placement (Kurth et al., 2014).

Individual Factors. Factors that contributed to the drop-out rate in restrictive or alternative settings included low attendance, teen pregnancy, lack of qualified or caring teachers, and low parental involvement. It was suggested that mentors, a transition specialist, and an open door policy with school administrators would decrease this rate dramatically (Hardman, 2012). According to Johnson (2007), 100% of his study's participants who were a parent of a student with a disability acknowledged that they could be more involved with their child's education. It was further articulated that the low level or no positive parental involvement increased the student drop-out rate for students in the transitional age group. Parental involvement is critical because parents serve as role models for their children when setting and working toward various goals (Johnson, 2007). Educators have a responsibility to keep students sheltered from harm as well as making them feel safe, protected and respected (Lampron & Gonsoulin, 2013).

There is a segment of the population who reside in restrictive settings that have experienced abuse or neglect, poor and/or unsafe neighborhoods, homelessness, or have been in and out of the welfare system (Lampron & Gonsoulin, 2013). Many of these

students experience mental health issues or educational disabilities that make it difficult to succeed in school. They are disconnected from their community schools through alternate placement, which makes it increasingly difficult to succeed. When the educational system continues to rely on consequence-based methods such as alternative, non-general educational placements as the typical response to the undesired behavior, students learn that the goal is not to get caught, rather than understanding the reasons to not engage in the negative behavior (Hardman, 2012; Hoege et al., 2013; Lampron & Gonsoulin, 2013).

Tabone, Thompson, and Jordan (2016) found that gender was a factor in transitioning to less restrictive settings. The study reviewed 675 youth's admission and discharge records from Illinois Residential Treatment Outcome System during 2005-2007. Since a predictor of a more restrictive setting is based upon severe mental health or behavioral issues, it would stand to reason that if these conditions improve, the restrictiveness of the setting would be lessened. Tabone et al. (2016) found this to be true, however, they also found a "causal relationship between gender and psychosocial strength" (p. 364). It was found that when planning interventions for youth in residential treatment, it is important to take both strengths and gender into account. The decision-making process should be examined to determine what factors are being considered when transitioning youth in and out of treatment facilities. Gender appeared to be a "key factor when determining outcomes" (Tabone et al., 2016, p. 370). Aron and Loprest (2012) also found a disproportionate representation of boys in special education than girls. Kurth et al. (2014), concurred, stating that student gender had a significant impact on educational placement.

Across the country, more Black and Native Americans receive services for Emotional Behavioral Disorders (EBD) than any other group (Crofford, Rittner & Nochajski, 2013). Ryndak et al. (2014) noted that Black and Hispanic students were 2.5 and 1.8 times respectively more likely than their White peers to be in alternative school settings. The LRE principle infers that placement decisions are made based on objective data and sound judgment; however, the disproportionate segregation of students of color marginalized by both race and disability indicate otherwise. LRE and curriculum policies need to be corrected in order for students of color to be viewed as equal in our educational system (Ryndak et al., 2014). According to Lampron & Gonsoulin, (2013) and Hoge et al. (2014), students in alternative placements are disproportionately youth of color who have demonstrated inappropriate behaviors in their school settings. The schools have responded by placing these students in restrictive settings.

Rittner, Crofford and Chen (2016) noted that African-American males with EBD experienced "higher patterns of multiple placements in alternative or restrictive educational classroom settings" (p. 603) regardless of parental or caretaker moves. This study examined the impact of admission characteristics of 105 students admitted to a day school treatment program. They looked at who graduated, earned a general education diploma, or were transitioned back to a regular classroom setting as being successful, whereas those students who dropped out, moved to a more restrictive setting or left the program were deemed unsuccessful. The study found that 40% of students with EBD had attended five or more schools compared to 23% of students with all other types of disabilities (Rittner et al., 2016, p. 603). African Americans in this study were approximately 73% less likely than other race to succeed, and individuals who entered

the program in grades Kindergarten-6th grade or 10th-12th grade were over three times more likely to succeed than students who entered the program in 7th-9th grade (Rittner et al., 2016, p. 609). In summary, the younger and older students were more successful in transitioning to traditional, mainstream schools than the middle-school-aged students.

In a joint research study by Artiles, Kozleski, Trent, Osher, and Ortiz (2010), it was found that once students "who are from historically underserved populations are identified and placed within special education, they are more likely to be placed in segregated restrictive setting than their White peers, even with the same disability category" (p. 285). This population is often suspended and expelled due to their challenging behaviors (Cloth, Evans, Becker & Peternite, 2014). Administrative action towards this group sends the message to the student that they are not wanted and to the teachers that these students can be avoided within the educational system (Cloth et al. 2014).

The number of previous educational placements was found to impact success. A history of five or more placements was 73% less likely to succeed in the program, and previous residential placements were 74% less likely to succeed regardless of the number of previous placements. This was also found to be true with contact with the juvenile justice system. Individuals with juvenile justice contact were less likely to succeed in gaining skills to re-enter traditional classroom settings than those with no juvenile justice contact.

Crofford et al. (2013) found that "age and poverty, rather than race, appeared to be the strongest predictor of admission" (p. 317), and the racial distribution of the students matched the referring communities racial distribution. Artiles et al. (2010)

discussed disproportionality in regards to special education and the explanations that blame "racist individuals or biased systems" (p. 286). According to these authors, historical patterns of racial and socioeconomic segregation of the United States and how they affect and reinforce prejudice must be taken into account when discussing disproportionality within the educational system. They highlighted the debated topic of how policy surrounding special education was created to address the civil rights of a specific group (students with disabilities) and yet still create a climate of inequality for other marginalized groups (students from historically underserved groups) (Artiles et al., 2010, p. 281).

In a similar study by Crofford, Rittner, and Nochajski (2013), characteristics of 105 youth were examined to determine factors associated with admission to a day school treatment program. They found consistencies with national admission trends with more males (78%) than females enrolled. Contrary to national trends, more Caucasians (63.8%) than students of color (36.2%) were admitted. Poverty was common and most students were on psychotropic medications and had histories of outpatient and inpatient hospitalizations. Almost 25% were found to be involved in the juvenile justice system. The researchers' findings supported the gender and behavioral biases commonly found in other studies. The researchers found that race was less of a factor than poverty in those admitted when income and populations of the community were considered. A racial bias in referrals seemed to be less of a factor than poverty and acting out behaviors (Crofford et al., 2013, p. 317). The majority of the children placed in this day school treatment program (DSTP) were in middle or high school and almost two-thirds were admitted between the ages of 12 and 15 years of age. The majority of these students had previous

alternative placements prior to being admitted to this program, which was consistent with national findings (Crofford et al., 2013).

Crofford et al. (2013) argued that factors that these children faced prior to entering the DSTP were complex at both the individual and family level. These included poverty, individual and family problems, stresses associated with single parenting, gang exposure, neighborhood violence, multiple school placements, inconsistent or absence of educational services, and overall frustration.

Aggression was the most frequent reason students were initially referred to an alternate setting, however, it was not identified as the most common reason for maintaining a student in this setting (Rittner et al., 2016). Behavioral issues can be the result of the school's failure to provide adequate supplementary aids and services (Gruenhagen & Ross, 1995). Lampron and Gonsoulin (2013) suggested that students' perception of their safety reduces antisocial activity and aggressive behaviors. They further stated that schools should focus not only on whether or not staff and students are safe, but also on whether or not they feel safe and respected.

Hardman (2012) investigated the moral judgment of three children with EBD. In this study, it was found that students with EBD and those considered "at risk" would respond positively in their moral judgments if they were in a friendly, nurturing environment. However, conflict emerged if someone was not obligated to do the right thing, and if by disobeying one would escape punishment or would result in a personal reward. It was found that friendships play an important role in students' moral and social development since they provide a barrier against feelings of being rejected (Hardman, 2012). It should be noted that there are limitations to this study since it was limited to the

responses of only three students with EBD and the results may not be able to be generalized to all students with EBD. However, this study did show that the relationship between behavior and judgment is more complex than previously thought.

Institutional Variance. Specific educational policy needs to be followed to ensure IDEA and LRE are being met. There are disproportionate numbers of students with EBD in restrictive settings as compared to other disability areas. This disparity needs to be addressed through the restructuring of educational policy in regard to placements for this unique population of students. Marx et al. (2014) explored differing perspectives by educators in regards to LRE. One side of the argument believed that the LRE is always the general education setting, while the other believed that it was where the students' needs were best met (Hyatt & Filler, 2011; Marx et al., 2014). Numerous court cases have resulted from this differing view and have concluded in varied findings. Marx et al. found that a student can be determined to receive FAPE in the LRE in one district, but have a very different placement in another district.

IEP teams are making placement decisions without considering the general education setting with adaptations as a starting point, prior to contemplating a more restrictive placement (Hendrickson, Smith, Frank, & Merical, 1998). Rozalski, Stewart, and Miller (2010) suggested the IEP team use a checklist to aid IEP teams when determining placement for students. This checklist was based on case law and used the guiding principles from each case. It consists of questions that assist the team in following the requirements of IDEA and LRE. The checklist questions are listed in Table 1 and the full checklist in Appendix A.

Table 1

Least Restrictive Environment Checklist Questions

1. Can the student be educated in the general education setting? If not, why not?
2. Can the student receive an appropriate education in the general education setting with supplemental aids and services? If not, why not?
3. What supplemental aids and services would be necessary for the student to be served in the general education setting?
4. If the student is educated in the general education setting, how will the placement affect others' learning?
5. Are there any negative impacts of the child's being educated in the general education setting?
6. What are the social benefits of being educated in the general education setting?
7. What are the costs of general education placement? Are they well beyond what is feasible for a school district?
8. Is the student making adequate progress? Do the student's supplemental aids and services need to be adapted?
9. Could the services feasibly be provided in the general education setting?
10. What are the benefits of the special versus general education setting?
11. Will the student have an increased chance for success in a special program and support versus a general education setting?
12. Will mainstreaming provide the best education access for the student?
13. How will we integrate the student into the general education setting to the maximum extent possible?

14. Is this the “maximum extent,” or can we determine other ways to integrate the student?
15. What is the closest school at which appropriate services can be provided? Is this the closest school to the student’s home?
16. Does the school closest to the child’s home, or in which the child is zoned, have the supports and resources necessary for the individualized education plan?

In studies conducted by Villarreal (2015) and McLeskey et al. (2012), it was found that educational placements of students receiving EBD services directly impacted educational outcomes. Villarreal (2015) studied data for students aged 6-21 years across the United States in 2010. Both the national- and state-level data was obtained from the Data Accountability Center website. It included almost six million school-aged students who were identified as having one of the 13 disabilities defined by the IDEA. Of the sample, 6.7% (388,023) were identified as having EBD. In 2010, Villarreal (2015) found that 42% of all students with EBD had an educational placement of at least 80% of the day inside the regular classroom, 18.3% had a placement inside the regular classroom for 40-79% of the day, 21.3% had a placement in the regular class for less than 40% of the day, and 18.2% had a placement in a separate facility. These percentages varied among states, and corresponding variables differed across states. The study found a correlation between three variables created a significant and positive relationship with exiting school with a regular diploma. These variables included the percentage of students identified as having EBD, special education teacher to student ratio, and percentage of white students. (Villarreal, 2015).

Teacher mindset when interacting with students with disabilities has an impact on student success or failure. Negative attitudes and behaviors toward students with disabilities were considered to be one of the most contributing reasons for their failure of inclusion (Melekoglu,

2013). However, according to Melekoglu (2013), if teacher candidates were exposed to this population during the training process, it could help to change this negative attitude and increase awareness.

Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports

Alternative educational settings provide students with significant supports they need to be successful (Lampron & Gonsoulin, 2013). Lampron and Gonsoulin furthered stated that since the mid-1990s the trend is to turn away from the punitive behavior management approach toward a positive, supports-based approach. The positive approach gaining implementation momentum is Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS). Simonsen and Sugai (2013) noted that many public schools are adopting PBIS and are noticing improved student, staff, and school outcomes. The authors stated that alternative schools that adopt PBIS better meet the needs of students who display high-risk behaviors. However, they did state that research on this behavior support program is limited in alternative settings. In a study by Lampron and Gonsoulin (2013), the authors found that it was essential for restrictive settings to "prioritize the implementation of effective, evidence-based practices designed to reduce recidivism through positive practices one being PBIS" (p. 162). According to Simonsen and Sugai (2013) and Lampron and Gonsoulin (2013), with the implementation of a PBIS program, students and staff can learn how to display positive, preventative evidence-based practices that result in a desired behavioral outcome.

PBIS is organized into a three-tiered framework, with increased intensity of support at each tier. The targeted group follows the first tier or universal tier, where the focus is on all students, and the final tier addresses the intensive individualized group of students. All of the tiers are based on prevention theory and science (Lampron & Gonsoulin, 2013; Simonsen & Sugai, 2013). The figure below shows the three-tiered pyramid with the percentages and types of

students that are typically found in each tier. It also displays the academic and behavioral systems that are found in each tier.

Steps need to be taken in order to address student behavior in an equitable and socially responsive manner. One group of researchers suggestion was to replace subjective decision making with a more systematic data-gathering approach (Smith, Katsiyannis, Losinski, & Ryan, 2015). In the K-12 setting, this approach is commonly termed Response to Intervention (RTI) when referring to literacy and mathematics, and as PBIS when referring to behavior. PBIS is a research-based process for addressing problem behaviors through progressively more intensive evidence-based interventions that should be used to help students achieve social, academic, and emotional success both in and out of the classroom.

Figure 1. PBIS and RTI Pyramid.

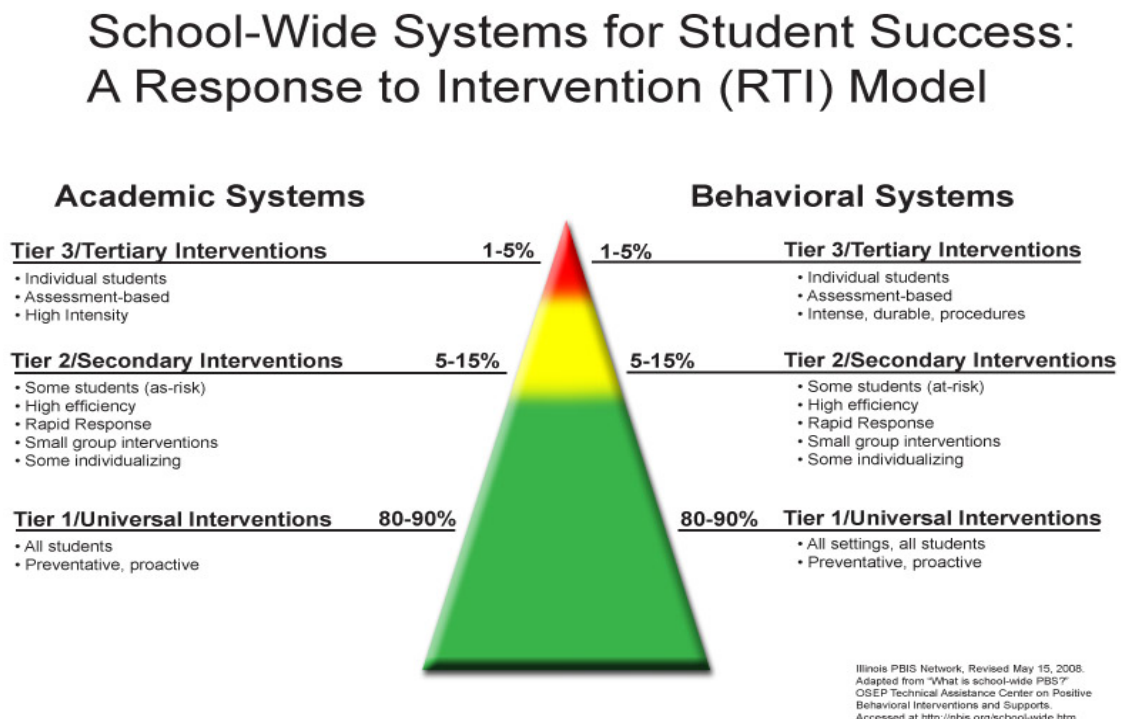


Figure1. Response to Intervention (RTI) Model showing the three tiers of academic and behavioral system interventions.

According to Simonsen and Sugai (2013), the PBIS framework in an alternative setting may need to be intensified, or even adjusted, based upon the behavioral needs and support of the students for which it is being used. A common misconception is students who are educated in an alternate setting require tier three supports. Instead, all tiers should be used and the elements of each tier should be adapted and intensified based on the needs of the students (Simonsen & Sugai, 2013). Interventions to reduce a targeted behavior should first be implemented using tier one supports and if a student's behavior is unresponsive, move to tier two. Only after no response at tier two, does a student require tier three support. Tier one supports include implementing school-wide positive and proactive interventions, which might include school level and classroom social skills instruction and student recognition systems. Tier two supports may include individualized goals, additional adult mentoring and support to improve social skills. Tier three practices should be based on a full functional behavioral assessment along with direct observations. Tier three services include a behavior support plan and may require additional staff support (Simonsen & Sugai, 2013).

Simonsen and Sugai (2013) found positive outcomes for students where PBIS elements were adapted for alternative educational implementation. Benefits included "increases in appropriate behaviors, decreases in problem behaviors, and decreases in the use of crisis-emergency responses, including restraints" (p. 7). Lampron and Gonsoulin (2013) argued that implementing PBIS within the alternate setting will provide a framework that allows for behavioral interventions and treatment so that the students and staff can use their time toward increasing educational gains and developing skills that allow the youth to be successful and return to their homes, communities, and schools. PBIS helps these students develop the skills that they need to successful contributing members of society as adults. The key to the students' success is

to have continual supports as they leave restrictive settings. Having the student move to a school that has PBIS in place will support their success (Lampron & Gonsoulin, 2013).

The use of the level system, which includes daily point sheets and school-wide goals for students, must be examined (Hoge et al., 2012). Daily point sheets are a method for educators to track behavior goals for individual students. This data is then compiled and used to monitor and track progress for specific target areas. Measurement tools that educators use need to be based on evidence and used by practitioners who are trained in their specific use. However, the continued placement of students in the alternative schools included a "failure to meet program-wide goals based on a level system" (Hoge et al., 2013, p. 222).

Summary

Johnson (2007) stated that the alternative school exists to educate, mentor, and provide behavior modification programs for students who have been previously unsuccessful in the traditional school setting. According to Landrum et al. (2003), resources need to be expanded to serve students with tools that are proven effective, intervene at the earliest age possible, and ensure that implemented procedures are done so with the utmost integrity and sustained over a prolonged period of time. If these ideas are implemented and followed, a lower number of students will need to be moved to more restrictive settings which could potentially improve the outcomes for students with EBD (Landrum et al., 2003).

Special education has provided children with disabilities greater access to public education, created a substructure for educating them, helped with earlier identification and promoted inclusion of this population alongside their nondisabled peers (Aron & Loprest, 2012). Despite these advances, students with disabilities are often held to lower standards, are less likely to take full academic curriculum in high school, and are more likely to drop out of school (Aron

& Loprest, 2012). Students with disabilities will be best served when their environments are effectively adapted to their needs. The failure to understand and correctly implement Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) can result in illegal infringements upon the civil liberties of students with disabilities by placing them in more restrictive settings than necessary to meet their needs (Hyatt & Filler, 2011).

Chapter III: Procedures and Research Design

This research study explored the rationale that impacted educational placement decisions for students receiving services for Emotional Behavior Disorder (EBD), the narrative contributing to students transitioning to a less restrictive setting, and the narrative inhibiting students from returning to a less restrictive educational placement. This chapter is divided into 10 sections: Research Method and Design, Research Questions, Setting, Sample, Instrumentation and Measures, Data Collection, Data Analysis, Researcher Positionality, Limitations and Delimitations, and Ethical Considerations.

Research Method and Design

The research design of this case study was grounded in a constructivist view of research. Constructivism accepts reality as a part of the human mind, and therefore reality is perceived as subjective and its philosophical background relates to the Socratic method (Creswell, 2014). This study aimed to seek understanding within the world of special education and alternative learning environments.

Creswell (2014) stated that case studies are used to develop an in-depth analysis. The case study is appropriate for this research since it intends to convey rich, descriptive information about decisions regarding students receiving special education services and alternative educational settings. The case study of an intermediate district was used to explore the factors that impact students with EBD transitioning to and from restrictive settings. An Intermediate District is one that is formed as a cooperative effort of member school districts and provides integrated services for the students in the areas of vocational education, special education, as well as other authorized services. Data collection

included interviews with seven school district representatives that made student placement decisions. The researcher explored possible solutions toward increasing the rate of EBD students successfully transitioning to less restrictive settings, specifically the general education setting.

Research Questions

The objective of this research was to identify the decision-makers narratives around the factors that contribute to student placement in a restrictive educational setting, prevent students from transitioning to a lesser restrictive setting, and increase students' rate of successful transition to a less restrictive setting. The factors explored were placed in two categories: individual or institutional/district. During the course of this study, the following research questions guided the investigation:

- What is the narrative regarding the rationale for the initial placement of students with Emotional Behavioral Disorder in restrictive educational settings?
- What is the narrative that supports students with Emotional Behavior Disorders in transitioning to a less restrictive setting?
- What is the narrative regarding the factors that inhibit students with Emotional Behavioral Disorder from transitioning to a less restrictive educational setting?

Sample

The sample for the study consisted of school district representatives from each of the nine member districts that the Intermediate district supports. The role of each of the representatives was to determine if a student in special education required more support than their own individual district's schools could provide and if an alternate setting was appropriate.

The criteria for the respondents was that they currently worked for member districts of the Intermediate District, served as an administrative representative, and contributed to the decision making process to determine educational placement for students with EBD. Nine original invitations were sent, with three declining participation. Three new invitations were sent to different district representatives in the second round. After two rounds of invitations, seven participants agreed to be interviewed, and two districts were not represented in the sample. All interviews occurred between June and October of 2017. Of the seven participants, five were female and two were male. Respondents had been in their positions between one and 18 years and had between 13 and 40 years experience in education. The positions were varied and included the following: Director of Special Education, Assistant Director of Special Education, and Special Education Coordinator.

Due to the small sample and the need to protect the identity of the respondents, limited demographic information was collected, but the researcher maintained detailed notes about interview dates, times, and locations. A summary of demographic information and interview information is included in Table 3, sorted according to the interview date.

Setting

The interviews of the district representatives occurred outside of school hours and were conducted face-to-face as well as via telephone conference. The researcher traveled to convenient locations for each of the respondents, per their individual request. This was done in order to prevent subjectivity from either the interviewee or interviewer since the researcher is an educator as well as a doctoral student.

Instrumentation and Measures

The study used a semi-structured interview approach. Open-ended questions were rooted in literature review and flexibility with question order and follow-up prompts were allowed in order to increase the flow of the interview process and elicit rich, detailed responses (Merriam, 2009). Interviews followed an introductory protocol, taken directly from Creswell (2014), which included: introductions, verifying informed consent, reviewing the research goals, reminding participant of the reason for their selection, estimating the length of time, assuring confidentiality, and requesting permission to record.

Field Tests

Interview questions were field tested with a Director of Special Education and a former District Special Education Coordinator. The questions were sent to the individuals via email, and they responded with feedback in regard to wording, question order, and additional potential questions. Feedback was used to revise the interview questions. The revised draft of questions was field tested in a mock interview with a district representative that was not included in the study. The purpose was to discern if the questions garnered enough information and resulted in an anticipated 60-minute length of the interview. Interview questions for each research objective are listed in Table 2 and included in Appendix B.

Table 2

Interview Questions

Demographic/Background Information	Tell me about your professional background including the number of years in education and in your current position.	
	Initial Restrictive Placement	Transition to a Less Restrictive Placement
Institutional	Please explain your role in placement of students in various educational settings?	What are the school or district factors that allow students to return to a less restrictive setting?
	Describe the protocol or guidelines that are currently used when placing students in various educational settings?	Will you explain some district requirements that move students between various educational settings?
		Will you explain some of the institutional factors that exist in order to transition students to a less restrictive setting?
		What and/or who influences the decision to support students to transition to a less restrictive setting?
Individual	What are some of the qualities of the student that influence the decision to transition him/her to a more restrictive educational setting?	What are some of the individual qualities in students that help to transition them to less restrictive settings?
	What are some of the educational and behavioral qualities or factors that help transition students to a less restrictive educational placement?	
Closing		Is there anything you would like to share regarding student placement that we have not covered? If you could do anything to

make the process more effective in transitioning students to a less restrictive setting, what would it be?

Data Collection

Once permission to conduct the study was received from dissertation committee members and Bethel University Institutional Review Board (IRB), potential interview participants were contacted by phone using the number listed on their individual school district websites. Respondents were informed of the purpose of the study and their position to provide valuable information that could be helpful to students and staff in restrictive academic settings (Appendix D: Phone call protocol). The informed consent letter (Appendix C) was e-mailed to all participants and collected prior to the interview. Once the consent letter was received, a mutually agreeable time and location to conduct the face-to-face interview were scheduled. The participants were reminded that the interview process would be approximately 60 minutes in length. Prior to the interview, the questions were emailed to the participants to allow time for reflection. At the time of the interview the participant was again assured confidentiality with the deletion of any personally identifiable information and reminded of the use of a transcription service and that data would be stored in a secure location.

An organizational system was created to keep track of notes, documents, and memos that were created during the collection process. The researcher removed any personally identifiable information, including any identifiable places or people's names from the data, to ensure confidentiality. An overview of the data collection is included in Table 3.

Table 3

Data Collection Overview

Respondent	Gender	Interview	Interview	Location
Pseudonym		Date	Duration	
Candice	F	6-12-17	43 minutes	SPED Office
Marty	M	6-14-17	45 minutes	SPED Office
Mary	F	6-14-17	56 minutes	SPED Office
Corrine	F	6-21-17	53 minutes	Phone
Robert	M	7-20-17	54 minutes	SPED Office
Holly	F	8-16-17	27 minutes	Phone
Sally	F	10-24-17	80 minutes	SPED Office

Data Analysis

An interview protocol was developed which included recording, note-taking, and the transcription of the interviews (Creswell, 2014). The interview recordings and transcription ensured the data obtained was accurately documented and not impacted by potential researcher bias that may exist. Once all the interviews were transcribed through a confidential online transcription service, the researcher read through the transcripts and compared them with the recordings in order to confirm accuracy.

The researcher removed any personally identifiable information, including place and people names. In addition, in order to fully protect the privacy of the respondents, the researcher altered any specific information about the school district they worked in. After all transcripts had been reviewed for accuracy and protected against the provision

of personally identifiable information, all respondents received a copy of the transcript and recording to check for accuracy. Three of the respondents responded with minor clarifications, which were made.

Following verification of transcription accuracy, the researcher read through the transcripts two times in order to gain familiarity with the data and note potential patterns between the data and the research questions. Responses were tracked and grouped together based on the three research questions. From the interview transcriptions, keywords and themes emerged and the process of color-coding themes began.

The steps used for the final data analysis, largely based on Merriam (2009), were as follows:

- 1) Open coding: After reading and re-reading the data for each participant, notations were made next to data that was interesting, important, or relevant.
- 2) Analytical coding: Open codes that were similar were grouped together in order to construct categories. Notes and comments from each of the participants were then compared to determine the major categories.
- 3) Sorting evidence: Data was sorted into the major categories, in alignment with the research questions.
- 4) Repeated analytic coding and sorting evidence: This process was repeated several times to determine emerging themes.

A reflective coding discourse meeting was held with an experienced qualitative researcher. Themes, codes, and interviews were reviewed and discussed. The discourse clarified similarities and differences between codes and resulted in combining codes that

did not stand as distinctly unique. Prior to the reflective coding discourse, 11 themes and 23 codes were documented. Based on discourse, revisions resulted in eight.

Researcher Positionality

Awareness of researcher positionality is an important part of the qualitative research process (Creswell, 2014). As a special education teacher who worked in an alternative educational setting, the researcher had a vested interest in understanding the factors that influence placing students with EBD in alternative settings. The researcher had experienced the challenges that students and educators face with these settings and was required to refrain from judging intentions or actions of district personnel. The awareness of preconceived notions due to a personal experience of the researcher was addressed. It was necessary to acknowledge this and to bracket (Appendix E) in order to confront and avoid bias (Merriam, 2009).

Limitations and Delimitations

The purpose of this study was not to present widely generalized findings. Instead, the researcher intended to share the experiences of school district representatives so as to add their voices to the collective conversation about educational placement.

One area of limitation was the sample, which was limited to district representatives who worked directly with students with special needs, and who had a relationship with an Intermediate school district in Minnesota. It was also limited to respondents who were willing to participate in the study, which could have resulted in a biased sample. It was possible that participants had a strong personal reason, sometimes referred to as an agenda. A larger research team could broaden the scope of this research to include other intermediate districts and special education cooperatives in Minnesota.

Some of the respondents could have experienced self-reporting bias, which is a limitation inherent in all research. This could have, for instance, have been concealed if the district representative had a positive or negative event when placing students with EBD in various educational placements. The researcher attempted to mitigate this limitation by ensuring confidentiality and explaining the care taken to avoid any inadvertent identifiers, and the respondents appeared to be comfortable sharing potentially negative information. The data is from a moment in time and may not be reflective of changing attitudes over time.

Ethical Considerations

The study followed the basic principles outlined in the Belmont Report (1978) of respect for persons, beneficence, and justice. In addition, the study protected the anonymity of all the participants involved. During both the data collection and interview process, information was disassociated from the contributing participant. There are potential risks to the participants as a result of partaking in the study, so therefore all data was collected with the assurance of confidentiality.

Ethical issues addressed in this study included researcher bias. The researcher used reflexivity to become more self-aware and monitor the researcher for bias. This researcher is passionate about the topic, so an awareness of preconceived notions or ideas must be kept in the forefront.

Trustworthiness of data. The goal of this research was to present findings from a specific moment in time and to help begin the discussion of exploring the factors that place students in various educational settings. As a qualitative study, the goal was to understand this phenomenon from the respondent's perspective, not the researcher

(Merriam, 2009). Validity strategies were also incorporated, including member checking. This was done in order to verify the findings and to confirm that the findings were reflective of the respondents' answers.

Respondent protection. A component of ethical research is to protect the respondent. Since this study was relatively small in nature, it was vitally important to ensure confidentiality and anonymity to the respondents. To guarantee this, the researcher assigned pseudonyms to each of the respondents and removed any identifying factors that could link them to their responses. After the interviews were transcribed and data retrieved, the originals were destroyed, to further protect the respondents. Throughout the analysis process, information sources were referenced through the pseudonym.

Awareness of researcher positionality. Qualitative research is commonly judged and is overly criticized for having researcher bias. Bias can exist in all research, and to account for this, self-reflection was used to create an open and honest narrative (Creswell, 2014). Reflectivity is a core characteristic of qualitative research and this study includes comments from the researcher, as well as interpretations of the findings. As a special education teacher who worked in an alternative setting, it was imperative to acknowledge the potential bias that may exist. Preconceived notions as to why students move from one educational placement to another needed to be addressed and included in the research.

A formal bracketed exercise that the researcher used was two-fold and was included in Appendix E. First, educational placement was made for the benefit of the individual student. It is imperative that the student with a disability be placed in a setting

that will best serve their individual academic and behavioral needs. Secondly, the placement was based upon a consistent set of factors and guidelines. Specific to the study, placement decision for students was not the role of the researcher, but rather an outside group of educational staff.

Chapter IV: Results

The purpose of this study was to investigate the individual and institutional factors that influenced the decision to move a student with EBD between restrictive educational placements. Participants included Directors of Special Education, Assistant Directors of Special Education, as well as a Special Education Coordinator in Minnesota. Respondents participated in semi-structured, face-to-face interviews at a location of their choice and engaged in several opportunities for feedback about the data collection and analytical process.

Introduction to Themes

The data was sorted by research questions, and after rigorous analysis, a total of eight themes emerged. To be identified as a theme, a construct must have occurred in at least five of the seven interviews. The first research question, which focused on the initial placement of students, held two themes. The second question, which addressed the transition process to a less restrictive setting, held two themes, and the third question exploring factors that inhibit students from transitioning to a less restrictive setting, included four themes. The factors are listed in Table 4.

Table 4

Themes: Factors that Influence Student Educational Placement and Transition

Individual	Institutional
Student Behavior and Disposition	Lack of School Resources
Negative Staff Mindset	Collaborative Culture and Shared Processes
Lack of Student Readiness Mindset	Receptiveness to Transition
Lack of Communication and Collaboration	Inconsistent Standards

Research Question 1: Rationales for Initial Placement

In addressing Research Question 1 regarding the rationale for the initial placement of students with EBD into restrictive settings the data analysis process produced two themes. These themes were student behavior and disposition and lack of school resources.

Theme 1: Student Behavior and Disposition. The theme of student behavior and disposition occurred in all seven interviews and included physical aggression, mental health needs, and the lack of a skill set. Hendrickson et al. (1998) stated, “Overt behaviors such as aggression and disruptiveness versus covert behaviors (e.g., social withdrawal, anxiety) are more likely to gain referral and ultimate placement in special education programs” (p. 294). Sally, one of the participants, stated that placing a student in a more restrictive setting might be safety based, “Especially when a kid is tearing up a building, we move them through the system a lot quicker.” Another participant, Robert, concurred, “Some significant behaviors that, basically, a least restrictive gen-ed is not

able to handle.” A general educational environment is not able to handle high magnitude behaviors, including physical aggression toward staff and other students or self-harm, according to both Robert and Corrine. Respondents postulated all students should have access to an education while remaining safe from harm. Marty, one of the participants, stated, “Intense, frequent physical behaviors are the major factor, but verbal aggression can also play a role if they continually disrupt the learning environment.” Sally stated, “Kids don’t go to a setting four because they have a learning disability. They go to a setting four because they have behaviors.”

All respondents agreed that multiple demographic antecedents contribute to student behaviors. Another participant, Candice stated, “Cultural differences, economics, and ethnicity play a role in identification.” Marty further quantified, “Kids who because of poverty or social-economic status are coming from an at-risk environment based off of factors that cause them to be at risk, which then will cause behaviors to happen. Poverty has an impact.” Sally specified:

I always ask the question of ethnicity to my supervisors when they’re talking about placement. Ethnicity of the student plays a role in decision making in regards to placement, and it comes out in different ways. I think we’re probably erring on the side of trying not to have (students of color) in a more restrictive environment, but if there’s a behavior, or they do something criminal, or something against our discipline policy, there’s nothing we can do.

This also affects the mental health of the student and the family unit. All participants shared that if the family unit were stressed due to financial instability, divorce or exodus

of a parental role model, or homelessness, mental health would begin to decline. This dis-regulated the student and resulted in overt aggression kind of behaviors.

A lack of skill set in the individual student impacts educational placement. According to Sally, a student “doesn’t have the skills of learning how to flow,” or adapt to everyday changes, and there is no time in the general education classroom to teach these skills. The student begins to display negative behaviors manifested in attendance issues, acting out in physical or verbal means, or receiving failing grades. The expectations of the staff such as staying in your seat, paying attention to the lesson, being quiet, and raising your hand to ask a question, do not match the skill set of the student. This results in a conflict. The student needs to have the “inherent desire to actually want to succeed, a growth mindset, rather than one that is fixed,” according to Candice. She further stated that the student also needs “the ability to deal with mistakes and failures, and know that that was not the end and that everything can be a learning experience, even mistakes.”

Theme 2: Lack of School Resources. The school and district’s limited resources impact student placement decisions. All respondents shared that they rely on the setting four programs to handle intense behaviors because the general educational environment does not have the capabilities to do so. The majority of traditional schools are not equipped with facilities, staff, or programs to address students who have highly volatile and aggressive behaviors. In a study by Kurth et al. (2014), the researchers found that “it is plausible that the availability of services (or lack thereof) may play a contributing role (placement decisions).” According to Corrine, “You can’t hold other people accountable for the least restrictive if you don’t have the programs in place to do it.” Candice stated

that there is a lack of control over “what we can physically change in the environment, and if it still isn’t better for that student, we need to look at what other environments (more restrictive) might be able to offer a better alternative.” Schools have physical limitations to what can be altered to program for students with high needs, and sometimes it is not financially prudent for these changes to be made at the home school. It is cost prohibitive to service the student within the school since it would require additional staffing and building changes in order to educate an extremely small number of students. It is then that alternative programming is considered to better service the student.

The Director of Special Education for the individual school district is critical in understanding the continuum of service delivery and making sure that resources are available. Without Director input, by default, students may be placed in the more restrictive programming. Respondents reported that the school would exhaust available service delivery options before referring a student for placement. Participants did state that they typically will implement two, six-week interventions aimed to prevent students from transitioning to a more restrictive placement. If interventions are not effective, administrators will move the student. If the student behaviors are significant, they may bypass this process entirely. Sally stated, “ I don’t think it’s a willful choice by the student. They are communicating ineffectively.”

She further said, very rarely do you have setting two, a high LD student, who has no behaviors. They can be managed, but as soon as you’ve got kids with Autism, or ADD, or ODD, now you’re starting to get some behaviors and they’ve just learned that maladaptive behavior, and they take it to the point of needing

constant adult intervention. Then you're looking at not just taking care of him, but the kids around him or her.

The level of staffing for constant adult intervention is not available in the general education environment.

It was noted that student placement was sometimes influenced by under-trained and over-worked staff members struggling with servicing the student. This happened in part to prolonged behaviors and lack of school supports, as well as a break down in communication between home and school. According to Candice, "I think some of our students who maybe weren't programmed as well as they could have and was completely due to staff not making good decisions in the heat of moment kind of thing." Schools lack options for servicing this group of students, which can force a more restrictive placement.

Research Question 2: Rationales for Transition to a Less Restrictive Setting

To answer Research Question 2 regarding the narrative that supports students with EBD in transitioning to a less restrictive setting, data analysis produced two themes: collaborative culture and shared processes and receptive environment for transition.

Theme 1: Collaborative Culture and Shared Processes. A successful educational environment is one where the entire IEP team comprised of special education teachers, district representative, student, and family "work together as a cohesive unit and have a common goal," according to Holly. "Communication is key within this group," stated Candice. All respondents agreed that without open and honest communication, a successful transition would not occur. One respondent stated, "Adults fail the students where there isn't communication between families and IEP teams." It is the students'

role to communicate how they are feeling and be able to identify their own needs and possible strategies to cope with challenging situations. Mary explained:

The mindset or that discussion around when students are here, they're here for a very specific reason. We would be able to as an intermediate district look at the reason that they're there and the need for intentional interventions and then how to work hand in hand with the serving district to transition them back to their home district.

Interviewees referenced shared guidelines or a shared checklist that could be used during the process of transitioning educational placements. Even though all respondents stated a "very loose" checklist should guide the team, only three districts had the practice in place. It was noted by Candice that districts did not want a "checklist that only works for seven out of 10 students. Either it worked for everyone or it doesn't work at all." Respondents shared that the checklist should be able to track students' desire to transition, familial support, academic and behavior goals, and overall progress. In a study by Hoge et al. (2014), the researchers also found the "no clear rationale exists as to how these students should move from setting to setting" (p. 225). This guide could monitor growth in the student's ability to manage and limit, if not eliminate, maladaptive behaviors that had influenced their educational placement.

All of the respondents confirmed that the student had to meet a "behavior contract" prior to transitioning to a less restrictive setting, yet the length of the contract varied by district between six and 12 weeks. It was reported that the behavior contract tracked daily behaviors of physical and verbal interactions, attendance, work completion, and grades.

Respondents highlighted that site visits should be completed and monitored. Site visits helped to develop an open collaborative culture and increased the likelihood of success. Staff, student, and family should be given the opportunity to visit the proposed school, according to Candice. Four respondents stated that the setting four teachers needed to observe at the mainstream school and vice versa, so that the same supports can be implemented in both settings in order to allow for a smoother and more successful transition.

Participants shared that once a student started to transition back to the home school, the transition plan was flexible. If the transition was going well, additional time was added. The reverse was also true. The speed of the transition was slowed down, if necessary. Transition plans were to be based on the individual students; it was not a “one size fit all” schedule. In a study by Krezmien et al. (2008), it was summarized that planning and delivering behavioral and mental health treatment should be a coordinated activity that involves special educators, general educators, and clinicians, as well as other service providers to ensure that the students receive comprehensive, mental health and education services that are tailored to their individual needs. Mary said, “We brought the student back and catered to his needs. Some needed a lot of services around them, and others required less.” She further commented that it was necessary to coordinate wrap around services as well in order for the student to be successful. Sally added, “Connection time was necessary, where the student can bond and build some relationships.”

Theme 2: Receptive Environment for Transition. All of the respondents concurred that choosing the classroom was key to the success of the student transitioning

to a less restrictive setting. Appropriate classroom placement was determined by identifying what strategies were successful in the nontraditional setting and finding staff members who implement those same strategies in the mainstream classroom/school. These teachers exemplify best practice in special education using positive behavioral intervention supports (PBIS), rather than punishment, to enable the inclusion and reintegration of students with EBD into general education classroom (Hardman, 2012). This approach helps to facilitate learning, practice social conventions, and transform a classroom into an inclusive learning community. Educators that integrate PBIS into the classrooms, helps to facilitate learning and practice social conventions and might also transform a classroom into an inclusive learning community. Successful transition also required that the receiving staff be open minded about strategies and the student themselves. According to Sally the receiving staff “had to give them (student) some room and a ton of support simultaneously. How you do that is an art, and there are some teachers who can do it.” Four of the respondents mentioned that creativity with resource management was needed to allow the receiving school to create a space where the student could be successful. Sally stated, “Staff need to realize that these kids have the right to be back, they are not going to be perfect. They don’t go to a setting four and come back perfect.”

The receiving school needs to be creative if there is a negative history between the staff and student. Robert stated that if we “put the student back with the same teacher, we may be setting them up for failure.” The staff needs to “have a sense of humor and not take anything too personally,” according to Sally. Candice said, “Staffing plays a big role in some of the factors that impact the student success.” Robert stated, “If we can and

if there's a need for it, we match staff to a student when a student is coming back from a restrictive setting.”

Prepping receiving staff and students was imperative to creating a supportive environment for transition. Robert said that preparing staff who “may have a fear of one particular kid coming back” is part of his role. “Transitions for any one of our regular ed or special ed kids are tough.” The receiving staff and students need to acknowledge previous mistakes and failures and believe the incidents can be a learning experience and can be resolved. All involved need to understand that being in the general education environment will help students achieve better long-term outcomes. According to Sally, it is critical to “create a connection time, where the students can bond and build relationships with other students and the staff.”

Respondents asserted that the student needed to have confidence in order to successfully transition. Student efficacy involved the belief that they were ready to return to their home school and that there was a purpose for them to return to a traditional building. Mary said, “It’s almost teaching for advocacy and the advocacy of student special needs.” Candice added, “The student acknowledging and advocating for themselves to say, I’m in the right place and I’m doing well here.” Without student investment and determination, the likelihood of a successful transition is dismal.

Research Question 3: Rationales that Inhibit Transition

Research Question 3 focused on the factors that inhibit students with EBD from transitioning to a less restrictive educational setting. The data analysis produced four themes: negative staff mindset, lack of student readiness mindset, inconsistent standards, and lack of communication and collaboration. Kurth et al. (2014) found that many

reasons, including “local capacity and resources, pressures from parent and professional groups, and state-level funding structures all contribute to variability in placement patterns” (p. 235).

Theme 1: Negative Staff Mindset. Negative attitudes and the behaviors of teachers towards students with disabilities were considered to be reasons for student failure in inclusionary classrooms (Melekoglu, 2013). The mindset of the receiving staff had a direct impact on the transition of the student. Participants reported a negative bias regarding the student behaviors and setting four programming. The receiving staff was skilled at identifying transition barriers instead of identifying ways to make the transition successful for the student. Mary stated, “Staff are quick to make judgments about students.” Corrine said, “The adults that point out so quickly what the students are not doing.” Holly said that she had a goal “to change the mindset of the staff.” Too often staff looked at placement to a restrictive setting as “permanent” versus “the students are coming here temporarily.” Robert stated, “There is a perception of what a setting four is and what in reality is not always the same.” Mindsets toward students who are in restrictive settings were difficult to change. Change from prohibitive mindsets was required in order for students to thrive and progress in the general educational environment. Mary agreed:

I think we’re pretty quick to make some judgments about students coming from restrictive programs. How is it that we continue to work with our staff so that isn’t the correct answer? That’s a barrier for me on the other side of it, because I can’t always argue that one away, the safety factor. Now I have to figure out how

do I ensure safety and change their mindset? It's an ongoing issue that we just deal with.

There were times a student transitioned back to the same case manager who was in the decision making process when the student was sent to the restrictive setting. This caused animosity among staff, parents, and the student. The message to the general education staff, according to Sally, should be, "We are going to need to make it work. You are the adult. This child has a right to an education." Adopting this message was often the issue when physical aggression towards the staff had occurred. A fear may exist toward that student, which although valid, needs to be addressed as well. Staff members feared the student, which although valid, needed to be addressed. Staff members were not educated on how to address the unresolved feelings which diminished the student's chance to successfully transition.

Several of the respondents mentioned that students of color were sometimes treated differently. Sally stated, "There are times when we intentionally move slower because we have a child of color moving through the system. We try to be more present." Respondents explicitly stated that they were not racist, addressing the inequity and inequality in transitioning as an area for growth. Participants acknowledged biases. Marty responded to the bias by stating, "I hate to say it but I think (race) plays a role. It plays a role in identification." Holly said, "I would definitely say race for sure plays a role. I think race, ethnic, and then also socioeconomic status too." Robert stated, "There is a perception of what a setting four is and what in reality is not always the same." Mindsets toward students who are in restrictive settings were difficult to change. Change

from prohibitive mindsets was required in order for students to thrive and progress in the general educational environment.

Theme 2: Lack of Student Readiness Mindset. The mindset of the student during the transition process was an important component of the progression. All of the respondents agreed that if the student voiced, “I’m not ready,” then they should not begin the process. The student was not successful at their home-based school until they stated, “I’m ready to be successful.” Holly said, “Students need drive. They need to know that others believe in them. That they have that support to transition, to be successful. The student has to play their part in being open and want that change (in placement) too.” Too often staff and parents were pushing the students to transition back to their home schools before they were ready. All participants contended that the student knew what to do to get back to a restrictive setting, but they did not always know what to do to get to a less restrictive setting.

A student needed to be motivated to transition. According to Candice, “I think it’s the ability to communicate how they’re feeling, the ability to identify their own need for a strategy. They need an inherent desire to actually want to succeed, kind of a growth mindset, not a fixed mindset.” It is common for the student to have a distrust of teachers, partly due to their past negative experience. In a study by Hardman (2012), the author concluded that when the moral context is punitive and unfriendly, children may perceive the classroom as harsh and uncaring, a place where they have been previously defined as outcasts and must fend for themselves as a result. The speed of the transition process was also critical. During every step of the process, the student needed to be comfortable.

Theme 3: Inconsistent Standards. All respondents reported working in isolation. Ideas were not shared between districts. A consistent written protocol or guideline did not exist for educators to access when transitioning students from restrictive placements. Every district had its own protocol, and most were not documented.

It was noted that “behavior contracts,” which identify what a student is expected to display before a student can begin the transition process, ranged in length from six to 12 weeks. Robert added that in addition to monitoring behavior, attendance, and work completion, administrators also looked at behavior history. He said that transition decisions were impacted by the “history of behavior and whether it’s personal towards the administrators or to the teachers.” While this was important data, it was not always an adequate indicator of student success in their home school. According to Holly, “A better practice would include reviewing narrative social emotional data.”

District practices did not allow for triangulation, which would provide a more accurate indicator of a student’s readiness. According to Marty, there was a lack of documentation of the interventions’ impact. The lack of data tracking restricted educators’ ability to make informed decisions about what interventions to be implemented going forward. Ideas were not shared between districts. There was no documentation or protocol that could be used across districts. Ryndak et al. (2014) found that the “concepts of involvement and progress in the general curriculum often are not well understood and few districts have developed clear policies or procedures for effective implementation.” This has led to different standards and protocols that are dependent on the educational setting.

Theme 4: Lack of Communication and Collaboration. All respondents stated that there was a lack of communication between school personnel and families, which resulted in misunderstandings. Mary said, “The communication between school and the family is really key. When we don’t have it, we’re always guessing. It really heightens their (student and staff) anxiety because we don’t know what’s happening.” Often the communication breakdown occurred between school officials. The Special Education Coordinator, who most often had direct contact with the students, did not communicate the requirements that would be placed on the serving districts and the students. “The Director is real critical in making sure that the resources, and understanding the big picture of service delivery,” Sally said.

Collaboration between the settings needed to occur in order to assimilate and prepare students for a traditional setting. Hendrickson et al. (1998) stated that collaboration among decision makers was “lacking” when it concerned educational placements. An area of concern for five of the respondents was that the teacher in the restrictive setting did not complete a site visit in the traditional setting. Setting four teachers did not realize the number of transitions and people that the student would come into contact with in the traditional setting. Marty said to “make sure that you have people from the building they are going to at the table. It’s a lot easier for that transition because they’re part of the process.” It was noted by all respondents that setting four teachers make their work look incredibly easy and need to communicate more with the traditional schools in order to educate staff on how to work with challenging students. Until the collaborative relationships and lines of communication are strengthened, students with behaviors will fail to achieve success transitioning to less restrictive environments.

Conceptual Map

The figure shows a conceptual picture of the decision-makers views of factors that influenced transition of students with EBD between educational settings. Two themes that directly impacted the initial placement of students to a more restrictive environment included student behavior and disposition and the lack of school resources. Themes that supported students in transitioning to a less restrictive setting included a collaborative culture and shared processes and receptive general education. The four factors that inhibited students from transitioning are represented by a symbolic stop sign.

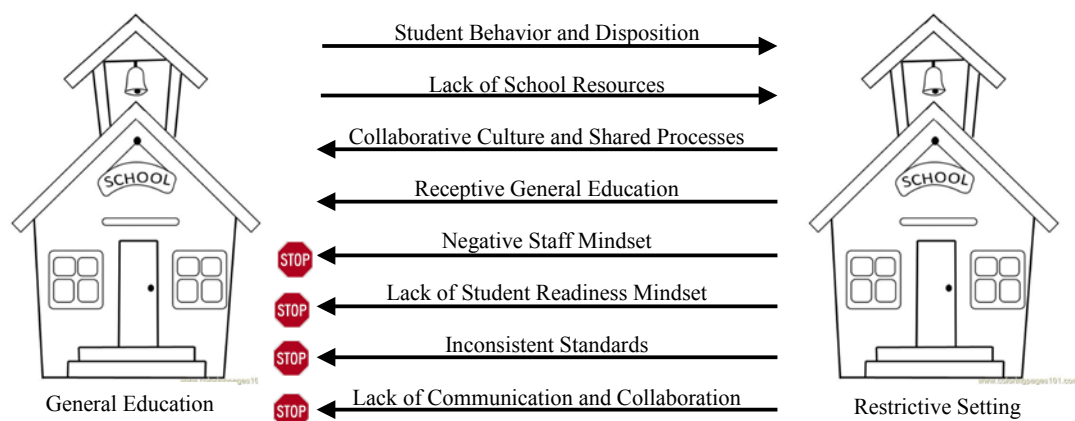


Figure 2. Concept map: The factors that allow students to transition between educational placements.

This conceptual map agrees with Ryndak et al. (2014) who stated that many factors impact placement decisions. Hoge et al. (2014) stipulated that placement decision should be based on consideration of the student's educational needs as well as the impact of his or her behavior on the learning environment of peers. However, the researchers concluded that a "student's return to a less restrictive setting was not necessarily contingent upon factors that were used to place a student into the program and often included factors unrelated to student academic or behavioral performance" (p. 225).

Chapter V: Discussion

Overview of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the factors that contributed to students transitioning between traditional schools and restrictive educational settings. The case study included semi-structured interviews. Participants were school district representatives in one Minnesota county who served on IEP teams to determine appropriate educational placements for students with disabilities.

Seven representatives participated in this study. Five respondents were interviewed face-to-face at a location of their choice, and two were interviewed via a telephone conference. All interviews were transcribed, coded, and analyzed for common themes. After multiple iterations of coding and feedback from all respondents and an independent analyst, eight themes emerged.

Research Questions

This study sought to answer the question, "What are the factors that contribute to students transitioning from and entering restrictive educational settings?" The factors explored were placed into two categories: individual and institutional/district. During the course of this study, the following research questions guided the investigation:

1. What is the narrative regarding the rationale for the initial placement of students with Emotional Behavioral Disorder in restrictive settings?
2. What is the narrative that supports students with Emotional Behavioral Disorder in transitioning to a less restrictive setting?
3. What is the narrative regarding the factors that inhibit students with Emotional Behavioral Disorder from transitioning to a less restrictive educational setting?

Summary of Findings

Multiple themes emerged from interviewee responses specific to each research question. The themes relevant to question one which addressed the factors that contributed to students transitioning to restrictive settings included student behavior and disposition, as well as lack of school resources. The two themes that arose from question two, which addressed the factors that allowed students to transition to a less restrictive setting, included a collaborative culture, shared processes and receptive general education. Themes from question three, which addressed the factors that inhibit students transitioning to a less restrictive environment, included lack of student readiness mindset, negative staff mindset, inconsistent standards, and lack of communication and collaboration.

Conclusions

The decision to place a student in a restrictive setting is complex (Hoge et al., 2014). Placement determination requires extensive data collection and a unanimous decision by an IEP team. This decision can become contentious and animosity can develop among the students, family, and the home district staff. The decision to remove a student from a typical school is not taken lightly due to lasting effects (Ryndak et al., 2014).

This study found that multiple individual and institutional factors impacted the decision to transition a student to a more restrictive setting as well as transition a student to a more traditional educational placement. Findings demonstrated the interwoven layer of factors that impact an IEP team decision (Hoge et al., 2014). Several themes occurred repeatedly through this study and deserve mention in order to better understand factors

impacting the decision-making process concerning student educational placement. Quite a few of these themes were familiar to this researcher, and confirmed some of the ideas in the bracketing exercise that was done.

Student: Behavior, Disposition, and Readiness

Student placement decisions were often based on student behaviors. This included physical and verbal aggression toward staff and peers, property destruction, and mental health needs. The general education environment was not able to handle high magnitude behaviors, and placement decisions were made due to safety concerns. Ruehl (1998), examined legislative and court decisions to support the right of a school to temporarily remove dangerous children. He discussed this removal was justified when "the student is substantially likely to cause injury and the school has made reasonable efforts to improve the problem behavior through the use of supplementary aids and services" (p. 187). Villarreal (2015) confirmed that students who exhibit more severe behavior problems, both internal and external, are more likely to be placed in more restrictive settings.

A student-readiness mindset was a critical component of the transition process. If the student verbalized that he was not ready and had not yet learned the necessary coping skills, then he should not begin the transition process. The importance of mindset was confirmed in a study by Hoge et al. (2014) where "student resistance to transition" was found to be a factor that maintained a student placement in an alternative school (p. 222).

Students learn best when they are in inclusive educational settings, surrounded by same-aged peers. Hughes et al. (2013) concurred, by stating that the exercise of self-determination skills (choice making, problem-solving, and self-advocating) is positively related to learning and the greatest gains occur when students practice these skills in the

inclusive setting. The lack of this skill set, which often manifests itself in inappropriate behaviors, puts students at a higher risk of being placed in restrictive settings. However, Villarreal (2015) found that for some students with extreme behavioral needs, the restrictive environment provides the necessary supports for them to be successful.

Collaboration: Communication and Shared Processes

The IEP team needed to work together in all phases of the decision-making process. At every meeting that occurred during the progression, all staff involved in the student's programming were to be present. Communication was key within this group, and without open and honest dialogue, a successful transition could not occur. Successful teams worked as a cohesive unit and had a common goal to transition students back to the general educational environment, if at all possible. These IEP teams had a growth mindset, rather than a fixed mindset. A student was placed in a restrictive educational setting for a specific reason. That being said, placement was to be viewed as restorative, and the initial reason did not prevent the student from returning to his home district. It was beneficial for site visits by staff from both educational settings to occur in order to assimilate continuity and prepare the student that was transitioning. The collaboration was imperative to the creation of a transition plan.

All study respondents reported that a protocol or checklist to guide the decision to transition a student should exist. Unfortunately, only three of the seven districts had a guide in place. The checklist or protocol would track a student's desire to transition, familial support, academic and behavior goals, and student growth in managing behaviors that had influenced his educational placement. The protocol would also document site visits that occurred between the educational settings.

The recommended protocol would outline the behavior contract that the student was expected to meet in order to begin the transition. This contract tracked daily behaviors such as verbal or physical interactions, attendance, work completion, and grades. Each contract could be altered slightly to fit the individual needs of the student. The shared protocol would be consistent across all school districts so that no bias could exist based on location. This is especially important in an Intermediate district that serves multiple school districts across a county.

Open communication between school personnel and families must exist in order for the student to be successful (Aron & Loprest, 2012). Study findings highlighted the importance of communication in all educational placements. Study participants shared that breakdown in communication came from the school officials not conveying the necessary requirements for the student to meet in order to begin a transition to their home district.

The other vital communication path needed for student success was the communication between school and family. Candice, one of the respondents stated, "Often our toughest students come with our toughest parents. Communication is key with these kids." According to Crane et al. (2013), communication between home and the school has implications for the student's development and will impact subsequent decisions for the child. If open communication does not exist, it is extremely difficult to program and move forward with new interventions. Behavioral interventions were most effective when they were consistently used at both home and school (Lampron & Gonsoulin, 2013).

Learning Environment: Receptive and Supportive

Staff mindset played an important role when students were attempting to transition to a less restrictive setting. Respondents reported a bias around the student behaviors and setting four programming. Staff members were observed as adept at pointing out the negatives but had a more difficult time noticing the positives. This mindset inhibited students' success and negatively impacted the likelihood of transitioning back to the typical school setting. As one participant reported, "The student has a right to an education, we are going to need to make it work." Staff were quick to deem a restrictive placement as terminal when it should be considered temporary. Another respondent, Sally stated, "Well he is rude. Well, then teach him how to be polite. If a kid can't read, you teach him how to read. If they can't do math, that's what they teach them, but if they misbehave, you punish. That's just how it makes you feel better." Sally further explained, "I look at behavior as you are not meeting my needs, and I (student) don't know what to do." Placing a student in a more restrictive setting was easier than understanding the cause of the behavior and programming accordingly.

It was found that students of color were sometimes treated differently. Sally shared that her district intentionally moved students of color between educational settings at a slower rate than white peers. Marty reported, "Race plays a role." Holly agreed, "I would definitely say race for sure plays a role. I think race, ethnicity, and then also socioeconomic status too." According to Rittner et al. (2015), it was noted that as "poverty increases, the rate of EBD classification among black males, increases faster than for other males or females of any race in part because of higher rates of poverty found among black families and the preponderance of externalizing behaviors in the

designation" (p. 603). Kurth et al. (2014) supported this phenomenon by sharing that, "Demographic features have a significant impact on placement, including student gender, racial or ethnic background, and socio-economic status" (p. 236). This positionality of the participants was a concept that this researcher thought may be relevant, but was surprised and thankful that the participants were so frank and open that this phenomenon exists.

The student transitioning to the general education environment was most successful when intentionally matched with supportive staff. According to four of the respondents, they do their best to match students and staff whose personalities complement each other. Sally contended that the staff members who were able to admit faults were creative, adapted for kids with special needs, and were the most successful with challenging students. Holly commented, "I think that the team and that's including teachers, para, administration, parents. If one of those is a weak link, it doesn't hurt anybody but the student." Everyone involved in the student's programming should have the same priority, which is the success of the student.

The same is true in regard to the time a student is enrolled in an alternative educational placement. With the right staff and programming, time in a restrictive setting can be designed to provide a true rehabilitative opportunity. Lampron and Gonsoulin (2013), stated:

In the right setting, youth may have their first opportunity in months or even years to attend school; earn course credits; receive attention to and monitoring of their physical, mental health, and education needs; and continuously come in contact

with positive role models who affirm the youth's ability to succeed and push them onto a new path (p. 163).

Recommendations for Practitioners

Provide professional development. School districts need to be aware of the factors that influence the decision to remove a student from the general educational environment and place them in a separate educational facility. Professional development should be provided to educators on a consistent basis to ensure understanding of the factors that influence decisions to transition students between educational placements. A stigma can be placed on students placed in level four settings, which can be hard to remove. These students no longer have access to the general education curriculum or to students without disabilities. According to Landrum et al. (2003), many "teachers are inadequately trained to intervene and effectively manage the more serious behavioral and instructional challenges that students with EBD are likely to present" (p. 153). Teacher training will have long-term benefits for individual students and the health of the district.

Students with disabilities were severely underserved until 1975, but now more than six million children and youth with disabilities are being provided services (Artiles et al., 2010). According to Ruehl (1998), educational reform needs to occur in order to have equal accountability for all students and educators, regardless of their individual labels. He further stated that educational programs need to be properly staffed with well-trained instructors to offer appropriate services in the least restrictive environment. It should also be noted that perhaps it is not just inconsistent standards (differing behavior contracts) but an equity issue.

Culturally competent assessment tools must be incorporated into teacher preparation programs and professional development opportunities so that all teachers understand and incorporate positive behavioral interventions for addressing disruptive student behavior (Hendrickson et al., 1998). These actions may eliminate some of the perceived equity issues, by creating consistent protocols that would be used to transition students between educational placements.

Develop a protocol/checklist. Inconsistencies in student placement decisions and practices between districts pose a problem for the serving intermediate district. Biases or a sense of favoritism may exist, which in turn will affect students and their sense of fairness. This could be eliminated or lessened if a standard protocol existed for districts to use when referring students to a more restrictive placement. As one respondent stated, "I trust that the paperwork and a protocol is being followed to move a student to a more restrictive setting. They are adults, but their paperwork is not as clean as it should be."

Better documentation would benefit the identification and referral process. As one respondent stated, "Cultural differences, economics, and ethnicity play a role in identification. Kids who because of poverty or social-economic status are coming from an at-risk environment, which then will cause behaviors to happen." Educators need to be mindful of all of the factors that affect behavior and be able to separate those factors from the decision. Using a comprehensive screening protocol at intake will help with accurate identification. This does not replace accurate records but will aid in finding appropriate services to identify at-risk youth (Krezmien, Mulcahy & Leone, 2008).

Develop a behavior plan. The development of a behavior plan that is consistently implemented in intermediate district's member districts would benefit students. The timeline for meeting behavior goals and the standard transition timeline must be the same for every behavior plan contract in order to maintain equity for all students. However, the plans should be customized for each student based upon their individual needs. Currently, the higher socioeconomic districts have longer timelines for returning students to the general education setting. This practice exacerbates the poverty and racial achievement gap. A behavior plan should include attendance, work completion, tracking of key behaviors, and grades. According to Robert, "the behavior contract has been a good, successful indicator of how they (the student) will do."

Recommendations for Further Study

Larger Sample. This study adds one intermediate district's lens toward the complex issues surrounding student educational placement. Greater perspectives could be gained from a broader sample. Research should be extended to states outside of Minnesota. This could result in gaining insights beneficial to Minnesota educators specific to the racial gap in achievement and discipline. Kurth et al. (2014) found that segregation based upon disability assumed that students cannot learn in or benefit from traditional classrooms. This conclusion of restrictive placements as being "terminal" needs to be studied further.

PBIS and Mindset. Student readiness has been documented as an influential factor in student transition between educational placements in previous research and was a significant finding in this study. Research should include more Intermediate districts

and larger districts that have their own alternative educational settings within their own boundaries.

Turning away from the punitive approach in regards to discipline and instead using an approach that is positive will in turn created an environment that promoted learning and growth. The use of PBIS in restrictive settings is a proactive, preventative, and data driven tool to support students (Simonsen et al., 2011). Simonsen and Sugai (2013) further contended that improved student, staff, and school outcomes with the adoption and implementation of PBIS in the school. This was apparent in both research and practice in the restrictive setting.

Additional research focused on how the impact of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) would benefit students and staff in all educational settings. Implementing these practices may result in increasing appropriate behavior, decreasing problem behaviors, and decreasing the use of crisis-emergency responses, such as restraints (Lampron & Gonsoulin, 2013; Simonsen & Sugai, 2013). Using the PBIS framework helps students to set goals, acquire skills, and promote a desire to connect with the community at large.

Legal Mandates. Procedural interpretations of Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) and Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) have had a direct effect on students with disabilities and should be examined (Ryndak et al., 2014). Additional research on the organizational decision-making process by which youth are moved to less restrictive settings will need to be completed in order to ensure the best decisions are being made for both boys and girls in residential treatment (Tabone, Thompson & Jordan, 2016). Further research is needed to ensure that student placements are done in

accordance with special education law and policy and help to guide the process to reintegrate students with EBD into the traditional educational setting.

Socioeconomic Status. The correlation between individual school districts and the length of stay at a restrictive educational placement needs to be explored further. This additional research should also include the exploration of the connection between individual school districts and the length of student behavior contracts. This study showed that there were discrepancies between districts and two of the respondents stated that an association of socioeconomic status and length of behavior contract existed. One respondent had explicitly stated that they “slow down their transitions” when servicing a student of color. This bias should be explored further to determine if in fact it does exist and to what extent, and what can be done to correct the discriminating practice. Robert stated, “It’s unfortunate then, for a student because you’re not allowing that student to have the same access for success based on where they live.” Artiles et al. (2010) confirmed this idea, assuming that “disproportionality is a symptom of a larger cultural and historical processes that shape the educational experiences of historically underserved groups.” This concept should be further explored in other Intermediate districts to see if the same phenomenon occurs.

Concluding Comments

This study found that a disconnect exists between general education and special education with regards to students that have been removed from the general educational setting. Students are placed in restrictive settings and the belief is that they will be "fixed" and returned at some point as a typical general education student. Sally said:

The expertise is in setting four. It's sort of an excuse. I don't mean it to be an excuse, but you (setting four teachers) can handle getting this really tough kid, and turn them into humans. Helping them see their more human side, and then bringing them back, you need to help this staff (general education) understand how this little body works.

A more collaborative environment needs to exist between general education and special education in order for all students to be successful. This includes open and honest communication among school and district officials, families, and the student. Listening to each other throughout the process will aid in the conversation and improve the process for all students. This is an area that needs to be improved upon in order for the process to be successful. The participants and this researcher want this to happen, yet barriers exist that prevent it from occurring.

It was apparent through the course of this study that there is an incredible passion for students. However, the process of transitioning students from traditional settings to restrictive settings and back can be arduous and does not consistently align with students' best interests. Too often restrictive settings are deemed as terminal placements when, in fact, they should be viewed as a temporary location for the purpose to learn the necessary skills in order to be successful. As Marty said, "We need to have more skin in the game, and got to believe that they (students) will be successful, there is hope."

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Appendix A: Least Restrictive Environment Checklist

Questions to Ask	Appropriate Time to Ask	Case Law
1. Can the student be educated in the general education setting? If not, why not?	As soon as placement discussion begins	Greer v. Rome City School District (1991); Oberti v. Board of Education Clementon School District (119); Hartmann v. Loudoun County Board of Education (1998)
2. Can the student receive an appropriate education in the general education setting with supplemental aids and services? If not, why not?	When considering the general education setting	Daniel, R. R. v. State Board of Education (1989)
3. What supplemental aids and services would be necessary for the student to be served in the general education setting?	When considering the general education setting	Daniel, R. R. v. State Board of Education (1989)
4. If the student is educated in the general education setting, how will the placement affect others' learning?	When considering the general education setting	MR v. Lincolnwood Board of Education (1194)
5. Are there any negative impacts of the child's being educated in the general education setting?	When considering the general education setting	Sacramento City Unified School District Board of Education v. Rachel H. (1994)
6. What are the social benefits of being educated in the general education setting?	When considering the general education setting	Sacramento City Unified School District Board of Education v. Rachel H. (1994)
7. What are the costs of general education placement? Are they well beyond what is feasible for a school district?	When considering the general education setting	Sacramento City Unified School District Board of Education v. Rachel H. (1994)
8. Is the student making adequate progress? Do the student's supplemental aids and services need to be adapted?	If the student is already placed in the general education setting	Clyde K. v. Puyallup School District (1994)

9. Could the services feasibly be provided in the general education setting?	If a child is already placed in a segregated environment or a more restrictive environment is being considered	Roncker v. Walter (1983)
10. What are the benefits of the special versus general education setting?	If a child is already placed in a segregated environment or a more restrictive environment is being considered	Sacramento City Unified School District Board of Education v. Rachel
11. Will the student have an increased chance for success in a special program and support versus a general education setting?	If a child is already placed in a segregated environment or a more restrictive environment is being considered	MR v. Lincolnwood Board of Education (1994)
12. Will mainstreaming provide the best education access for the student?	If a child is already placed in a segregated environment or a more restrictive environment is being considered	Poolaw v. Bishop (1995)
13. How will we integrate the student into the general education setting to the maximum extent possible?	If a child is already placed in a segregated environment or a more restrictive environment is being considered	Daniel, R. R. v. State Board of Education (1989); Hartmann v. Loudoun County Board of Education (1997)
14. Is this the “maximum extent,” or can we determine other ways to integrate the student?	If a child is already placed in a segregated environment or a more restrictive environment is being considered	Daniel, R. R. v. State Board of Education (1989); Hartmann v. Loudoun County Board of Education (1998)
15. What is the closest school at which appropriate services can be provided? Is this the closest school to the student’s home?	If considering a placement outside of the home school or district	Flour Bluff School District v. Katherine M. (1996); Hudson v. Bloomfield Hills School District (1997)
16. Does the school closest to the child’s home, or in which the child is zoned, have the supports and resources necessary for the individualized education plan?	If considering a placement outside of the home school or district	Flour Bluff School District v. Katherine M. (1996); Hudson v. Bloomfield Hills School District (1997)

Appendix B: Individual Interview Questions

The following questions were utilized to guide the discussion during the face-to-face interview sessions with the targeted participants that included the member district representatives.

Opening (provide a rich description of your sample)	How long have you worked in Special Education? Tell me about your experience in education. How long have you served in your current role? Tell me about current role with the district.
Institutional	Please explain your role in placement of students in various educational settings? Describe the protocol or guidelines that are currently used when placing students in various educational settings? What are the school or district factors that allow students to return to a less restrictive setting? Can you explain some district requirements that move students between various educational settings? Can you explain some of the institutional factors that exist in order to transition students to a less restrictive setting?
Individual	What are individual qualities in students that help them transition to less restrictive settings? What influences the decision to transition students to a less restrictive setting? What are some of the personal educational and behavioral qualities or factors that help transition students to a less restrictive setting?
Closing	Is there anything you would like to share regarding student placement that we have not covered? If you could do anything to make the process more effective in transitioning students to a less restrictive setting, what would it be?

Follow up prompts included

Tell me more about _____.

Repeat a portion of a response and pause.

What did you mean when you said _____?

Appendix C: Informed Consent Letter to District Representatives

CONSENT FORM FOR RESEARCH WITH HUMANS

You are invited to participate in a study of factors that influence and make the decision to place and return students with Emotional Behavioral Disorders into and out of restrictive educational placements.

You were selected as a possible participant because you are a District Representative that is familiar with special education and the referrals of students with special needs to alternative educational settings, and have been committed to the success of all students. This research is being conducted by Ms. Colleen F. Weis, a special education teacher and doctoral student at Bethel University in Minnesota. The research is in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education. There are no monetary incentives for participation.

If you decide to participate, I will contact you to set-up a face-to-face interview that is expected to last between 45-60 minutes. I will provide you the interview questions in advance, and will plan to ask follow-up questions during the interview. I will contact you sometime after the interview to discuss emerging themes noted and to check with you to see if my understanding was correct. There are no anticipated discomforts other than the possible feelings of angst associated with spending an anticipated 45-60 minutes on an interview, and those possible discomforts that may be associated with being interviewed and recorded for transcription purposes. The estimated total time for the actual interview and subsequent check-in(s) is between 60 – 90 minutes altogether. All identifiable information will be withheld and there are no risks expected. Possible benefits to participating may be additional time for reflecting on current practice.

Any information obtained in connection with this study that can be identified to you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. In any written reports or publications, no one will be identified or identifiable and only aggregate data will be presented. The audio recording of our interview will be password protected and used only for transcription purposes. Interview transcripts will then be used for data analysis purposes and deleted after three years.

Your decision to participate will not affect your future relations with Bethel or myself in any way. If you decide to participate, you are free to discontinue participation at any time without affecting such relationships.

This research project has been reviewed and approved in accordance with Bethel's Levels of Review for Research with Humans. If you have any questions about the research and/or research participants' rights or wish to report a research-related injury, please call Colleen Weis (612) 306-5278 or my Bethel Faculty Advisor, Dr. Tracy Reimer (651) 635-8502. You will be offered a copy of this form to keep.

You are making a decision whether or not to participate. Your signature below indicates that you have read the information provided above and have decided to participate. You may withdraw at any time without prejudice after signing this form should you choose to discontinue participation in this study.

Signature _____ Date _____
Signature of Investigator _____

Appendix D: Invitation Phone Protocol

Hello my name is Colleen Weis, and I am a doctoral student at Bethel University, in St. Paul, Minnesota. I am also a Special Education Teacher. I am contacting you to invite you to participate in a study about the factors that refer students with Emotional Behaviors Disorders to a more restrictive educational placement, as well as those factors that allow them to return to a less restrictive placement.

You were selected as a possible participant because you work directly with special education students in your own district. You are uniquely qualified to provide valuable information about the factors that impact educational placement decisions.

If you decide to participate, we will schedule a face-to-face interview at a location of your choice. The interview should take an hour or less and will be digitally recorded for transcription purposes. You will be provided a copy of the transcription to check for accuracy. In addition, I will contact you following the interview to ensure that I represent your ideas accurately.

Confidentiality is highly valued in this study. All participant names and identifiers will be deleted from transcripts, and transcripts will be identifiable by a number. Transcripts will be stored on a password-protected computer to which only I have access. No one will be identifiable in any written reports or publications

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without affecting your relationship with Bethel University, and your information will be destroyed. There are no risks for participating in this study, nor will there be any compensation for participation.

If you are willing to participate, I will send you an informed consent letter to sign, and we will schedule a time and place for our interview. Thanks you in advance for your time and consideration.

Appendix E: Bracket Exercise

Factors that I anticipate being important during the study that influence placement of students in restrictive settings include: socio-economic, race, and gender. Staff attitude may also play a role in placement, perhaps if a staff member is directly impacted by the student's behavior, this may play a role in the decision making process. While this should not be an influence, personal feelings toward the student may also influence the decision.

Factors that may play a role in determining whether or not a student returns to their home school may include inconsistent standards across districts. Currently the students are required to complete a contract, which includes behavior tracking, grades, attendance and tracking of specific behaviors. The behavior contracts vary in length across districts, and I am hoping to find out why that exists.

The factors that may inhibit a student from returning to the general educational environment may include general education staff attitude, student attitude, and demographics. I anticipate a lengthy conversation about factors that prevent students from returning. I hope to gain insight as to how to improve the odds for a student's success in transitioning back to the general educational environment. I also realize that my experience working with this population of students can not lead the interviews in any way.