

Running Head: Student and Teacher Perceptions of Discipline

STUDENT AND TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF DISCIPLINE  
AT THE MIDDLE SCHOOL LEVEL

By

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**ABSTRACT**

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The purpose of this study was to describe the perceptions of teachers and students regarding the discipline system currently in place at Menomonie Middle School through a survey of the 44 teachers and 31 students chosen to participate. The study defined 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade teachers and students understanding of the ALAC (Alternative Learning and Attendance Center) step system, their view of the effectiveness of the system and their perceptions of the principals administrative role in maintaining a positive school climate. The focus of the questions was on 1) determining the level of understanding by both teachers and students of the school rules and resulting consequences, 2) determining the level of student and teacher understanding of the administration of the ALAC step system and 3) determining teachers and students perceived level of input into disciplinary decisions of students. Results of the survey were tabulated to include percentages and

frequencies. The results were to be used by the various building wellness sub-committees developed in the Fall of 2002. The recommendations that were made as a result of the study were to focus on using the results for the student handbook, ALAC step system handbook and school climate committee.

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Many issues arise again and again in public schools. Recurring most often appears to be the issue of discipline. Discipline has been addressed from many viewpoints; that of school boards, administrators and teachers. There is little mention in the research of the student's view on disciplinary practices. Although, through the years, the number of students being referred for some type of discipline intervention has been on the rise. In a study by Skiba, Peterson and Williams (1997) as many as 40% of all students receive some type of documented discipline intervention within one school year. The majority of those referrals are made for noncompliance or disrespect. Behaviors that threaten school safety represented a small percent of referrals in their study. The most common disciplinary reactions to student infractions are detention and suspension. A survey of administrators by Costenbader and Markson, (1994) as cited in Skiba, Peterson and Williams, (1997) shows the offense most likely to result in suspension is aggression.

The middle school that is the focus of this study documented 2,149 discipline referrals, 405 in-school suspensions and 113 out-of-school suspensions for a student body of approximately 800, grades six through eight, during the 2000-2001 school year. Approximately 229 students received the 2, 149 discipline referrals, the majority of referrals coming from teachers. Comparing that to the study mentioned above, this school had approximately 29% of its student population receive some sort of discipline intervention. This school documented the use of 405 in-school suspensions and 113 out-

of-school suspensions, supporting the literature that these are the two most commonly used forms of discipline in our public schools today.

Student and teacher perceptions of discipline in their schools were the least documented information found in the research. However, it was found that the public's perception of discipline was more negative than that of either students or teachers. Some of this is due to the amount of television and newspaper coverage of the most aggressive acts of violence that have occurred in schools. Research has shown that the majority of discipline referrals received in secondary schools were not for aggressive or violent acts but for behaviors that are disrespectful and display insubordination.

With discipline issues on the rise, this study hypothesizes that the needs of teachers and students are changing and need to be identified in order to facilitate a positive school climate conducive to learning for all students. In order to understand the changing school climate as related to discipline this paper includes some discussion of student and teacher input into discipline decisions, types of discipline strategies and the principal's pivotal role in supporting the first two. This paper will provide a description of the students and teachers at Menomonie Middle School, a rural northwestern Wisconsin district with a student population of 800 students in grades 6 through 8. Discussion will revolve around the information received from these two groups about their perceptions of disciplinary practices at Menomonie Middle School.

### **Menomonie Middle School**

Menomonie Middle School is located in Menomonie, Wisconsin. The middle school is broken into three pods, one for each grade 6 through 8. Each grade level is then broken down into teams and each team is represented by a color. For example, 7 Gold

would indicate which grade and which team a student is on. Altogether Menomonie Middle School has three grades and 6 teams. The discipline system currently in place at Menomonie Middle School is called the ALAC (Alternative Learning and Attendance Center) step system. Two forms are used to access the ALAC room. The first form is the ALAC referral that is used by the classroom teacher to refer the student to ALAC during class for the remainder of that period. This form is generally used for classroom misbehaviors. The second form used, the discipline referral, is written out by any staff member in the school for severe behavior infractions. This referral results in a meeting between the student and an administrator and may result in any number of consequences, which may include, parent notification, lunch detention, in school suspension, out of school suspension or referral for expulsion.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The purpose of this study is to describe the perceptions of teachers and students regarding the discipline system currently in place at Menomonie Middle School. The study will define 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade teachers and students understanding of the ALAC step system, their view on the effectiveness of the system and their perceptions of the principal's administrative role in maintaining a positive school climate.

The results will be measured using a single survey at the end of the first term for the school year 2001-2002.

### **Research Objectives**

1. To determine the level of understanding of the school rules and resulting consequences by both teachers and students.

2. To determine the level of student and teacher understanding of the administration of the ALAC step system.
3. To identify the five most common teacher and student perceptions of administrative discipline practices.
4. To determine teachers and students perceived level of input into disciplinary decisions of students.

### **Definition of Terms**

ALAC – Referred to as the Alternative Learning and Attendance Center. In this study ALAC refers to the step system used by teachers and administrators for disciplinary infractions of students. ALAC is a room in Menomonie Middle School staffed by an ALAC supervisor.

Detention – is referred to when a student must spend time outside of the regular school day with a school staff person.

Suspension – can be time served in-school or out-of-school as a consequence to misbehavior. In school suspension is served in the ALAC room.

Expulsion – is used to expel students from school for serious behavior infractions usually as a result of drug use or violence.

IDEA – The individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Legislation put in place to ensure that students with disabilities received the same free and appropriate public education as their peers. It was enacted to protect student rights.

## CHAPTER TWO

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Review of the literature regarding school discipline presents many viewpoints, especially that of the public and teachers. This chapter will focus specifically on perceptions of discipline. Most importantly it will focus on the perceptions of students and teachers regarding current discipline practices occurring in schools. Secondly, discipline intervention strategies being used in schools at this time will be discussed. Also discussed in this chapter, the principal's key role in supporting discipline practices and maintaining a positive school climate conducive to positive behavior and learning.

#### Perceptions of Discipline

As discipline in schools has come into the public eye, many different groups have expressed their opinions on the state of public education. Students and teachers were found to be the two groups with the least amount of input into discipline problems being addressed in our school systems. However, a 1997 "Poll of Teachers' attitudes Toward the Public Schools" gives us a brighter picture of discipline than does the general public (Langdon, 1997). The opinions gathered through this poll shared the similarities and differences between public school teachers attitudes and attitudes of the public at large. Teachers expressed that they feel schools are doing a relatively good job with discipline. As many as 73% gave the school where they teach a rating of A or B. Several issues have changed over the years including teacher's perceptions of lack of parental support. Teachers feel parents do less than they say they will do to support teachers with discipline issues. In general the greatest percentage of teachers believe public schools have improved in the five years prior to this study. All teachers, regardless of where they

teach, rate their schools higher than does the public. Cited as the most frequently reported discipline problems in secondary schools were: not completing assignments (78 percent), absences (57 percent) and cheating (47percent). Attacks on teachers (2 percent), stealing via force (2 percent), racial fights (6 percent), carrying weapons (7 percent) and sexual activity (8 percent) were the least frequently observed discipline problems in this poll (Krajewski, 1998).

There is little research regarding student's perceptions of discipline in schools, however, Kreuttner's 1983 research (Thorson, 1996) suggests that students and teachers perceptions of discipline are different. Students interviewed by Thorson (1996) indicated that they may not like discipline but they did see the necessity for it. The study did point in the direction, however, that the appropriate intervention strategy did depend on the individual and the situation. In the conclusion to this article Thorson states her opinions of the student responses to the interview. Students were seeking liberation from "rote enforcement and standard procedures". They felt that teachers who taught well and communicated with students could avoid some discipline problems in their classrooms. Parent contact was one strategy these students felt should be a constant from the beginning. It was also considered to be one of the most effective discipline practices noted. Lack of communication with adults was a consistent theme throughout Thorson's study.

The public has a more dismal picture of discipline than either the students or teachers. The 16<sup>th</sup> annual Gallup Poll of the public's attitude toward public schools indicated again, for the 15<sup>th</sup> time, that discipline is perceived as the number one problem in American education (McDaniel, 1986). The press is unrelenting in focusing on school

violence such as the Columbine Massacre and other sporadic violent attacks that have occurred through out the country. However, McDaniel reminds us that public schools reflect the problems and changes in the society at large. Schools are serving larger groups of students than ever before. Students are coming from diverse backgrounds with all kinds of problems. School discipline problems are often blown out of proportion. There are many schools where serious discipline problems are rare. It is wise to remember that the adult generation has always bemoaned the sad state of discipline in the young.

### Discipline Intervention Strategies

In a study by Skiba, Peterson and Williams (1997) 40% of middle school students received a disciplinary intervention at least once during the school year. The offenses in these referrals were most often not those behaviors that threaten school safety, but rather those that indicate insubordination and lack of respect. The results also indicated that the majority of referrals originated in the classroom. Given the age of middle school students, it is not surprising to find that problems with authority represent the greatest amount of discipline problems in middle schools today. Traditional discipline in schools has tended to be punitive and exclusionary, including practices such as detention, suspension and expulsion. Out of school suspension is used as a major tool to punish disorderly behavior (Uchitelle, Bartz, Hillman, 1989). The perceived lack of control of students has been a national issue. Many principals have felt the pressure to “get tough” on students who are out of control. Literature shows that this type of practice, sometimes called zero tolerance, which treats every child the same using standard practices, does not

provide support to students with severe behavior problems or long term resolution of the behaviors for others (Gable, Hendrickson, Tonelson, Acker, 2000).

Discipline practice has been changed since the 1997 reauthorization of IDEA. New provisions argue strongly that if there is to be improvement in our school climate and discipline, it will be necessary to implement a school wide approach that addresses both special education and regular education (Skiba, Peterson, 2000). IDEA '97 has many disciplinary requirements for students with disabilities or students at risk. A functional behavioral assessment is mandatory before the 10<sup>th</sup> day of suspension if a student is at risk for long-term exclusion. The functional behavioral assessment is meant to address the intent of the behavior allowing staff to better understand the individual students behavior issues. However, in a system set up to be punishment oriented and exclusionary, administrators and teachers sometimes have difficulty responding to challenging behavior in any other way. Research has already shown that this type of discipline does not work well for the chronic misbehaving students and those that appear to be unresponsive to current discipline practices. For these students more specialized behavior support plans are needed in the form of functional behavioral assessments (Tobin, Sugai, Colvin, 2000).

### The Principal's Role

The principal's role in school discipline is changing as well. Administrators now face considerable pressure to improve school discipline and provide greater support to students with disabilities that are related to behavior problems (Tobin, Sugai, Colvin, 2000). As was stated earlier, the public's view of discipline in our schools is of great concern and this relates to the public pressure that administrators feel from their

community to make schools safe for children. At the same time there is a severe shortage of candidates for leadership roles like principal. The principalship has acquired many more responsibilities without the incentives needed to attract high quality candidates (Tirozzi, 2001).

A study by Greene and Barnes (1993) as cited by Freiberg, Stein and Parker (1995) states the ways in which administrators respond to school discipline are not dependent on the size of school they work at. Principals tend to respond to student misconduct with conventional methods like parental notice, detention, suspension and expulsion. Consequences such as school and community service or loss of privileges were not found to be widely used by administrators. The use of discipline referrals by teachers is usually utilized in one way. Teachers send students out of their classrooms (or to the office) without any feedback or resolution of the problem. The information collected by way of discipline referrals is rarely used to make decisions about improving school climate and student behaviors.

Tobin, Sugai, and Colvin (2000) make a good point when they state that administrators need information about the current status of discipline at their school before effective changes can be made. Most schools have developed forms for discipline referrals that can be tracked and used to produce various kinds of information, specifically to analyze student behavior before completing a functional behavioral assessment. Discipline referral data has a wealth of information including identifying students at risk, communicating with staff teams, monitoring progress towards school climate improvement and referral for special education. Administrators can use records of discipline referrals as a tool in all these areas to help improve the status of discipline in

their schools. This type of administrative leadership fosters a school, home and community partnership for promoting positive outcomes for all students (Gable, Hendrickson, Tonelson, Van Acker, 2000).

With the number of discipline referrals on the rise, administrators are faced with the challenge of creating new and unique ways of dealing with student misconduct. A recommendation by Freiberg, Stein and Parker (1995) include creating smaller learning environments (or teams). Dividing students and teachers into teams provides an atmosphere conducive to learning and fosters the development of critical thinking skills. Adding harsher consequences to an already failing discipline system is not the answer. Referrals for discipline are a symptom of a greater problem, an environment that does not work for either students or teachers.

Research on discipline indicates that administrators can provide a positive school climate that is conducive to positive school behavior (Short, 1988). Three themes come from the research according to Short. The first theme is the approach of schools working together in a unified way to establish good discipline. School wide behavior plans are an example of this as opposed to the disjointed management of students that occurs in schools today where the teacher makes a discipline referral and has no follow-up with that student to resolve the problem. The second theme Short mentions is the necessity for a positive school climate that encourages positive student behavior. The third theme points out the pivotal role of the school principal and his/her role in carrying out the first two conditions. Schools that function under these three premises have teachers that take the major role in handling routine discipline problems. Research shows that when administrators take the majority of the role in handling discipline issues there is a higher

incidence of suspension (Short, 1988). Principals who take on discipline matters in these situations end up playing the role of enforcer of rules and handling each situation in a rote discipline manner, treating each student the same.

Principal leadership is the key to determining how schools operate, specifically with discipline structure of the school. Successful principals make themselves visible within a school. They are present in the hallways, classrooms and lunchrooms. Principals who lead their school in this way expect teachers to handle the routine discipline problems and see their role as facilitating the problem-solving skills of teachers and students (Short, 1988).

In conclusion, research on student and teacher perceptions of discipline practices depend a great deal on the leadership role of the principal. The principal encourages positive school climate by being a visible force in the school, promoting positive student behavior, facilitating student and teacher problem solving skills and emphasizing a student-centered approach to discipline.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the methods used to conduct the assessment of student and teacher perceptions of discipline practices at Menomonie Middle School. It includes a description of the subjects, instrument and procedures used for the study. A data analysis section is included to describe the specific descriptive statistics used to address each of the objectives mentioned earlier.

#### **Description of Subjects**

The subjects used in this study included 60 students and 60 teachers in grades 6, 7 or 8 attending or working at Menomonie Middle School during the 2001-2002 school year. A stratified random sample of students in grades 6-8 was used, representing some students who have received discipline referrals, ALAC referrals or no discipline interventions at all. All the teachers were asked to participate in the study.

#### **Instrumentation**

The researcher developed the instrument that was utilized in this study during the first term of the 2001-2002 school year. It was titled Student and Teacher Perceptions of Discipline Practices. The purpose of this study was to determine, with a needs assessment scale, the student's and teacher's level of understanding of current discipline practices and their perception of effectiveness of current practices.

The content of the instrument dealt with questions regarding students and teachers understanding of the ALAC step system. Their understanding of the rules implemented

at the middle school and resulting consequences, perception of administrative discipline practices and level of input into these decisions by students and staff.

The subjects rated their responses on a survey using a Likert scale. They chose an answer on a scale of 0-5, with 0 representing no agreement/no understanding with the statement to 5 representing complete agreement/complete understanding. All responses were confidential.

### **Procedures**

The confidential survey was distributed at a monthly faculty meeting on May 14<sup>th</sup>, 2002. The survey was completed during the meeting and placed in a manila envelope that was sealed and returned to the researcher before leaving the meeting. The student survey was distributed to 3 randomly chosen classes, one from each of the grades. Parent permission was received prior to distributing the survey vial mail using self-addressed stamped envelopes for returning the forms. The teacher of each of these classes distributed the survey at the beginning of the class period. Every student who had parent permission was asked to voluntarily complete the survey and was insured confidentiality. The surveys were placed in a manila envelope, sealed and returned to the researcher.

### **Scale of Measurement**

The survey measured four components. The first two components were the measurement of understanding of the school rules and resulting consequences, specifically the administration of the ALAC step system. These variables were measured by 10 questions that focused on personal understanding. The subjects were given a survey using a Likert Scale with 0 representing no understanding to 5 representing complete understanding. The variables were measured with a numerical score. A mean

was calculated along with a percentage score per each item on the Likert Scale. The last two components, student and teacher perceptions of administrative discipline practices and level of input into disciplinary decisions were measured by 10 questions utilizing a Likert Scale with 0 representing no agreement with the statement to 5 representing complete agreement with the statement. A mean was calculated along with a percentage score per each item on the Likert Scale.

### **Unknowns**

The rate of response for both students and staff may have affected the results since a portion of the teachers were absent the day the survey was given and some students were not given parental permission to complete the survey. Both the teachers and students may have chosen not to respond to the survey honestly affecting the results of the questionnaire.

### **Limitations**

Limitations to the study surround the honesty of the respondents. For various reasons, students or staff members may have chosen to respond inaccurately. The instrument only measured student and staff perception of discipline practices not the actual discipline practices. The sample size may also be a limitation since 44 of the 60 staff members completed the survey and 31 of the 60 students completed the survey. Had the number of people completing the instrument been higher the results may have been different.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to recognize the perceptions of students and staff at Menomonie Middle school in regards to current discipline practices and policies. The results were provided to the staff and will be used in conjunction with the on-going building wellness plan to be in place the 2002-2003 school year.

#### **Data Analysis**

Sixty staff questionnaires were distributed on May 14<sup>th</sup>, 2002 to the teachers of Menomonie Middle School. Forty-four staff questionnaires were returned giving the evaluator a 73% return rate. Sixty students were randomly selected and permission to participate was mailed to parents. Thirty-one students received permission to participate giving the evaluator a 52 % return rate for a combined average of 63% for both student and staff return rate.

The survey asked students and staff to rate their perception of various discipline practices with twenty questions. In the following tables you will find the valid percent of each perception level identified and the number of people that responded (n).

Statement 1: I understand what behaviors result in a referral to ALAC.

ALAC is a step-discipline system that is currently used within the middle school. It consists of seven steps of discipline, one being the lowest to seven the highest. When students receive a referral to ALAC (Alternative Learning and Attendance Center) they do so because of various disruptions to the classroom including: insubordination, inappropriate language, harassment, excessive tardies and so on. ALAC is also used for full day in-school detentions which are a result of more serious behaviors and frequent misbehaviors (3 in 10 school days).

**Table 1****Statement 1: Knowledge of behaviors resulting in ALAC**

Perception Levels	Valid %	Valid %	(n)
	Teachers	Students	T and S
1 Totally disagree	0%	0%	0
2 Somewhat disagree	0%	3%	1
3 Not sure	11%	19%	11
4 Somewhat agree	30%	32%	23
5 Totally agree	59%	45%	40

Statement 2: I understand what behaviors result in a discipline referral.

A discipline referral is a referral a teacher or staff member makes regarding a serious or chronic misbehavior displayed by a student. Discipline referrals go directly to the principal or assistant principal and are dealt with through the office. The principal or assistant principal refer to the ALAC handbook when deciding on the appropriate consequence and step the student will be placed on.

**Table 2****Statement 2: Behaviors resulting in a discipline referral**

Perception Levels	Valid %	Valid %	(n)
	Teachers	Students	T and S
1 Totally disagree	0%	3%	1
2 Somewhat disagree	0%	7%	2
3 Not sure	14%	19%	12
4 Somewhat agree	34%	32%	25
5 Totally agree	52%	39%	35

Statement 3: I understand how students move up and down the ALAC steps.

The ALAC step system has a very detailed set of guidelines and policies for determining what step a student is on according to the type of referral made, type of misbehavior, past behavior and frequency of misbehavior. There is some subjectiveness applied by both administrators in using the step system as it is set up to be used flexibly with each student.

**Table 3****Statement 3: How students move on ALAC steps**

Perception Levels	Valid %	Valid %	(n)
	Teachers	Students	T and S
1 Totally disagree	2%	7%	3
2 Somewhat disagree	5%	3%	3
3 Not sure	20%	29%	18
4 Somewhat agree	41%	19%	24
5 Totally agree	32%	42%	27

Statement 4: I know what the consequence is for excessive tardies.

The middle school is made up of “teams” at each grade level. Teams are given the leeway to decide on certain student policies within their teams. Tardies seems to be one of the policies that varies the most widely across the teams from teachers who record every tardy to others who give students permission to be late for certain class periods because of the distance they are coming to get to class. This issue is frequently discussed in team meeting and faculty meetings with many viewpoints.

**Table 4****Statement 4: Knowledge of consequences for tardies**

<b>Perception Levels</b>	<b>Valid %</b>	<b>Valid %</b>	<b>(n)</b>
	<b>Teachers</b>	<b>Students</b>	<b>T and S</b>
1 Totally disagree	11%	3%	6
2 Somewhat disagree	16%	3%	8
3 Not sure	20%	13%	13
4 Somewhat agree	18%	23%	15
5 Totally agree	34%	58%	33

Statement 5: I know what the consequence is for excessive gum chewing.

Gum chewing is another school infraction that is dealt with in various ways among the teams. Some teachers follow the handbook and assign lunch detention after the third infraction and a discipline referral after the fourth infraction. Other teachers do not keep track of gum infractions, asking students to spit out the gum or ignoring the problem altogether. Many students are not deterred from chewing gum for any reason including the consequences assigned for excessive gum chewing. According to the responses 84% of the students somewhat or totally understand the consequences for gum chewing while only 64% of the teachers are somewhat or totally aware of what the consequences for gum chewing are.

**Table 5****Statement 5: Knowledge of consequences for gum chewing**

Perception Levels	Valid %	Valid %	(n)
	Teachers	Students	T and S
1 Totally disagree	5%	3%	3
2 Somewhat disagree	9%	3%	5
3 Not sure	23%	10%	14
4 Somewhat agree	25%	29%	18
5 Totally agree	39%	55%	35

Statement 6: The principal follows the ALAC guidelines that are in the handbook.

The ALAC guidelines are in the student handbook so that all students, staff and parents are aware of the system and how it works. Principals have the ability to be somewhat flexible with the step system when dealing with individual students. Only the principals assign steps and corresponding consequences after receiving discipline referrals from staff.

**Table 6****Statement 6: Principal follows ALAC guidelines**

Perception Levels	Valid %	Valid %	(n)
	Teachers	Students	T and S
1 Totally disagree	2%	3%	2
2 Somewhat disagree	16%	3%	8
3 Not sure	39%	42%	30
4 Somewhat agree	36%	19%	22
5 Totally agree	7%	32%	13

Statement 7: The principal treats all students the same when assigning consequences.

There are many different styles of leadership. Some staff and students believe the principal should treat all the students the same and others feel that the individual should be considered when deciding on consequences. Only 29% of the staff somewhat or totally agree that the principal treats students the same when assigning consequences whereas 55% of the students somewhat or totally agree the principal treats students the same.

**Table 7****Statement 7: Principal treats students the same**

Perception Levels	Valid %	Valid %	(n)
	Teachers	Students	T and S
1 Totally disagree	11%	10%	8
2 Somewhat disagree	30%	10%	16
3 Not sure	30%	26%	21
4 Somewhat agree	27%	26%	20
5 Totally agree	2%	29%	10

Statement 8: I know what the consequence is for three ALAC's in ten school days.

In order for students to move down the step system they must not receive any referrals in ten school days. Likewise, any student who receives three ALAC referrals in ten school days must serve one day of in-school suspension. Both students and staff seem to have an understanding of this policy since 66% of staff and 58% of students totally or somewhat agree they know the consequence for three ALAC's in ten school days.

**Table 8****Statement 8: Knowledge of consequence of 3 ALAC's in 10 days**

Perception Levels	Valid %	Valid %	(n)
	Teachers	Students	T and S
1 Totally disagree	5%	7%	4
2 Somewhat disagree	7%	10%	6
3 Not sure	23%	26%	18
4 Somewhat agree	18%	29%	17
5 Totally agree	48%	29%	30

Statement 9: I know what the consequence is for fighting.

The consequences for fighting can vary for many reasons including who started the fight, how both students responded to staff intervention during the fight and what step both students were on prior to fighting along with past history of fighting. Over half of the staff surveyed, 52%, somewhat or totally agree that they know what the consequence is for fighting whereas 45% of the students somewhat or totally agree that they know what the consequence is for fighting.

**Table 9****Statement 9: Knowledge of consequence for fighting**

<b>Perception Levels</b>	<b>Valid %</b>	<b>Valid %</b>	<b>(n)</b>
	<b>Teachers</b>	<b>Students</b>	<b>T and S</b>
1 Totally disagree	7%	16%	8
2 Somewhat disagree	11%	3%	6
3 Not sure	30%	35%	24
4 Somewhat agree	32%	16%	19
5 Totally agree	20%	29%	18

Statement 10: Students change their behavior when given ALAC referrals.

Only 39% of staff and 20% of students somewhat or totally agree that students change their behavior when given an ALAC referral. Among the students who responded to this question, 39% somewhat or totally disagreed that students change their behavior when given an ALAC referral.

**Table 10****Statement 10: Students change their behavior when given an ALAC referral**

Perception Levels	Valid %	Valid %	(n)
	Teachers	Students	T and S
1 Totally disagree	11%	23%	12
2 Somewhat disagree	20%	16%	14
3 Not sure	30%	42%	26
4 Somewhat agree	34%	13%	19
5 Totally agree	5%	7%	4

Statement 11: Students have input about what consequence they might receive for breaking school rules.

Of the students surveyed 48% somewhat or totally agreed that students have input about what consequence they might receive for breaking school rules. Only 11% of the staff somewhat or totally agree that students have input. This discrepancy might be due to the fact that staff are not involved in assigning consequences and therefore do not know if students have input or not.

**Table 11**

**Statement 11: Students have input about consequences**

Perception Levels	Valid %	Valid %	(n)
	Teachers	Students	T and S
1 Totally disagree	9%	19%	10
2 Somewhat disagree	25%	13%	15
3 Not sure	55%	19%	30
4 Somewhat agree	9%	29%	13
5 Totally agree	2%	19%	7

Statement 12: The principal listens to the student when discussing discipline referrals.

Staff are not present when the principal and student conference about discipline referrals, however, 46% of staff somewhat or totally agree that the principal listens to the student when discussing discipline referrals. Only 2% of the staff somewhat disagree with this statement. Students were a little more split with 45% somewhat or totally agreeing and 20% somewhat or totally disagreeing that the principal listens to students when discussing discipline referrals.

**Table 12****Statement 12: Principal listens to student during discipline referrals**

Perception Levels	Valid %	Valid %	(n)
	Teachers	Students	T and S
1 Totally disagree	0%	10%	3
2 Somewhat disagree	2%	10%	4
3 Not sure	52%	35%	34
4 Somewhat agree	32%	16%	19
5 Totally agree	14%	29%	15

Statement 13: The principal is available to see students when there is a problem.

The staff was somewhat split on their perception of whether the principal is accessible or not. Of the staff, 36% somewhat or totally agreed that the principal is available when there is a problem and 43% somewhat or totally disagreed that the principal is available. The students were also split with 42% somewhat or totally agreeing and 32% somewhat or totally disagreeing.

**Table 13****Statement 13: Principal is available when there is a problem**

Perception Levels	Valid %	Valid %	(n)
	Teachers	Students	T and S
1 Totally disagree	2%	16%	6
2 Somewhat disagree	41%	16%	23
3 Not sure	20%	26%	17
4 Somewhat agree	34%	16%	20
5 Totally agree	2%	26%	9

Statement 14: Teachers have input about what consequences students receive for breaking school rules.

Of the teachers and students survey, 39% of the teachers and 64% of the students somewhat or totally agree that teachers have input into what consequences students receive for misbehavior at school. Whereas 42% of the teachers and only 3% of the students somewhat or totally disagree that teachers have any input.

**Table 14**

**Statement 14: Teachers have input into consequences**

<b>Perception Levels</b>	<b>Valid % Teachers</b>	<b>Valid % Students</b>	<b>(n) T and S</b>
1 Totally disagree	11%	0%	5
2 Somewhat disagree	32%	3%	15
3 Not sure	18%	32%	18
4 Somewhat agree	34%	29%	24
5 Totally agree	5%	35%	13

Statement 15: Teachers are consistent about sending students to ALAC.

From the survey, only 22% of the teachers somewhat or totally agree that teachers are consistent when sending students to ALAC. Of the students surveyed, 49%, nearly half somewhat or totally agree that teachers are consistent when sending students to ALAC.

**Table 15****Statement 15: Teachers are consistent when using ALAC**

<b>Perception Levels</b>	<b>Valid % Teachers</b>	<b>Valid % Students</b>	<b>(n) T and S</b>
1 Totally disagree	16%	13%	11
2 Somewhat disagree	43%	13%	23
3 Not sure	18%	26%	16
4 Somewhat agree	20%	39%	21
5 Totally agree	2%	10%	4

Statement 16: ALAC referrals improve student behavior.

This question is similar to question number ten which stated “students change their behavior when given ALAC referrals”. The survey results for statement sixteen were similar to statement ten. Of the teachers surveyed 25% somewhat or totally agreed that ALAC referrals improve student behavior whereas only 19% of the students somewhat or totally agreed that ALAC referrals improve student behavior.

**Table 16****Statement 16: ALAC referrals improve student behavior**

<b>Perception Levels</b>	<b>Valid % Teachers</b>	<b>Valid % Students</b>	<b>(n) T and S</b>
1 Totally disagree	11%	29%	14
2 Somewhat disagree	25%	13%	15
3 Not sure	39%	39%	29
4 Somewhat agree	20%	16%	14
5 Totally agree	5%	3%	3

Statement 17: Students who misbehave are not always sent to ALAC.

This question is similar to question number fifteen that states “teachers are consistent about sending students to ALAC”. The responses were similar since 88% of the teachers and 65% of the students somewhat or totally agreed that students who misbehave are not always sent to ALAC. Teachers have to make a decision whether to send a student to ALAC or not based on many factors including past history, type of misbehavior, response to teacher redirection, etc.

**Table 17****Statement 17: Students are not always sent to ALAC**

Perception Levels	Valid %	Valid %	(n)
	Teachers	Students	T and S
1 Totally disagree	0%	7%	2
2 Somewhat disagree	2%	7%	3
3 Not sure	9%	23%	11
4 Somewhat agree	68%	26%	38
5 Totally agree	20%	39%	21

Statement 18: I know what step results in out of school suspension.

The lowest step in the ALAC system is Step 1 and the highest step is Step 7 or expulsion. However out of school suspension is assigned by the principal after taking into consideration many factors including frequency of misbehavior, type of misbehavior, past history, behavior towards staff and administrators, etc. Of the staff surveyed, 43% somewhat or totally agreed that they know what step results in out of school suspension. Of the students surveyed, 33% somewhat or totally agree that they know what step results in out of school suspension.

**Table 18****Statement 18: Knowledge of what step results in OSS**

Perception Levels	Valid %	Valid %	(n)
	Teachers	Students	T and S
1 Totally disagree	5%	23%	9
2 Somewhat disagree	16%	3%	8
3 Not sure	36%	42%	29
4 Somewhat agree	32%	10%	17
5 Totally agree	11%	23%	12

Statement 19: The principal is fair when dealing with students.

Of the students and staff surveyed, 55% of the teachers and 42% of the students somewhat or totally agreed that the principal is fair when dealing with students.

**Table 19****Statement 19: Principal is fair when dealing with students**

Perception Levels	Valid %	Valid %	(n)
	Teachers	Students	T and S
1 Totally disagree	7%	16%	8
2 Somewhat disagree	20%	13%	13
3 Not sure	18%	29%	17
4 Somewhat agree	39%	29%	26
5 Totally agree	16%	13%	11

Statement 20: Teachers send students to ALAC only when necessary.

This question is similar to the other questions regarding teacher consistency when sending students to ALAC and the question about students not always being sent to ALAC when they misbehave. Again, teachers must make a subjective decision every time a student misbehaves in the classroom based on the factors mentioned before including, type of misbehavior, students response to redirection, past history, etc. Of the staff and students surveyed, 55% of the staff and 74% of the students somewhat or totally agree that teachers send students to ALAC only when necessary.

**Table 20****Statement 20: Teachers send students to ALAC only when necessary**

Perception Levels	Valid %	Valid %	(n)
	Teachers	Students	T and S
1 Totally disagree	7%	3%	4
2 Somewhat disagree	20%	10%	12
3 Not sure	18%	13%	12
4 Somewhat agree	39%	32%	27
5 Totally agree	16%	42%	20

## CHAPTER 5

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter will summarize the purpose of the study, review of literature, procedures for the study and results of the study. After reviewing the results of the study some recommendations for the Menomonie Middle School staff are documented.

#### **Summary**

The purpose of this study was to describe the perceptions of teachers and students regarding the discipline system currently in place at Menomonie Middle School. The study defined the 6<sup>th</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grade staff and students understanding of the ALAC step system, their view on the effectiveness of the system and their perceptions of the principal's administrative role in maintaining a positive school climate. The literature that was reviewed looked at perceptions of discipline, specifically the perceptions of students, staff and community. Various discipline intervention strategies were reviewed and compared to those in place at Menomonie Middle School. The principal's changing role in maintaining a positive school climate and the pressure to improve school discipline was reviewed. Chapter 3 discussed the methods used to evaluate the perceptions of staff and students regarding current discipline practices at Menomonie Middle School. A questionnaire was developed by the researcher in the fall of 2001 and the results were tabulated and tables were provided in Chapter 4. The results included the mean perception levels for all 20 questions addressed within the survey.

#### **Conclusions**

The survey presented ten questions measuring the understanding of school rules and resulting consequences, specifically the ALAC step system. The other ten questions

measured the perceptions of students and teachers regarding the administrative discipline practices and level of input into disciplinary decisions.

Approximately 59% of the staff and 45% of the students totally agreed that they understood what behaviors resulted in ALAC referrals. Similarly 52% of staff and 39% of students totally agreed they understood what behaviors resulted in discipline referrals. However, students and staff were less sure of how students moved up and down the ALAC step system with only 32% of staff and 42% of students who felt they totally agreed they understood how the step system operated.

Of the staff surveyed only 7% felt the principal followed the ALAC step guidelines as written in the handbook and only 2% of the staff totally agreed that they believed that the principal treats students the same on discipline issues. However, 14% of staff and 29% of the students surveyed totally agreed that the principal listens to students when discussing discipline referrals with them. As for ALAC as a discipline intervention, only 5% of staff and 7% of the students totally agreed that students change their behavior after receiving an ALAC referral. Teachers surveyed responded with only 5% totally agreeing that teachers have input into consequences and 19% of students responded they totally agree that students have input into consequences. Teachers also responded with only 2% totally agreeing that staff are consistent when using ALAC.

APPENDIX A

Student Perceptions of Discipline Practices at the Middle School

Please circle one answer for each of the following questions:

<u>Grade</u>	<u>Gender</u>	<u>Number of times sent to ALAC</u>
a) 6 <sup>th</sup>	a) Male	a) Never
b) 7 <sup>th</sup>	b) Female	b) 1-2 times
c) 8 <sup>th</sup>		c) 3-5 times
		d) 6-10 times
		e) more than 10 times

Please answer the following questions, using the scale below, with the answer that best identifies how strongly you agree or disagree with the statement.

Totally disagree= 1      Somewhat disagree= 2      Not sure=3      Somewhat agree=4      Totally agree=5

- |  |   |   |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. I understand what behaviors result in a referral to ALAC.                                 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. I understand what behaviors result in a discipline referral.                              | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. I understand how students move up and down the ALAC steps.                                | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. I know what the consequence is for excessive tardies.                                     | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. I know what the consequence is for excessive gum chewing.                                 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. The principal follows the ALAC guidelines that are in the handbook.                       | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. The principal treats all students the same when assigning consequences                    | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. I know what the consequence is for 3 ALAC's in ten school days.                           | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9. I know what the consequence is for fighting.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 10. Students change their behavior when given ALAC referrals.                                | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 11. Students have input about what consequence they might receive for breaking school rules. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 12. The principal listens to the student when discussing discipline referrals.               | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

- |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 13. The principal is available to see students when there is a problem.                     | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 14. Teachers have input about what consequences students receive for breaking school rules. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 15. Teachers are consistent about sending students to ALAC.                                 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 16. ALAC referrals improve student behavior.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 17. Students who misbehave are not always sent to ALAC.                                     | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 18. I know what step results in out of school suspension.                                   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 19. The principal is fair when dealing with students.                                       | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 20. Teachers send students to ALAC only when necessary.                                     | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Teacher Perceptions of Discipline Practices at the Middle School

Please circle one answer for each of the following questions:

<b><u>Grade Taught</u></b>	<b><u>Gender</u></b>	<b>Most common reason you send students to ALAC?</b>
a) 6 <sup>th</sup>	a) Male	_____
b) 7 <sup>th</sup>	b) Female	
c) 8 <sup>th</sup>		

Please answer the following questions, using the scale below, with the answer that best identifies how strongly you agree or disagree with the statement.

Totally disagree= 1      Somewhat disagree= 2      Not sure=3      Somewhat agree=4      Totally agree=5

- |  |   |   |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. I understand what behaviors result in a referral to ALAC.                                 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. I understand what behaviors result in a discipline referral.                              | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. I understand how students move up and down the ALAC steps.                                | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. I know what the consequence is for excessive tardies.                                     | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. I know what the consequence is for excessive gum chewing.                                 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. The principal follows the ALAC guidelines that are in the handbook.                       | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. The principal treats all students the same when assigning consequences                    | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. I know what the consequence is for 3 ALAC's in ten school days.                           | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9. I know what the consequence is for fighting.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 10. Students change their behavior when given ALAC referrals.                                | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 11. Students have input about what consequence they might receive for breaking school rules. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 12. The principal listens to the student when discussing discipline referrals.               | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 13. The principal is available to see students when there is a problem.                      | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

14. Teachers have input about what consequences students receive for breaking school rules. 1 2 3 4 5
15. Teachers are consistent about sending students to ALAC. 1 2 3 4 5
16. ALAC referrals improve student behavior. 1 2 3 4 5
17. Students who misbehave are not always sent to ALAC. 1 2 3 4 5
18. I know what step results in out of school suspension. 1 2 3 4 5
19. The principal is fair when dealing with students. 1 2 3 4 5
20. Teachers send students to ALAC only when necessary. 1 2 3 4 5

APPENDIX B

April 29, 2002

Dear Parent or Guardian,

Your child's school has an opportunity to take part in a study about student and staff perceptions of discipline practices at Menomonie Middle School. I am asking your permission for your child to be included in this study.

A twenty-question survey will be conducted during your child's class. The survey will include questions about student understanding of the school rules and consequences. There will also be questions about student and teacher perceptions of administrative discipline practices and level of student input into disciplinary decisions.

There is little or no risk to your child in participating in this survey. All responses are completely confidential. Although the results of this study may benefit others in the future, there is no direct benefit to your child by participating in this study.

Your child's answers are strictly confidential. Students will not put their names on the survey. Only the primary researcher, Christine McMasters, will have access to the confidential raw data. Your child's participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Should your child choose to participate and later wish to withdraw from the study, he or she may discontinue participation at any time.

Questions or concerns about participation in the research or subsequent complaints should be addressed first to the researcher (Christine McMasters at 232-1673) or research advisor (Lynn Laventure at 232-2679) and second to Susan Foxwell, Human protections Administrator, UW-Stout Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research, 11 HH, UW-Stout, Menomonie, WI 54751, phone (715) 232-2477.

Please sign the attached form indicating whether or not you have agreed to have your child participate and return it in the self addressed stamped envelope by **May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2002**.

I, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_ do \_\_\_ do not (check one) agree to allow my child, \_\_\_\_\_, to participate in this study about perceptions of discipline practices at Menomonie Middle School.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

### **Consent for Participation**

This research examines student and teacher perceptions of disciplinary practices at Menomonie Middle School. The goal of this study is to evaluate a questionnaire that measures this as a part of this study. Before completing the questionnaire, we would like you to read and then sign the consent form, indicating that you understand the potential risks and benefits of participation, and that you understand your rights as a participant. If you have any questions, please contact Christine McMasters, the primary researcher at Menomonie Middle School, 232-1673.

#### **RISKS**

There is little or no risk to you in filling out this questionnaire. Your responses are completely confidential.

#### **BENEFITS**

Although the results of this study may benefit others in the future, there is no direct benefit to you by participating in this study.

#### **CONFIDENTIALITY OF RESPONSES**

Your answers are strictly confidential. Only the primary researcher or her designee will have access to the confidential raw data.

#### **RIGHT TO WITHDRAW OR DECLINE TO PARTICIPATE**

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may choose not to participate without any adverse consequences to you. Should you choose to participate and later wish to withdraw from the study, you may discontinue your participation at this time without incurring adverse consequences.

**NOTE:** Questions or concerns about participation in the research or subsequent complaints should be addressed first to the researcher (Christine McMasters 232-1673) or research advisor (Lynn Laventure 232-2679) and second to Susan Foxwell, Human Protections Administrator, UW-Stout Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research, 11 HH, UW-Stout, Menomonie, WI 54751, phone (715) 232-2477.

I attest that I have read and understood the above description, including potential risks and benefits, and my rights as a participant, and that all my questions about the study have been answered to my satisfaction. I hereby give my informed consent to participate in this research study.

Student Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

### **Consent for Participation**

This research examines student and teacher perceptions of disciplinary practices at Menomonie Middle School. The goal of this study is to evaluate a questionnaire that measures this as a part of this study. Before completing the questionnaire, we would like you to read and then sign the consent form, indicating that you understand the potential risks and benefits of participation, and that you understand your rights as a participant. If you have any questions, please contact Christine McMasters, the primary researcher at Menomonie Middle School, 232-1673.

#### **RISKS**

There is little or no risk to you in filling out this questionnaire. Your responses are completely confidential.

#### **BENEFITS**

Although the results of this study may benefit others in the future, there is no direct benefit to you by participating in this study.

#### **CONFIDENTIALITY OF RESPONSES**

Your answers are strictly confidential. Only the primary researcher or her designee will have access to the confidential raw data.

#### **RIGHT TO WITHDRAW OR DECLINE TO PARTICIPATE**

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may choose not to participate without any adverse consequences to you. Should you choose to participate and later wish to withdraw from the study, you may discontinue your participation at this time without incurring adverse consequences.

**NOTE:** Questions or concerns about participation in the research or subsequent complaints should be addressed first to the researcher (Christine McMasters 232-1673) or research advisor (Lynn Laventure 232-2679) and second to Susan Foxwell, Human Protections Administrator, UW-Stout Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research, 11 HH, UW-Stout, Menomonie, WI 54751, phone (715) 232-2477.

I attest that I have read and understood the above description, including potential risks and benefits, and my rights as a participant, and that all my questions about the study have been answered to my satisfaction. I hereby give my informed consent to participate in this research study.

Teacher Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

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