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Addressing Bullying in Schools: The Perceptions, Thoughts and Beliefs of Middle-School Principals

Quentin Fretwell

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This dissertation, ADDRESSING BULLYING IN SCHOOLS: THE PERCEPTIONS, THOUGHTS AND BELIEFS OF MIDDLE-SCHOOL PRINCIPALS, by QUENTIN FRETWELL, was prepared under the direction of the candidate's Dissertation Advisory Committee. It is accepted by the committee members in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in the College of Education, Georgia State University.

The Dissertation Advisory Committee and the student's Department Chair, as representatives of the faculty, certify that this dissertation has met all standards of excellence and scholarship as determined by the faculty.

Joyce E. Many, Ph.D.
Committee Co-Chair

Jami Royal Berry, Ph.D.
Committee Co-Chair

Joel Meyers, Ph.D.
Committee Member

Olga S. Jarrett, Ph.D.
Committee Member

Garry W. McGiboney, Ph.D.
Committee Member

Date

William Curlette, Ph.D.
Chair, Department of Educational Policy Studies

Paul A. Alberto, Ph.D.
Dean, College of Education

AUTHOR'S STATEMENT

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Quentin Fretwell

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Quentin Fretwell
Georgia State University
Educational Policy Studies
P.O. Box 3977
Atlanta, Georgia 30302-3977

The director of this dissertation is:

Dr. Joyce E. Many
Office of the Dean
College of Education
Georgia State University
Atlanta, Georgia 30303-3038

CURRICULUM VITAE

Quentin Fretwell

ADDRESS: Georgia State University
Educational Policy Studies
P.O. Box 3977
Atlanta, Georgia 30302-3977

EDUCATION: Ph.D. 2015 Georgia State University
Educational Policy Studies
Ed.S. 2003 Georgia State University
Educational Policy Studies
M.Ed. 1992 Georgia State University
Special Education
B.Mu. 1981 Georgia State University
Music

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

2013 – Present Safe Schools Coordinator
Best County School District, Anywhere, GA¹
2012 – 2013 Retired
Best County School District, Anywhere, GA
2008 – 2012 Director, Department of Safe Schools and Student Relations
Best County School District, Anywhere, GA
2002 – 2008 Department Administrator, Department of Safe Schools and
Student Relations
Best County School District, Anywhere, GA
2000 – 2002 Administrator, Department of Human Resources
Best County School District, Anywhere, GA
1994 – 2000 Assistant Principal
Best County School District, Anywhere, GA
1981 – 1994 Substitute Teacher, Paraprofessional, Teacher, Department Chair
Best County School District, Anywhere, GA

PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS:

Kappa Delta Pi International Honor Society
Best County School District Administrators Association
International Bullying Prevention Association

¹ As the participants were all principals at Best County School District, in order to protect the privacy of the individuals, the author is using the pseudonym of Best County School District in his vita in lieu of the name and location of the actual school district.

PRESENTATIONS:

(2014). *Addressing School Bullying: Things You Should Know.*

Presentation at the Youth Issues Summit, Callaway Gardens, Georgia; Auburn University Anti Bullying Summit, Peachtree City, and Georgia; Georgia School Safety Conference, Athens, Georgia.

(2012). *Improving Student Attendance.*

Presentation at Georgia School Social Worker Conference, St. Simons Island, Georgia.

RECOGNITIONS:

Most Outstanding Educational Leadership Ph.D. Student – Georgia State University

School-Based Leader Honoree – Auburn University Anti-Bullying Summit

ADDRESSING BULLYING IN SCHOOLS:
THE PERCEPTIONS, THOUGHTS AND BELIEFS OF MIDDLE-SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

by

Quentin Fretwell

Under the Direction of Dr. Joyce E. Many

ABSTRACT

Bullying in schools is a major problem that can greatly impact the academic achievement and overall well-being of students. It also continues to present public relations and legal challenges for local schools and school districts. There is no real argument that it is a significant concern that must be swiftly addressed.

Middle-school principals who participated in my study were asked to define bullying. Subsequently, they suggest that the term be further clarified to reduce misuse and/or overuse of the word by students, parents and other stakeholders. The principals strongly felt that they could effectively address student bullying and had a high perception of their own self-efficacy. They reported several factors contributing to this perception, including training, their district's strong stance on bullying, adoption of a written policy, procedures and guidelines, personal experiences and a desire to help the students in their care. On the other hand, study participants felt strongly that they have and can reduce school bullying; but, not eradicate it.

Of particular interest was the principals' thoughts on cyberbullying. They indicated that this area of bullying was particularly problematic. It seemed to form the basis for much of the fights that occurred and it was something that had increased over the years. Additionally, they posited that this component of bullying seems to involve mostly female students. Of particular concern to these principals was what happened at school when all parties returned to school after an online clash. Many of the disputes they addressed in school began with online issues.

On the subject of actually addressing bullying in schools, principals stated that having the district take a substantial stance on the issue and having district-level guidelines in place positively affected their efforts. Moreover, the guidelines, in concert with the policy, district campaign and the *Code of Student Conduct* provided several tools to address bullying in a proactive, preventive and responsive manner.

Index Words: Bullying, Perceptions, Discipline, Code of student conduct, Self-efficacy

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by
Quentin Fretwell

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to several people: my wonderful wife, Cosandra H. Fretwell, my love and an inspiration for me in all I have ever accomplished; my daughter, Mary E. (Baby Girl) Fretwell, my first born and daddy's girl for whom I pray that she realizes all of her dreams; my son, John D. (JD) Fretwell, who is following in the steps of his father and grandfather; my granddaughter, Sasha S. Fretwell, who makes you happy in her presence; my mother, Carrie M. Benton, who spared no effort to support my dreams; and my dad, a good man who has been an inspiration to me.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This is a day in the school life of a student. During class, comments were made about his hair, clothes, weight and/or glasses. While walking down the stairs to the gym locker rooms, he endured having older students thump his head, pinch or poke at him repeatedly. In gym class, he was the last person picked for a team or not picked at all. After gym class, students had to shower and he would wait until the other students were finished to avoid being teased. When riding the bus on trips, he was not allowed to sit in certain seats and had to take that humiliating walk back to the front of the bus. However, teachers recognized and promoted his strengths, which built his self-esteem and gave him a sense of worth.

The somewhat short, heavysset, glasses-wearing grade-school student in the story above was not a tremendous athlete or in the high tiers of popularity. He faced many challenges at home and school, which included many instances of bullying like those described in this story. He had to endure having his head “thumped” by others in the crowd, not being allowed to sit in certain places in the cafeteria or on the school bus during a trip, being called names, teased and other actions of harassment. He also had a strong desire to rise from humble beginnings and go to college. How did this child make it through the pain of being bullied? How did he realize his dream of going to college and having a better life in adulthood?

Bullying and Its Impact

Well, the student described above is me. As a child, I encountered and endured many instances of bullying, and I was not alone. This scenario could describe any number of readers of this work. Some of you, when the subject of bullying is mentioned, begin a journey down memory lane that may not include happy memories. My personal experiences, both as a child

and later as a school administrator are the primary rationales for addressing this issue. Subsequently, I have explored the literature and found that previous research has both documented the prevalence of bullying and the fact bullying can have serious negative implications for the victim as well as the bully (Georgia Department of Education, 2009; Nansel, Overpeck, Pilla, Ruan, Simons-Morton, & Scheidt, 2001; Neiman, 2011; StopBullying.gov, 2014; Olweus, 1978). The consequences of bullying can manifest immediately and can continue to affect the bully and the victim well into adulthood. Victims may become depressed, have substance abuse problems and/or have difficulties with relationships. Nansel et al. in their review of research of long-term consequences of bullying stated adults who were bullied “were found to have higher levels of depression and poorer self-esteem” (p. 2099). Olweus (1978) reported “whipping boys” (victims of bullying) exhibit anxiety and internal conflict in adult social situations (pp. 117, 167). Moreover, if they were further harassed as adults, it was just an extension of what happened in the past and confirms their shortcomings. As an example of this, as an assistant principal earlier in my career, I had students attempt to “bully” me. This premise was supported by Espelage, Aderman, Brown, Jones, Lane, McMahon, Reddy and Reynolds (2013) in their discussion and recommendations on understanding and preventing violence against teachers. Although I was able to deal with it publicly and privately, I felt like the same young high-school boy described above.

Of all of the physical, social and emotional consequences resulting from being bullied, a great concern is one of suicide (Litwiller & Brausch, 2013). Public outcry relative to recent reports of young people committing suicide, among other serious consequences, because they were bullied pushed lawmakers, school officials, parents and other stakeholders to take action (Stuart-Cassel, Bell & Springer, 2011). While this response was important and timely, suicides

alleged to be a result of bullying were not a recent phenomenon. Olweus (1993) and Smith, Pepler and Rigby (2004) cited the 1983 suicides of three Norway boys that occurred in a short time span of each other as reflective of the severe impact of bullying.

Relative to those who perpetrate bullying behavior, there is also evidence to suggest that bullies themselves realize emotional and social problems in adulthood. Not only are they prone to fight regularly, commit vandalism, steal, use drugs and alcohol and demonstrate other negative behaviors, their misconduct continues beyond their school years (Nansel et al., 2003; Olweus, 1993; Wang & Iannotti, 2012). Olweus (1993) noted in one study that by the age of 24, 60% of 6-9 graders, who had been involved in bullying incidents, had at least one criminal conviction. Earlier research also indicated bullies exhibit many types of socio-emotional and behavioral problems in adulthood (Olweus, 1978). These concerns include poor social adjustment, psychiatric problems, divorce, social isolation, diminished professional success and possibly transference of their adjustment issues to their children.

Bullying's Relation to School Violence

No discourse of the consequences of bullying would be complete without reminding readers of the findings of research from the U.S. Secret Service (2002) relative to school shootings. In this summary of the 2000 study by the National Threat Assessment Center (NTAC), 37 school shootings were studied. The 47 students involved in these attacks did not commit random acts of violence. Their actions were deliberate, planned and purposeful. All aspects of the incidents were reviewed, including school information and court and medical records. Researchers found that “in a number of cases [of school shootings], bullying played a key role in the decision to attack” (p. 14). Records and interviews revealed that the attackers experienced bullying and harassment that was “longstanding and severe” (p. 14). Because of the significant role bullying

played in a number of these incidents, this provides the strong support for continued efforts to mitigate and even eradicate bullying in schools.

Interestingly, Nansel, Overpeck, Haynie, Ruan and Scheidt (2003) found relationships between bullying and violence that seems to suggest a rationale for the above NTAC information. Not only did they find a significant correlation between bullying and subsequent involvement in violence, the relationship was even stronger with the bullies, as opposed to the targets of bullying. Moreover, this relationship increased proportionately with bullying that occurred in locations with little adult supervision and more anonymity, especially away from school. Nansel et al. (2003) posited a direct association with off-campus bullying and carrying weapons at school. This finding may have been related to targets bringing weapons as a reaction to being bullied or may reflect that bullies bring weapons to school as an extension to their off-campus behavior. Either premise supports the need for ensuring that intervention efforts include community training and involvement.

Background of the Problem

Is there actually a bullying problem? If there is, how pervasive is the problem? Early data reported by Olweus (1993) indicated, in Norwegian primary and junior high schools, 15 percent of the 84,000 students studied were caught up in bullying/victim situations. Stated differently, this represents one in seven students. Moreover, 9% of them were victims and 7% bullies. In the United States of America, the 2009 Georgia Student Health Survey (Georgia Department of Education, 2009) shows that 38% of Georgia's 6th graders and 31% of 8th graders shared being picked on or teased in the past 30 days. Twenty-three percent of 6th graders and 17% of 8th graders reported being bullied. The 2009-2010 School Crime and Safety Survey from the National Center for Education Statistics (Neiman, 2011) detailed various violence, discipline and

safety issues across several school characteristics (e.g., grade level, enrollment size, urbanicity and percent white enrollment). The survey gathered responses from principals who indicated that, as a category, schools reporting bullying problems occurred in greater percentages with respect to particular school characteristics. Interestingly, these percentages seemed to peak in middle schools and increased in concert with enrollment size. In a study conducted by Nansel et al. (2001), 19.4 % of the 15,686 student sample size in grades 6 through 10 admitted to bullying others at least *sometimes*. Similarly, 16.9% of these students stated that they have been bullied at least *sometimes*. As demonstrated previously, this study also found a peak in bullying frequency in middle grades (grades 6-8). Also, males bullied and were bullied more than females.

Cyberbullying

Any discussion of bullying must include information on its *first cousin*, cyberbullying. Cyberbullying is a recent phenomenon to the harassment arena. Many an administrator can relate to having a parent barge into their office with Facebook or Twitter pages in their hand, demanding that something be done about a student cyberbullying their child. Snakenborg, Van Acker and Gable (2011), in consolidating information from available literature, defined “cyberbullying as the use of electronic forms of communication by an individual or group to engage repeatedly in sending or posting content about an individual or group that a reasonable person would deem cruel, vulgar, threatening embarrassing, harassing, frightening or harmful” (p. 90). Vanderbosch and Van Cleemput (2008) suggested there may be more appropriate terms for this phenomenon (e.g., electronic bullying, digital bullying). The National Center for Education Statistics 2009-2010 School Crime and Safety Survey (Neiman, 2011) indicated that 12.6% of the schools sampled in the study reported incidents of cyberbullying that occurred

weekly both in and out of school. Interestingly, per the data of this study, percentages increased with the white population was 80% and above and peaked with middle grades.

Cyberbullying has become the fastest growing issue relative to bullying. In fact, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) indicated that cyberbullying is a major public health concern (CDC, 2008). The CDC reported incidents of cyberbullying are increasing exponentially, with little regard for the consequences. School officials should clearly communicate the emotional and legal implications of this behavior and swiftly address incidents occurring at school and/or using school hardware or intranet. Although the well-being of students is a primary concern of school officials, addressing incidents of cyberbullying that occur away from school using a student's personal hardware could be constitutionally difficult. Schools that have attempted to apply some disciplinary action (suspension and expulsion) to these situations have faced parental opposition at times. Court decisions associated with these oppositions have been scattered. Basically, the prevailing sentiment has been that students have First Amendment rights and their right to an education should remain intact (Hinduja & Patchin, 2011). On the other hand, students making threats to the school and creating other circumstances which cause or could pose a significant disruption to the school can be disciplined.

Therefore, is bullying a problem? It would seem that, based on the data cited above, it is an issue. Nansel et al. (2001) posited their "study indicates that bullying is a serious problem for U.S. youth" (p. 2098). Banks (1997) stated "bullying is a serious problem that can dramatically affect the ability of students to progress academically and socially" (p. 4). Bullying, including all forms of cyberbullying, has significant physical, psychological, emotional and social effects on young people. Just based on the information provide above, there is a need to prevent, mitigate and even make every attempt to eradicate bullying in schools. But, what is the more

effective method of accomplishing these goals? Banks (1997) suggested the method to promote a safe learning environment of students involves a comprehensive intervention plan involving all stakeholders. Fretwell and Errion (2011) also posited that a comprehensive bullying awareness campaign has short and long-term positive effects on reducing bullying.

Law and Policy Development Related to Bullying and Harassment

In response to the public outcry to address this important issue, most states have created or revised their laws and/or policies relative to bullying and harassment. This, coupled with the known seriousness of the problem, has motivated federal, state and local law and policy makers to develop or revise statutes relative to bullying. In an analysis of state laws and policies addressing bullying, Limber and Small (2003) presented a summary of these laws and made recommendations for state and local legislators and education officials. Recommendations for state lawmakers included:

1. providing a precise definition of bullying which is consistent with research;
2. ensuring their legislation requires local school boards to develop bullying policies, with the involvement of stakeholders;
3. recommending those local policies include the adoption of research-based comprehensive bullying prevention programs;
4. ensuring local policies do not focus just on reporting;
5. ensuring local procedures implement graduated sanctions and interventions and discourage exclusion and zero tolerance policies and;
6. appropriating the necessary funds to support comprehensive bullying prevention programs.

Limber and Small (2003) then provided three recommendations for state departments of education by suggesting they:

1. develop model policies and provide technical assistance to local districts;
2. provide detailed research on bullying, prevention programs and program effectiveness and;
3. offer training for all school-based officials and volunteers.

Lastly, Limber and Small (2003) gave four recommendations for local boards of education and administrators which asks them to:

1. develop bullying policies consistent with state recommendations;
2. promote research-based bullying prevention programs;
3. seek entire staff training and;
4. make bullying prevention a component of comprehensive violence mitigation efforts.

Using the Limber and Small (2003) study as a jump-off point, Greene and Ross (2005) extended this analysis to an examination of the contribution of those laws to the reduction of bullying. Greene and Ross (2005) also examined international, federal and state civil rights laws relative harassment. In summary, they reported about the current bullying statutes that vary from state to state and, based on the research-based recommendations, most have identified weaknesses.

In 2011, this analysis of bullying laws and policies was further extended in a study submitted to the U.S. Department of Education (Stuart-Cassel, Bell & Springer, 2011). Since the time of Limber and Smalls' (2003) study, nearly all states had adopted laws and/or policies to address bullying. This analysis was requested in response to the first Federal Partners in Bullying

Prevention Summit that was held in August 2010. This summit brought various governmental and educational stakeholders together to strategize on methods to combat bullying. From this discussion, it was determined that more detailed information on current laws and policies was vital to the summit's work in helping schools. The summary of Stuart et al. (2011) analysis noted a few key points:

1. state bullying legislation has dramatically increased;
2. expansion and revision of existing legislation has increased;
3. some legislation has more key, research-based components than others;
4. cyberbullying has been addressed in many state statutes and;
5. most states have model policies and/or guidelines for local education agencies.

In response to public, educational and political outcries and mandates set forth in statutes, local school districts/schools are implementing policies and procedures to address bullying. Some schools have adopted various programs that have been created over the years since bullying has become an issue of serious concern, for example, Positive Behavior Supports, No Place for Hate, among others (Kueny & Zirkel, 2012).

One notable program involves the work of Dan Olweus (Olweus, 1993), who is considered to be a pioneer of bullying research. Subsequently, other schools/districts have chosen to adopt Positive Behavior Supports programs, which address bullying in the overall context of school violence and behavior. The inculcation of bullying into a comprehensive school violence initiative was one of the recommendations indicated above by Limber and Small (2003). Effective implementation of this systematic and tiered approach purports to help schools in realizing a significant reduction in the number of disciplinary referrals, suspensions and

instructional and administrative time lost to dealing with misbehavior (Simonsen, Sugai, & Negrón, 2008).

Greene and Ross (2005) posited that establishing laws and policies encourage school administrators to attend to the issue of bullying. However, they also stated having a law or policy in place does not necessarily result in enforcement. Why is this the case? If school administrators are to lead this effort to mitigate or eradicate bullying in schools, what issues, obstacles, problems and/or perceptions are hindering the flow from policy to practice? The answers to these questions may be acquired directly from school administrators. Greene and Ross (2005) seemed to suggest that enforcement of bullying laws, policies and procedures are not being fully carried out across the board. Furthermore, as stated earlier, state statutes vary across the United States, even though researchers (Limber & Small, 2003; Stuart et al., 2011) indicated some important components that need to be addressed to make the policies effective. If laws, policies and procedures relative to bullying are not implemented, the goal of eradication of this serious health concern is hampered.

Statement of the Problem

Anderson (2011) stated even with all of the various programs provided over the years, bullying has not only continued, but also evolved. Per the above discussions on laws and policies that have been developed to address this important issue, all would agree that what happens directly in the schoolhouse really matters. In other words, procedures or programs which have come about as a result of laws or policies must actually be translated into practice in the schools. As indicated above by Olweus (1993), adult involvement is key to school-based intervention. In general, principals and the school administration lead this effort by rallying support from all stakeholders. It does take a village to promote student success and school

administrators must embrace the need to address and prevent bullying, design the methods to implement policy, assemble the troops and begin the work. Factors related to administrators' perceptions, goal orientation and/or self-efficacy may all play a role in the effectiveness of school administrators' efforts to mitigate bullying.

Perception drives motivation and subsequent action. But, what is the origin of these perceptions? Edward Thorndike (1920) suggested a construct known as the halo effect, which states that person's judgments of others may be skewed based on their overall impressions. Foster and Ysseldyke (1976) used this concept to suggest that teachers' expectations of students were affected by the special education labels they are given. Moreover, these expectations continued to be held by the teachers, even when the actual behaviors were in conflict with the labels. Koenig and Jaswal (2011) went further to posit there is a reverse halo effect termed the devil effect, in which, negative thoughts, perceptions, experiences or actions color a person's general opinions. Administrators' experiences, perceptions, thoughts or past actions may potentially color their opinions on bullying and how they perceived their ability or self-efficacy to deal with it.

Administrators' effectiveness of addressing bullying may also be related to their self-efficacy. Bandura (1977) defined self-efficacy as the belief that one can perform a behavior successfully. In other words, when a person has something to accomplish, does he believe he has the ability to achieve that goal? Subsequently, a person's opinions on his own abilities inform his outcome expectations and whether he feels the tasks he has chosen and his performance of those tasks will lead to success. Self-efficacy greatly impacts peoples' responses to an issue, including what they select to do and the level of effort they take to perform those tasks. Bandura (1977) posited self-efficacy is great predictor of performance effectiveness.

A key factor of self-efficacy is locus of control. Bandura (1997) stated a person's perceived capabilities are regulated by his or her alleged control of events. In turn, the perceived self-efficacy affects human functioning, such as cognition, motivation and mood. Cognition involves a person's thought processes, aspirations, goal-setting, commitment and visualization of outcomes. In addition, a person's motivation may also be of consideration in terms of planning and expectations and goal attainment. Lastly, a person's emotional well-being can also be greatly impacted by high or low self-efficacy. When an individual is confronted with low self-efficacy they may experience stress, depression, a need to develop or apply coping skills and/or a need for threat management. Thus, tenets of social learning theory (Bandura, 1969) and social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1999) may be useful in understanding the degree to which administrators' self-efficacy may play in their perceptions, beliefs, and actions in addressing bullying.

Purpose of the Study

Bullying is prevalent in our society and has serious detrimental effects on students. Policies have been recommended to address this problem. Ultimately, the effectiveness of anti-bullying programs falls to the school administrators who are vitally important to preventing, reducing and eliminating bullying in schools. Administrators must lead the effort and provide the catalyst for action by teachers, parents and other stakeholders. However, administrators must believe in the importance of taking action and that they can make a difference. Olweus (1993) offered the following premise:

Adult involvement in counteracting bullying/victim problems is an essential general prerequisite to a school-based intervention program, and it is important that the adults do not view bullying as an inevitable part of children's lives. Also implied in this view is the

conviction that a great deal can be accomplished with relatively simple means. At the same time, I want to underscore the fact that increased knowledge of the problems and of suitable countermeasures is of major importance in obtaining good results (p. 67).

Swearer, Espelage, Vaillancourt and Hymel (2010) challenged the effectiveness of anti-bullying programs and offer some reasons for their ineffectiveness. Swearer, et al. (2010) posited, “most anti-bullying programs are not well grounded in a guiding theoretical framework that would inform program development and evaluation” (p. 42). If school administrators are to lead effective efforts to mitigate bullying in schools, the programs developed for these efforts must align with research on what drives their work. Swearer, et al. (2010) submitted there is a disconnect with the research and current educational practices relative to addressing student bullying and victimization.

Anti-bullying programs should be theoretically driven, including a focus on socio-ecological perspectives, individual/group influences and data review. However, Swearer, et al. (2010) and Cunningham, Vaillancourt, Rimas, Deal, Cunningham, Short and Chen (2009) indicated that educators seem reluctant to adopt these programs. Moreover, these educators tended to adopt programs that fellow educators believed were more effective than programs that are scientifically supported. My study sought to assist in a better understanding of this dilemma by providing data and findings on school administrators’ perceptions, thoughts and beliefs that inform how they address and prevent bullying in schools. Subsequently, anti-bullying program development could be modified and thereby increase success of implementation and effectiveness.

Rationale for the Study

Previous research focusing on administrators' perceptions of bullying has found that although bullying was touted as a major concern, there were disconnects in the frequency of intervention, who should be the key players in the efforts and belief in their abilities to address the matter, including effective communication with parents (Mishina, Pepler & Wiener 2006; Sprague, Smith & Stieber, 2002; Newgent, Lounsbery, Keller, Baker, Cavell & Boughfman 2009). Additionally, principal perceptions on the extent of bullying in their schools seemed to be aligned with their implementation of anti-bullying programs. The greater the perception of bullying the greater likelihood that a program would be employed (Dake, Price, Telljohann & Funk 2004; Flynt & Morton 2008).

Critical analysis of this body of literature indicated certain methodological trends in this research. First, research on administrator's perceptions has been primarily conducted using quantitative methodology. Use of this methodology, though informative, did not allow for deeper insight into administrator thoughts, values, prior learning, experiences and beliefs, which drove their perceptions and motivations (Bandura, 1969, 1977, 1999). Furthermore, the studies utilizing this methodology did not capture richer data that could be categorized into common themes. The revelation of these themes would provide a better understanding of administrators' commonality of issues that would inform program development and/or professional learning. Mishina, Pepler and Wiener (2006) posited their study was one of the first qualitative assessments of stakeholder perceptions of bullying. Findings of the research included the following points:

- Bullying is a major concern in the schoolhouse.
- Stakeholder perceptions differ significantly from each other.

- There is a need for professional development to increase skill sets relative to bullying prevention that will subsequently improve self-efficacy, particularly in communicating with parents.

A second methodological emphasis in the research focusing on administrators' perceptions related to bullying was the fact that previous studies had focused either (a) on administrators in general without specific attention to the level of schooling at which they served, or (b) on elementary level administrators. In light of this research-based reflection, there is a clear need for additional research focused specifically on middle-school principals. The National Center for Educational Statistics (2011) indicated that bullying involvement peaks to about 40% in middle-school, then decreases to 20% by 12th grade. In addition, Devoe, Peter, Noonan, Snyder and Baum (2005) and Neiman (2010) indicated that student bullying rates are higher with middle-school students. Furthermore, Neiman (2010) reported that the rate of violent incidents, including physical attacks, threats, robberies, etc., with or without weapons, were higher in middle schools. From students' perspective, other research has posited that students feel bullying peaks in middle-school (Unnever & Cornell, 2003). A 6,500 student survey conducted by Nolin, Davies and Chandler (1996) clearly indicated that rates of victimization, relative to bullying, are twice as high with middle-schoolers as opposed to high-school students. Based on this statistic, it seemed that a focus on middle-school principals could provide important information.

Gathering information at this grade level would certainly be invaluable to the academic and social wellbeing of these students and set the stage for their entrance into high school. Swearer, Espelage, Vaillancourt and Hymel (2010) shared varying negative effects bullying has on school children. Both the bully and the victim seem to suffer problems with academic achievement,

along with other socio-emotional and relational harms as a result of these incidents. Sprague, et al. (2002) indicate that 40% of middle and high school students report bullying and harassment negatively affect their academic and social performance in school. It is appropriate to gather information from all grade levels. Every child deserves to attend school in an environment free from bullying and harassment. However, the discussion above suggests that more work must be done on the grade level that has the greater prevalence of bullying and harassment. Some would say this is akin to the triage method of dealing with a problem. Additionally, studying and making a subsequent impact on the middle-school level, may have a trickle down and up effect on the other practices at the elementary and secondary levels as well.

Given the need for additional understanding of administrators' perceptions of bullying using a qualitative approach, the lack of information regarding middle-school principals' perceptions and the need for increased attention at the middle-school level, as well as the prevalence of bullying at that age, the focus of my study was to garner additional and richer insight into middle-school administrators' perceptions, thoughts, feelings and beliefs relative to addressing bullying in schools. The specific research questions guiding my study were:

1. What are school administrators' perceptions relative to their own self-efficacy or ability to mitigate/eradicate bullying in schools?
2. What factors informed their perceptions on bullying and their ability to address the issue?
3. How have federal, state and local laws, policies and procedures informed and affected school administrators in the way they address bullying?
4. In their own voice, how do these school administrators address and prevent school bullying?

Overview of the Study

To explore the questions above, my study involved a qualitative study of an urban-suburban school district. Through a purposeful sampling method, 17 middle-school principals were chosen, representing 2-3 from each region of the school district and one administrator from a district instructional center. This was accomplished through a request for volunteers via face-to-face contact. Each principal who participated was involved in a 45 minute to 1 hour formal interview (Yin, 1984). The focused interviews, however, were not closed-ended. Participants were also provided the opportunity to speak freely in a conversational type of interview environment. This allowed the administrator to flow with the session and allowed essential information to emerge. Interviews were recorded and transcribed. As themes in the data emerged, follow-up interviews and member checks were conducted. Several secondary data sources related to bullying procedures and schools' bullying incidents were also reviewed and discussed with the administrators as references to them arose during the formal interviews. Through this method, detailed information was garnered to provide insight about the perceptions, beliefs and opinions of school administrators that further enhances the surveys in previous studies. In analyzing the data, interviews were transcribed and coded for emerging themes and reoccurring subject matter using a constant-comparative approach (Thomas, 2011).

Limitations of the Study

It is fair to say that all studies, including this one, have limitations. In fact, study limitations can and should be expected. Stone (2011) supported this premise and suggested that much could be gained by being open to differences and that inquiry could be undertaken in more than one way. To this point, one limitation of my study was the involvement of one school district. A further limitation was the sample size. Understandably, information from one school district

and/or 17 middle-school principals could not be generalized to all educational systems or school-based administrators. However, the findings of my study could lay a foundation for program and professional development and a starting point for future inquiry.

Another possible limitation involves the non-utilization of statistical correlations. The school district used in my study was a diverse urban-suburban system with multiple racial, ethnic and socio-economic variations. The district was divided into regions and administrators were selected from each. Furthermore, while student bullying data were reviewed, these data were not associated with a particular administrator. My study sought to gather honest insight on the impact of bullying statutes, policies and procedures on school leaders, with the hope that this information would, in turn, be a catalyst for professional and personal reflection and professional learning. Although important for future inquiry, there was no attempt in my study to demonstrate a correlation with a particular school administrator's views and beliefs on bullying and whether or not the school was winning or losing the battle to address the issue. Additionally, there may be many other factors that contributed to the success or difficulty in their efforts, which is beyond the scope of my study. In turn, it was my belief the effort to correlate schools and the views of the administrator would be counter-productive at this time and stifle honest and truthful sharing.

Additionally, it should be noted that my study was limited to data from middle-school administrators, not parents, students, staff members or other stakeholders. Moreover, it did not seek to delve deeply into the workings of one school. Again, the intent of the study was to acquire insight into the thoughts, beliefs, and perceptions of the school leaders, who must communicate the importance of addressing bullying to all stakeholders and provide the leadership and program to accomplish the task.

An additional limitation to be noted is that I was a previous colleague with the very administrators interviewed. I wrote the district policy, regulations and other procedures related to bullying and operated as a resource for the schools, prior to retiring. Having worked in the office that handles student hearings, student placement and student discipline, while in the system I was often the *go-to* person to answer questions related to bullying and related fields. With this depth of knowledge and experience, I had to consciously *check* my subjectivities at the door and later reflect on how I conducted the interviews and asked questions. Consequently, I had to consider whether this relationship might have clouded the participants' perceptions, thoughts, beliefs and actions and cause them to respond based on what I would have liked for them to answer? This was a significant issue that I worked to address specifically and it remained at the forefront of my reflection throughout the research period.

Significance of the Study

Studies on the perceptions of administrators, to this point, have emphasized data collected from surveys or questionnaires (Flynt & Morton, 2008; Harris & Hathorn, 2006; Kennedy, Russom, & Kevorkian, 2012). Astor, Meyer and Bebre (1999) and Mishna, Pepler and Wiener (2006) suggested school administrators are not usually included in school violence research. Moreover, Mitchell and Borg (2013) indicated,

“...empirical research [on bullying] tended to draw from quantitative (and in some cases – mixed methods) data derived from students, parents or teachers using primarily self-reporting instruments, and dependent of definitions that varied in perception. Overall, there were fewer instances where the social ecology of schools was considered in collecting ‘rich’ data on the lived experiences of all stakeholders” (pp. 151-152).

However, these persons, along with other support staff are vital to the discourse on school climate, perceptions and attitudes. Astor, et al. (1999) provided an opportunity for students, teachers, administrators and support staff to voice their theories and perspectives about the occurrence of violence in their schools. The study also received perceptions on the local school's response/non-response to incidents in various locations within the school. Although it was revealed that the most effective violence intervention method is adult presence and intervention, responses were sporadic and ineffective. What perceptions, thoughts and beliefs informed the decisions to delay or deny appropriate replies?

Unever and Cornell assessed "the nature and extent of student attitudes toward bullying" in middle schools (p. 5). In other words, they wanted to delve into the factors in the middle-school culture that either mitigate or reinforce bullying behavior in six middle schools. Studying middle school was significant in light of research by Nolin, Davies and Chandler (1996) that found students were victimized by bullying at twice the rate of high school students. In this study of 2437 students, they revealed a perception that other students rarely intervened in bullying incidents. Furthermore, this perception was similar to their beliefs about lack of teacher intervention. Additionally, some students felt comfortable joining in with the bullying behavior and empathy for the victim of bullying was not overwhelming. Therefore, it was evident that a "culture of bullying was pervasive across the six middle schools" (p. 16). A whole-school, whole-student approach was recommended in order to change the culture of the schools.

In a study by Kennedy, Russom and Kevorkian (2012), data were gathered on teacher and administrator perceptions of bullying. One hundred and thirty-nine participants in an educational conference were surveyed. Interestingly, although both groups felt strongly that bullying prevention training should be a part of the school curriculum, teachers and administrators

differed in their perceptions of the role of educators, the need for increased bullying prevention training, their own self-efficacy. The findings suggested that administrators feel teachers are not extremely important in the endeavor to handling bullying in schools. Moreover, teachers seemed to have a deeper longing and interest in more bullying prevention instruction than the administrators.

The significance of my study was to conduct in-depth analysis of data drawn from extensive interviews with middle-school principals to bring additional context to the findings from previous research acquired through quantitative methods. This qualitative effort allowed these administrators to expound on their thoughts, opinions and values relative to bullying. They were able to inform the interviewer on their perceptions of bullying and beliefs on their ability to address the issue. Moreover, the nature of interviewing allowed for questions to flow with responses and provided the opportunity to reveal additional information that may have not be revealed in surveys or questionnaires. The information gathered from my study will potentially be beneficial to professional development of educational leaders. More effective training modules could be developed by tailoring them to the responses of these administrators. Additionally, anti-bullying program developers could draw on new insights and subsequently make responsive revisions to anti-bullying programs to make them more effective. The ultimate goal is to mitigate, reduce and even eradicate bullying. My study will add to the body of knowledge with the purpose of assisting in this ultimate goal and help students to reach academic, social, and emotional success.

Definition of Terms

Bullying – A form of youth violence in which the target is harassed or attacked verbally, physically, emotionally and/or socially. Bullying involves an imbalance of power that is generally repeated over time (Olweus, 1993; Sherer & Nickerson, 2010).

Cyberbullying – Bullying that occurs through electronic means. This concept generally includes, but is not limited to, harassment or threats via social networks, the posting of demeaning pictures or words on websites or inappropriate texting/instant messaging (Hinduja & Patchin, 2011).

Self-Efficacy – A person's level of confidence that he or she can accomplish a particular task or goal (Bandura, 1977).

Administrators – School-based principals and assistant principals.

Laws – Statutes created or revised by federal or state legislators.

Policies – Regulations developed and adopted by state and local boards of education.

Model Policies – State-level documents developed by state departments of education to act as guide for the development of policies to be developed and adopted by local boards of education.

The development of model policies is usually mandated by state laws.

Procedures – A set of rules, regulations and/or actions, promulgated by the superintendent or designee, to be conducted by school officials. In most cases, procedures are based on laws and/or policies; however, they may not have companion statutes.

Summary

Events of bullying like the one described in the introduction are common in schools around the world. Needless to say, victims of bullying can go on to have positive lives. Although I was bullied, I did finish school, graduated from college and had a long successful career in public education, just like many others who experienced such events. As indicated by Olweus (1993),

adult intervention is vital to addressing bullying. This is what happened in my case. Adults took an interest in me and highlighted my strengths and assisted me in my weaknesses. Supervision was always in place and my esteem began to increase. Since that time, I have achieved many great things. However, there are certain times when I feel somewhat like that little target of the old days. This is the extent of my feelings; but, there are other targets of bullying who are not handling their past very well. Also, there are perpetrators who are also not handling their past well.

Bullying causes significant problems and has long-term effects for both the victim and the bully. School administrators must lead the way to building awareness with all stakeholders and addressing this issue daily in school. However, if perceptions, thoughts, feelings and beliefs of these administrators drive motivation and goal attainment on this issue, we must probe deeper in order to ensure that programs and training are aligned and effective. The next chapter will take a deeper look at the literature relative to bullying laws, policies and research with administrators. It will also explore Bandura's theories of self-efficacy, social cognitive theory, social learning theory and related topics through the lens of bullying and administrative perceptions and responses.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Part One: Bullying in Schools

There is a great deal of current research on bullying (Wang & Iannotti, 2012). Among a few others, it is the ‘topic de jour’ in education. However, this did not minimize the importance of helping children and making every effort to mitigate, even eradicate bullying in schools. Bullying and other forms of harassment hurt students, hinder their academic/socio-emotional progress, affect school climate and are detrimental to the larger social order as a whole. Bullying has been recognized as a major health concern and has resulted in several very serious consequences. I sought to assist in this noble effort to address this issue by extending research on the thoughts, perceptions and beliefs of school administrators, who are primary players in leading the endeavor to address this problem.

The following chapter explored bullying, first from a historical perspective and then described the types of bullying, definitions, types of victims and other related information. Next, I looked at suggested causes of student aggression and strategies for mitigating bullying incidents. Furthermore, I undertook a review of research and information of federal guidelines, state bullying laws and regulations and state department of education model policy development. Lastly, the final section I discussed the tenets of theoretical frameworks used in my study to help understand issues related to administrators’ self-efficacy and motivation. Interspersed in my discussion of this work, I integrated my own reflections drawn from my personal and professional experiences. This information laid a foundation for my study of middle-school administrators and their perceptions, values, beliefs and abilities relative to addressing bullying in their schools.

A Historical Perspective of Bullying

To fully comprehend the scope of the issue of bullying and the need for my study, an understanding of the history of the bullying was important. No discourse on bullying research could begin without a reference to Dr. Dan Olweus. His work was also cited in many writings and strategies on the subject. His work on bullying began in 1969 with a paper entitled *Prediction of aggression: On the basis of a projective test*. He then received an award for his work on bullies and whipping boys and a paper entitled *Personality and aggression* (1972). The term aggression, was very closely related to the discussion of school bullying. Dr. Olweus' work lead us to his early book on bullying entitled *Aggression in Schools* (Olweus, 1978). He began by explaining why the reports in this book were published prior to the completion of a more comprehensive study. Dr. Olweus believed there was a need for urgency because of the absence of any real study of the problem.

The word used for bullying in Scandinavia is *mobbing*. This English term originally referred to a large group of persons who had a common interest and pursued a common activity. Konrad Lorenz (1966) used the term in the discussion of animal behaviors such as feeding frenzies and defense against a larger predator. In Sweden, Peter-Paul Heinemann (1972) brought familiarity of the term to the public, using it in connection with Lorenz's discussion of animal behavior. Although Heinemann did not clearly define the term, he basically associated 'mobbing' with small, loosely-knit groups who committed various violent acts against an individual student with an alleged deviance (e.g., fat, different dialect, physical defect, etc.). During that period of time, Olweus embraced the word mobbing in his early work (1973) with some differences. He felt that consideration should also be given to the actions of individual members of the group. In other words, the mobbing behavior may be perpetrated by an individual person. However, that

person may have only done it in response to a group dynamic. And, if a small or large group does mob an individual, different members committed the violation on varying levels. This seemed akin to Olweus' information on the *Bullying Circle*. In the *Circle*, you have the main perpetrator, those who did not plan the incident, but become involved and others that incite/egg-on/encourage the perpetrators.

Olweus indicated there were two primary goals to be achieved based on his study. One was the significant limitation or eradication of bullying and two, the development of positive peer relationships whereby bullies and victims could coexist in harmony and peace. In the 1973 study Olweus also recognized that teacher intervention to limit bullying incidents was minimal. Therefore, Olweus suggested that adult supervision is extremely important in the reduction of bullying incidents. To achieve the goal of limiting the behavior, clear statements and active intervention by parents and school employees must occur. This could have a 'stigmatizing effect' on peers. Adults needed to state that bullying was not the norm and needed to stop. Furthermore, Olweus posited that it is important to step up school/home contact. The partnership between parent, community and the school must be strengthened. Building a positive school and home environment for the child could increase the likelihood of an adjusted student. These strategies were still major considerations in current bullying literature.

From this early work, with contributions from Heinemann, Olweus published the book *Bullying at School – What we know and what we can do* (1993). Here, he continued the use of the term *mobbing* and provided an overview of bullying, its causes, and mitigating strategies to address this phenomena. In the section below, we will discuss Olweus' contributions to the field's understanding of bullying and bullying programs, and then review the research examining the effectiveness of bullying programs.

The Topic of Bullying

“Bullying is now recognized as a widespread and often neglected problem in schools around the world” (Swearer, Espelage, Vaillancourt & Hymel, 2010, p. 38). They also suggested that defining bullying is problematic and affects assessment efforts. Olweus (1993) defined bullying or victimization as a student being repeatedly exposed to negative actions by one or more students over time. However, he recognized that bullying can also involve a single serious act of aggression, which although not repeated, still exposes the victim to intentional negative actions and an imbalance of power. Olweus’ definition of bullying did not, however, include occasional, one time, minor incidents or circumstances of mutual conflict. Olweus (1993) bifurcated bullying into two types, direct and indirect. Direct bullying involved face-to-face verbal and/or physical attacks. Conversely, indirect bullying included social isolation or exclusion. The federal bullying website, <http://www.stopbullying.gov> (Retrieved 2014), is managed by the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services. The partners of this site defined bullying as, “unwanted, aggressive behavior among school-aged children that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. The behavior is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time. Both kids who are bullied and who bully others may have serious, lasting problems” (<http://www.stopbullying.gov>) (Retrieved 2014).

Victims of bullying also fell into two categories, passive/submissive and provocative. Passive/submissive victims of bullying communicate to others that they are insecure and timid and will not defend themselves when harassed. They are characterized as being physically weak, nonassertive and sensitive. Moreover, boy victims seemed to be extremely attached to their mother. Olweus (1993) posited that external *deviations* play a less significant role in a bully’s choice of victims. However, Espelage and Swearer (2003) suggested that bully/victim behaviors

cannot be categorized into fixed, dyadic terms. In other words, this bully/victim interplay was actually dynamic, in which a student could be a bully at one point, victim the next, then a bystander. In fact, Espelage and Swearer (2003) referred to the belief that the bully/victim being static was a bias. Would this have some impact on how school administrators view and address bullying?

Suggested Bullying Causality and Mitigation Strategies

Olweus (1993) identified four child-rearing or childhood factors that could provide a causal relationship with student aggression and bullying, parents' basic emotional state, parent permissiveness, power-assertive child-rearing methods and the child's temperament. These factors briefly stepped in the direction of my research question. However, this discourse fell short in discussing the impact of intervention in this area. Furthermore, Olweus seemed to dismiss other factors that may have an impact on reinforcing bullying. He did mention them, such as parent's education level, socioeconomic issues, home environment, etc. Although he called the four factors, major trends, the additional factors listed above could be significant to an individual or small group of students.

Olweus also suggested that aggression has a group dynamic. Children and adults may act out more aggressively after another person models it. He called this effect "social contagion" (pp. 43-44). In this mechanism, a person who would not normally bully someone witnesses the model being rewarded for his/her aggression with limited consequences. The witness' inhibitions and view of responsibility are weakened in response to the mob mentality. Ultimately, the perception of the victim's worth is degraded to the point that they feel the victim deserves to be harassed. Again, this scenario provided concrete evidence that immediate teacher,

staff, parent and community supervision and intervention are key factors in the reduction and possible elimination of bullying in schools.

Based on the results of his research, Olweus suggested some strategies to be included in a bullying intervention program. First of all, goals must be created to set direction and communicate a clear message against bullying. Next, all adults should be involved in a campaign of awareness and involvement. Not only should adults understand the extent of the problem, they should also be engaged and demonstrate a high level of seriousness about the reduction of bullying. Various methods should be used to engage parents and the community. At the schoolhouse, school officials must create student awareness through some type of recognition day. From that point, the adults in the school must provide adequate supervision and be prepared to quickly intervene when bullying is witnessed. Olweus (1993) mentioned the importance of a *contact telephone* for students to report bullying incidents without fear of being identified or retaliation. He also recommended that the work of eliminating bullying be ongoing with teachers being selected for a committee to meet regularly for this effort. This continuing work should also include ongoing contact with parents to assist them in working with their children.

Recent studies have sought to evaluate the effectiveness of anti-bullying programs, including the Olweus model. Swearer, et al. (2010) indicated that of 10 studies on school-wide anti-bullying programs, two evaluated the Olweus Bullying Prevention Programme and found contrasting results. One found a decrease in bullying and victimization and the other revealed an increase. On the other hand, they posited that school-wide programs were far more effective in decreasing bullying incidents than classroom approaches.

In the classroom, clear rules prohibiting bullying must be established. However the emphasis should be on prevention and providing praise to students who choose to behave appropriately. Teachers should also help students become engaged with school and build positive teacher-student relationships. Clear sanctions should be communicated if students choose to bully others. In addition, students should be directly involved in their own discussions and activities relative to bullying prevention. Lastly, bullies, victims and their parents should receive planned intervention, assistance and support.

In terms of awareness strategies, the American Psychological Association (APA) issued a Resolution on Bullying among Children and Youth in July 2004. The resolution lists the prevalence, effects and consequences of bullying and indicates the need for adult intervention. It also mandated that bullying prevention will be integrated into the APA's violence prevention activities and other associated events. Although designed to state a pledge to help in the reduction of bullying, the resolution also serves as an awareness vehicle to bring the issue to a larger audience.

Gubler and Croxall (2005) in their paper entitled "Reducing Bullying through Prevention" identified four contemporary reasons for bullying behavior. They included the ignoring of early signs by school officials, poor parenting, media influences and the lack of socio-emotional education. In terms of prevention, they cited the work of Olweus (Olweus, 1993). Prevention programs focus on pro-social activities, improving school climates and teaching acceptance, respect, tolerance and diversity. Gubler and Croxall (2005) suggested that school officials increase their knowledge base on the subject of bullying, adopt a school-wide anti-bullying policy and program and advocate for funding and legislation.

Piotrowski and Hoot (2008) provided information on what teachers should know and do about bullying and violence. They opened their work by stating “the greatest potential for stemming the tide of the global plague known as bullying lies in the actions of teachers heeding Dr. King’s words” (p. 357). Dr. King said, “He who passively accepts evil is as much involved in it as he who helps to perpetrate it.” (Piotrowski & Hoot, 2008, p. 357). Piotrowski and Hoot posited that to reduce bullying and violence in the classroom, the teacher must first be able to identify bullying by knowing its definition, characteristics and the behaviors of the bully-victim relationship. Secondly, attention must be given to the influences of media and exposure to others who commit bullying and violent acts. States should require bullying prevention programs in schools. School employees should also receive specific training in bullying and violence prevention. Piotrowski and Hoot (2008) suggested that the United States is a newcomer on the topic of bullying and needs to review the work conducted in other countries like Norway. Interestingly and different, Piotrowski and Hoot (2008) offered descriptions of several categories of bullies that can be grouped together into three major forms.

Physical bullying involves hurting another through physical contact. Emotional bullying involves non-verbal aggression such as social isolation and exclusion. Espelage and Swearer, (2003) and Crick and Grotpeter, (1995) suggested a new type of bullying – relational aggression. This term, related to emotional bullying describes students harming others through the intentional manipulation and damage of relationships. Crick and Grotpeter (1995) posited that this form of bullying is mostly committed by girls. Conversely, acts of direct or physical bullying generally involve male perpetrators. Lastly, verbal bullying comprises hurtful words or encouraging others not to talk with a particular student. There are strategies teachers could use to reduce bullying in the classroom. Most importantly, teachers must establish and communicate

clear rules and consequences on the behavior. Furthermore, assistance and support should be given to the bully, the victim and their parents. Additionally, bystanders should be trained on how to respond if they witness bullying in order to eliminate the reinforcement factor.

Newman-Carlson and Horne (2004) proposed a psychoeducational approach to bullying reduction. Students reported that teachers are unlikely to consistently intervene in incidents of bullying. Teacher intervention continues to be cited as an important strategy to mitigating bullying behavior. Teachers were trained in seven modules of the Bullying Busters intervention program.

1. Increasing Awareness of Bullying
2. Recognizing the Bully
3. Recognizing the Victim
4. Taking Charge: Intervention for Bullying Behavior
5. Assisting Victims: Recommendations and Interventions
6. The Role of Prevention
7. Relaxation and Coping Skills

The program also looked at teacher self-efficacy in terms of how the training affected their knowledge and use of bullying intervention skills and the reduction of bullying. In conclusion, not only did the training make the teachers feel more efficacious, it also caused a significant reduction in bullying behavior.

Bucher and Manning (2003) offered suggestions for promoting safe schools. The first suggestion proposed that school officials review school conditions like overcrowding and poor supervision. It also suggested that the community dynamics and negative messages in the schoolhouse be evaluated. The second suggestion involved the promotion of a positive school

climate where everyone is civil, trusted and respected. High expectations are set and students are taught how to behave. The third suggestion embraced the review of the physical plant design and the use of uniformed school police in promoting school safety. The next suggestion called for the identification of the early warning signs of violence. These warning signs include emotional and behavioral indicators and can be subtle or blatant. The fifth suggestion comprised the writing of safe school plans and other safety materials. The sixth suggestion called for “collaborative conversations” (p. 162). School safety must be a collaborative effort involving administrators, teachers, staff, students, parents, appropriate agencies and other members of the community. Behavioral plans should be developed to resolve problems rather than just to react to them when they surface. The seventh suggestion involved a discussion of zero-tolerance policies. The authors of this work qualify their discussion by stating that school officials should build on zero-tolerance, but use them solely to mitigate school problems or rid the school of problem students. Finally, the last suggestion promoted the implementation of conflict resolution programs such as peer mediation and others. This implementation can support involvement by the entire school, especially the students.

Piotrowski and Hoot (2008) posited a slightly different perspective on the subject of bullying. They operationally defined bullying similarly to other researchers as aggressive behavior that is harmful and distressful to others that imbalances the power dynamics and it repeated over time. Piotrowski and Hoot further suggested that this aggression promotes a feeling of satisfaction in the bully and perpetuates the previously mentioned *Bullying Circle* coined by Olweus. They contended that bullying can be reduced or eliminated altogether, which may not be the sentiment of many school officials. Furthermore, they suggested teachers should be able to identify bullies, even before they violate the rules.

Bullying in the middle school is of a particular concern. Unnever and Cornell (2003) performed a study under the premise of a 1996 study conducted by Nolin, Davies and Chandler. A survey of 6,500 students revealed that bullying rates are twice as high in middle school. Unnever and Cornell (2003) sought to “assess the nature and extent of student attitudes toward bullying” (p. 5). Their study extends prior research on how school climate supports bullying and the link of anger and aggressive attitudes to bullying behavior. Students from the six middle schools, grades six, seven and eight in Roanoke, VA, were asked to complete a survey. Non-white students comprised 40% of the sample, 49.8% were on free or reduced school meals and 48.9% were male. Additionally, 19.6% of the total student population received special education services and in 1999-2000, the middle school dropout rate was 1.9%. All students were eligible to complete the survey on the date of administration. Of the total middle school enrollment of 3038 students, 2472 or 81% completed the survey. Thirty-one surveys were dropped from analysis due to inaccuracies.

The survey instrument consisted of five questions, which were designed to evaluate any possible culture of bullying. The participants were asked to respond to the following questions based on a Likert-scale of 0-4:

1. How often do other students try to put a stop to it when a student is being bullied at school?
2. How often do the teachers or other adults at school try to put a stop to it when a student is being bullied at school?
3. When you see a student your age being bullied at school, what do you feel or think?
4. Do you think you could join in bullying a student whom you didn't like?

5. Overall, how much do you think your teachers have done to counteract bullying since school started in August?

Demographic information relative to gender, SES, race and grade level was requested.

Moreover, five items were used to evaluate viewpoints on aggression and four were used to measure anger. Results were analyzed using quantitative methods. Study results reveal the existence of culture in which bullying is supported and encouraged. The students felt that neither teachers nor other students would intervene when bullying occurs. This shared belief created an environment of newly defined norms. Hence, there was a perceived acceptance that bullying was a behavior that would not or could not be stopped. Consequently, this perceived culture had serious implications for all players of the bullying scenario. The bully believed that he can continue his behavior unhindered, without accountability or consequences. Victims feared that they would continue to be a target and there was no hope for help, resulting in incidents not being reported. Moreover, bystanders found themselves at a crossroads of several possible directions. They could choose to get involved in the bullying behavior, encourage it by responding in ways that reinforce the bully, turn a *deaf ear*, and choose not to report the incident to an adult.

This study implied that a transformation in the culture of the school must involve a whole-school approach which seeks to change the attitudes of the students. Modifying the mind-sets of students uncertain about how they feel relative to bullying may be significantly easier than the efforts with those who embrace the behavior. Whole-school approaches must also include components to address anger and aggression. This study found a significant link of anger and favorable attitudes toward aggression to bullying perceptions and actions. Therefore, school officials must address cognitive and affective characteristics of students. Unnever and Cornell

(2003) suggested that “it may be useful to investigate further how anger predisposes middle-school students to bullying, and whether they perceive bullying as a justified reaction to provocation or frustration by victims” (p. 21).

The findings of the above study were further supported by the American Educational Research Association (2013). Unless whole-school and whole-student approaches are taken, inaction and indifference can reinforce a school culture of bullying. This type of environment has serious implications for bullies, victims, bystanders and the school community at large. In a task force examination of bullying research, Espelage, et al. (2013) concluded the following actions:

- Create a living and dynamic school policy on bullying that all embrace;
- Provide training for students, staff and parents on creating common norms and ways to deal with bullying incidents;
- Emphasize the social and emotional mission of the school in communication with all constituents and integrate it into the curriculum;
- Create and maintain open lines of communication to report and respond to incidents;
- Facilitate opportunities for staff, students and parents to discuss the topic and its solutions across academic and social contexts;
- Address mental health needs linked to persistent or extreme bullying situations;
- Educate and involve parents and other community members in the identification of bullying behaviors and responses that reduce such behavior; and
- Establish clear and developmentally appropriate consequences for peer groups that encourage or instigate bullying behaviors (pp. 43-44).

Part Two: Bullying Laws, Policies and Regulations

One of the research questions of my study asked about the impact of bullying laws, policies and procedures have on school administrators. The following section seeks to review information and analyses of federal and state statutes. Subsequently, these regulations inform and transform state and local policies. The effectiveness and efficiency of these regulations can have a tremendous effect on school officials and may inform on how they address bullying in their schools.

Federal Guidelines

Currently, there are no federal laws or regulations relative to bullying. However, this does not indicate that there is no federal concern or involvement. To date, there have been three annual anti-bullying summits hosted by the U.S. Department of Education. These events have brought together various stakeholders and experts to discuss bullying concerns and possible strategies and solutions. Additionally, the Department of Education has published several electronic and hard-copy documents providing guidance to school officials, parents and other stakeholders. On December 2011, the Department commissioned an analysis of state bullying laws and policies (Stuart-Cassel, Bell, & Springer, 2011). This analysis not only reviewed all current state statutes, the authors also reviewed proposed legislation and suggested components and strategies for effective regulations.

Moreover, on October 26, 2010, the Department's Office of Civil Rights (Ali, 2010) issued a "Dear Colleague Letter" on harassment and bullying. Known for its civil rights investigations and enforcement relative to protected groups, the OCR also recommended that school officials dig deeper in addressing incidents of bullying. The OCR urges that, along with addressing the bullying incident, school administrators must also ensure that the incident at hand is not just an

example of a larger harassment problem in the schoolhouse. In other words, school officials should make sure that a hostile environment is not being created. For example, the school may address a situation in which a student is being bullied because of his disability. The OCR advises that the school leaders investigate further to determine whether or not there is more school-wide harassment of more students with disabilities. Maybe, after dealing with a student being bullied for being Hispanic, school personnel find that a group of students are continually harassing these students in the school. Failure to deal with the culture of harassment in this and similar scenarios could result in an OCR investigation and possible liability. Of even greater interest is the OCR's concern about protected groups. Most of us are familiar with the standard disclaimer stating there will be no discrimination practices based on race, color, sex, disability or national origin. The OCR states that additional groups must also be protected, even though they are not listed in the original list. These groups may include sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, etc. Schools must ensure that persons in these groups are also protected and that any school-wide harassment must be addressed or face possible sanctions. This takes dealing with incidents of bullying to another level.

In my study I examined the extent to which such information affects school administrators. I explored the extent to which documents such as the ones addressed above impact administrators' perceptions and how they address bullying incidents or if such information raises anxiety of school officials. These were important areas to investigate in my study.

State Laws

In 2005, Greene and Ross began an examination of state laws relative to student-on-student bullying and harassment. Their study reviewed the most current state laws and policies at that time. Current state/federal civil rights and international human rights covenants were also examined. At that time, 18 states adopted formal anti-bullying laws, which mandated the development of policies/procedures. Two states had adopted bullying policies. In this review, definitions, reporting requirements, training, program development, and enforcement were analyzed. Greene and Ross found variations in language and process among the various states; however, there were also similarities. Definitions of bullying were alike in the use of certain terminologies. Many of them included “components of the social science criteria: intention to harm, repetition and power imbalance” (p. 92). This review also determined that the term, power imbalance, was not used directly by any state at the time although the implication was made through the use of civil rights language which established classes and groups. To have power imbalance, there must be a distinction of a higher power against a perceived weaker power. Using civil rights language, making this distinction is less problematic when looking at race, color, religion, ethnicity and other similar groups. On the other hand, psychosocial dynamics, such as, socioeconomic status, perceived family issues, attractiveness and other even lesser than obvious characteristics make legally articulating the term, power imbalance, difficult.

Secondly, Greene and Ross (2005) examined reporting requirements and sanctions relative to bullying. Nearly all policies mandated that school personnel report bullying (witnessed, suspected, written, anonymous, etc.) to the principal or a designee. However, only four states required feedback to parents of the bully and victim and two called for victim aftercare. As it relates to sanctions, all but one of the state laws and policies reviewed requested local school

districts to “establish sanctions for verified acts of bullying” (p. 94). The next topic of review involved training and program development. Most of the twenty states analyzed mentioned the need for some form of employee on local policies or bullying prevention. Seven states were more specific in this regard by requiring training or the implementation of prevention programs to reduce bullying incidents. Lastly, Greene and Ross (2005) reviewed these laws and policies in respect to enforcement. Chiefly, most of the states in this study protected schools and personnel if they followed the established procedures on bullying mitigation. But, one state specifically provides for the withholding of state funds for districts that do not act in accordance with adopted anti-bullying laws.

Recently, the United States Department of Education commissioned an additional study (Stuart-Cassel, Bell, & Springer, 2011) of state bullying laws and policies, similar to the previously mentioned study by Greene and Ross (2005). However, review of both studies reveals one major difference. At the time of the 2005 Greene and Ross study, only 18 states had anti-bullying laws and two had adopted educational policies on the subject. In 2011, the number of states with anti-bullying laws expanded to 46 states. To explain the increased number of states adopting bullying laws, Rigby and Smith (2011) posit an expanded public awareness of the topic of bullying and its detrimental effects on children. Furthermore, they suggest that *traditional* forms of bullying may be actually decreasing, while newer forms (covert and cyberbullying) were on the rise. The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) indicates increases in recent years in the numbers of students reporting that they have been bullied. Moreover, several high-profile school shootings, suicides and other incidents with alleged ties to bullying have occurred since 2005. This increased public presentation of bullying gives the perception that bullying incidents have increased and pushed the state legislative/governmental

stakeholders to respond with development of anti-bullying laws and policies (Stuart-Cassel, Bell, & Springer, 2011).

The Executive Summary of the 2011 study stated that in August 2010, the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services convened a group of government officials, researchers, policy makers and educators to the first Federal Partners in Bullying Prevention Summit. The rationale for this summit was to address the growing concerns and issues relative to bullying and the well-being of students. The following questions were developed to address these issues:

- To what extent do states' bullying laws cover U.S. Department of Education-identified key legislative and policy components?
- To what extent do states' model bullying policies cover U.S. Department of Education-identified key legislative and policy components?
- To what extent do school districts' bullying policies cover U.S. Department of Education-identified school districts policy subcomponents?
- How are state laws translated into practice at the school level?

In this USDOE (2010) study, the 46 state laws and 20 select state policies on bullying were analyzed based on 11 identified components, which include:

1. Prohibition and Purpose Statement
2. Statement of Scope
3. Prohibited Behavior (Including cyberbullying)
4. Enumeration of Groups
5. Development and Implementation of Local Policies (Directives to districts to develop policies)

6. Review of Local Policies
7. Components of Local Policies (What components should be included in local policies)
8. Communications
9. Training and Prevention
10. Transparency and Monitoring
11. Right to Pursue Other Legal Remedies (Victims not precluded from seeking other legal remedies.)

This analysis found significant differences among states in attention to bullying, however, most states were making efforts to cover this expanding issue. Furthermore, the study found that local policies on bullying mirrored their state's legislation. In other words, the more expansive the state law on bullying, the more expansive the district policy. At the time of this review, only one state (Montana) had not adopted a law related to bullying (Hinduja & Patchin, 2013).

Subsequently, there was no reason to believe that there has been a drastic change in the above findings. This update only accounts for three more states and revisions are generally annual exercises.

Part Three: Stakeholder Perceptions of Bullying in Schools

One important stakeholder in schools with opinions about bullying are the students themselves. According to Banks (1997), students felt that adult intervention in response to bullying is infrequent, and ineffective. Students did not believe that adults will help. Moreover, because of this perception, the students felt that when adults do respond, the bullying would increase. They also indicated that bullying was not discussed very much in school. If students do not believe bullying will be addressed effectively, if at all, they will not be motivated to report the incident. Furthermore, this means school officials and parents will not be aware of

incidents, which may lead to a perception there is a limited prevalence of the issue (Limber, 2002). As a result, the bullying behavior continues or increases, leading to the emotional, social and criminal issues indicated earlier.

Waasdorp, Bradshaw and Duong (2011) discussed parents' perceptions of bullying, victimization and the school. They reported that parents respond to their children's victimization from bullying in various ways. They also found that parents' perceptions of school climate affected how often they would report or discuss the incident with the school officials. Waasdorp et al (2011) originally hypothesized a greater frequency of parental response if they felt the school climate was positive, believing that parental involvement contributed to this mindset. The parents believe the school is able to handle these matters and the need for them to even speak with their children was not necessary. On the contrary, Waasdorp et al (2011) found the response greater when the perception of the school climate was negative. Additionally, the frequency of incidents of direct and indirect forms of bullying affected the parents' perceptions of the school climate.

Teachers' perceptions of bullying in school play a significant role in their interventions. A study by Maunder, Harrop and Tattersall (2010) found that a number of the teachers had difficulty identifying indirect actions as bullying (e.g., emotional, relational, social isolation, cyberbullying, etc.), as opposed to direct actions (physical, verbal, theft, etc.). This inability to identify a wider scope of bullying translates into difficulty to help students define the construct and address it when the behaviors occur. Banks (1997) stated that school personnel may view bullying as a rite of passage and ignore the behavior until it escalates into physical aggression. Furthermore, Maunder et al (2010) suggested that children who do not understand what indirect bullying behaviors is, its consequences and effects, will be more comfortable with committing

the offenses. Teachers play a key role in how schools handle this issue. However, Cohn and Canter (2002) stated that 25% of teachers see nothing wrong with bullying and address only 4% of the bullying incidents. Couple this statement with the student perception relative to adult assistance and you find a significant area of concern on the state of bullying intervention in schools.

Administrators' Perceptions of Bullying

As previously stated, school-based interventions to reduce bullying must start with the school leadership. Just as perceptions of parents, students and teachers affect aspects of bullying intercession, what is the significance of perception when it comes to addressing this issue by school administrators? Similarly, school principals may perceive bullying to be something that kids must go through and not take it seriously (Banks, 1997). Kennedy, Russom and Kevorkian (2012) studied school administrators and posit that their perceptions of bullying are significantly different from teachers. In fact, the primary purpose of the study was to explore these differences and their implications on effectively addressing bullying, policy development and professional learning. Kennedy, et al. (2012) further implied “the few studies exploring teacher and administrator attitudes and perceptions of bullying and school violence have yielded mixed results” (p. 2).

For this quantitative study, 200 teachers and administrators at a leadership conference were asked to complete a 10-item bullying survey during their lunch break. This Likert-scale assessment instrument was completed by 139 participants, which consisted of 98 teachers and 41 administrators. The survey instrument assessed their perceptions of bullying in four areas:

1. The Role of Educators
2. Bullying in the School Curriculum

3. Bullying Prevention and Professional Development

4. Self-Efficacy

Both groups felt strongly that bullying prevention training should be a part of the school curriculum. However, teachers and administrators differed in their perceptions of the role of educators, the need for increased bullying prevention training, and their own self-efficacy. Specifically, teachers believed that educators must play a more significant role in bullying prevention. This suggested that administrators feel teachers are not extremely important in the endeavor to handling bullying in schools. In this study, both groups were interested in more training. However, teachers were stronger in their desire for increased training. Stated differently, teachers seemed to have a deeper longing and interest in more bullying prevention instruction than the administrators.

On the topic of self-efficacy, my study used this term to describe the participants' belief in their ability to address and prevent bullying in schools. Kennedy, et al. (2012) correlated this ability to an understanding of educator role in addressing bullying and their perceptions of their skill level. The study posited that educator ability and skills could be increased through the development of policies and procedures, which included a focus on effective communication. Moreover, the study suggested increased awareness, educator unity and transparency. Subsequently, programs, policies and procedures should be revised to meet these needs. My study posed similar and related questions on the perceptions of middle-school administrators and seeks to continue the effort of bringing about awareness, transparency and information. This will result in, as suggested by Kennedy, et al. (2012), informing program, policy, procedure and professional learning development and an increase in confidence and ability to address bullying.

Elementary principals in Alabama were surveyed on their perceptions of bullying relative to students with disabilities (Flynt & Morton, 2008). Although any mistreatment of students with identified disabilities is problematic; Flynt and Morton (2008) indicated that principals in the study viewed this form of bullying as a low-level concern and did not perceive it to be a major issue. Although the researchers assumed the combination of bullying and disabilities would elevate administrators' level of distress, this was not supported in the study. When bullying in such circumstances is considered of minor concern to administrators, one wonders about the motivation of administrators to address bullying with the general student population.

The purpose of a study by Mishna, Pepler and Wiener (2006) was to provide "one of the first assessments of bullying based on the perceptions of victimized and their parents, teachers and school administrators" (p. 255). Four public schools were selected on opposite ranges of the income spectrum, percentage of single parent families, higher education percentage, subsidized housing and immigration status. The selected schools were from a large Canadian district, which was described as being an urban in nature. Of those schools, 349 students in the 4th and 5th grades were invited to participate by completing a Safe School Questionnaire. Subsequently, 159 or 46 percent of the students actually participated. After obtaining parental consent, research assistants administered the questionnaire and a trained doctoral student and two Master of Social Work students facilitated 60-90 minute semi-structured interviews. Furthermore, 20 parents, 13 teachers, two vice-principals and four principals were also asked to participate in interviews. Results were reported both quantitatively and qualitatively.

The results of the study interviews revealed a pattern of difficulty in the way participants described bullying. Their characterizations seemed related to how they perceived a bullying event and then making a determination on whether or not the incident was actually bullying.

Subsequently, this perception would influence each person's response. Additionally, a majority of participants in this study recognized indirect bullying. However, "they repeatedly normalized and minimized the behaviors, thus overlooking nonphysical aggression" (p. 262). Specifically, a principal in the study stated that he typically dealt with physical bullying. Therefore, this statement suggested that his prior learning was with direct bullying and his inexperience with indirect types of bullying informed his perceptions of his ability and influenced his identification and response to incidents. As previously proposed by Kennedy, et al. (2012), there is a need to develop policies and procedures that include information on identifying and addressing various types of bullying.

Mishna, et al. (2006) suggested that a bullying designation is connected to the beliefs and attitudes of the educator, which includes principals. Furthermore, there is a need to examine attitudes toward bullying. This will inform the development of methods designed to assist these educators to increase their awareness of why they respond to bullying in a particular manner. Mishna, et al. (2006) found that most of the adults reported that they were the targets of bullying and further suggest that educators must address these beliefs and feelings, which are affecting their response to bullying situations. Moreover, it is posited that there is a need to clarify assumptions and misperceptions relative to bullying issues.

Sprague, Smith and Stieber (2002) surveyed principals in Oregon schools on their perceptions of school violence, which included bullying and harassment. The survey instrument used in this survey was also utilized in 1995 by Sprague, Colvin and Irvin (1995). They were asked to rate risk and protective factors and answer five open-ended questions. The survey questions were quantitatively analyzed and the open-ended questions were given percentages based on reoccurring answers. Sprague, et al. (2002) found that bullying and harassment

continued to be substantial concerns. In fact, there was an increase in the perception that bullying and harassment were key issues in Oregon schools. This study rated protective factors, which described methods to improve school climate. However, the study did not delve into factors that informed or affected implementation of the protective factors.

Astor, Meyer and Behre (1999) provided an opportunity for students, teachers, administrators and support staff to voice their theories and perspectives about the occurrence of violence in their schools. The study also received perceptions on the local school's response/non-response to incidents in various locations within the school. Although it was revealed that the most effective violence intervention method is adult presence and intervention, responses were sporadic and ineffective.

In a study on the perceptions of students, teachers, parents, school counselors and principals, Newgent, Lounsbery, Keller, Baker, Cavell and Boughfman (2009) conducted individual interviews with four elementary-school principals and counselors. They were asked whether or not they characterized bullying as a problem in their school and the frequency of their encounters with bullying behavior. Students, teachers and parents were given quantitative questionnaires. The researchers found, generally, the principals did not feel that bullying was a problem in their buildings. Moreover, educators, parents and students differed in their awareness and perceptions of the frequency of the various types of bullying behavior. The students believed that relational bullying was more prevalent. However, educators indicated verbal bullying as the number one violation. These discrepancies in beliefs impact reporting of the incidents and how effectively they are handled, if at all.

Flynt and Morton (2008) studied the perceptions of elementary-school principals relative to the bullying of students with disabilities. It should be noted that this study did not involve

middle-school administrators. A sample size of 75 elementary school principals completed an eight item questionnaire, which was analyzed quantitatively. As a result, Flynt and Morton (2008) found that the majority of the principals perceived that bullying was a minor problem in their schools. Furthermore, the vast majority of the respondents reported that students with disabilities were bullies at times and at other times, the victims. In addition, verbal bullying was more recognized by the administrators, with physical and relational bullying were cited by only six administrators. The administrators perceived bullying as a minor problem, but, felt that teachers needed training.

In a study by Dake, Price, Telljohann and Funk (2004), they selected 700 schools and mailed four-page questionnaires to the principals. Of the 700 surveys mailed, the researchers received 378 responses. The questionnaire contained items relative to anti-bullying activities when implementing the Norwegian Bullying Prevention Program. These activities included student surveys, the formation of a bullying prevention committee to facilitate anti-bullying efforts, identification of barriers that hindered progress and a conference for stakeholders. Furthermore, the questionnaire queried principals' perceptions about the status of bullying in elementary schools in the United States.

The study found that when principals perceived bullying to be of a greater extent, there was a greater likelihood that the program's activities would be implemented. However, when asked about their perceptions on the effectiveness of the program's 11 other activities, principals said that calling the parent was the most effective and stakeholder conference the least. Additionally, they perceived that post-bullying activities, environmental bullying prevention activities and improved supervision to be effective. This perception of effectiveness was noted to increase when they felt that bullying was increasing in the country's elementary schools and their own

schools and that violence was increasing in the neighborhood. It should be noted here that this study was basically quantitative in design. Moreover, Dake et al. (2004) posited that “no published study to date has investigated principals’ perceptions or practices regarding bullying preventions” (p. 383).

Part Four: Theoretical Framework

No matter what laws, policies and/or procedures relative to bullying are adopted, they have to be implemented by school officials. When these regulations are put into place, the feelings and beliefs of school administrators may shape the ways in which these policies are enforced. They must feel capable of implementing the statutes. They must receive, in their opinion, appropriate training. They should feel that the laws, policies or procedures are effective and not an imposition. They must have strong beliefs about bullying and their ability to make a difference. These and other similar points are key to the effective mitigation/eradication of bullying.

The points indicated above focused on the ability of school personnel, beginning with the administrators, to understand, digest, organize and implement the laws, policies and procedures relative to bullying. The potential effectiveness of their efforts was directly related to their beliefs, perceptions and feelings about bullying, changing student behavior, trust in supervisors, their own abilities and other related factors.

The primary factor impacting administrators’ motivation and self-efficacy involved Bandura’s (1969) social learning construct related to identification. He defined this as a process of a person patterning “his thoughts, feelings or actions after another person who serves as a model” (p. 214). Behavior is learned and/or modified through emulation of the model. Furthermore, the behavior is shaped by various variables, stimuli, consequences, and lack of consequences, values, customs and other factors presented in the settings. In terms of bullying,

the role models administrators perceive as competent may impact their motivation and actions toward bullying incidents. As stated previously, it is important for school officials to lead the effort in addressing bullying, implementing statutes and responding to reports. If administrators have learned that efforts to address bullying are misguided or will not result in desired outcomes, they may not be motivated to try.

Bandura (1999) also posited that behavior is not simply a result of external, observable stimuli causing human behaviors but rather, people are human/personal agents of their behavior, which includes interpersonal factors (cognitive, affective and biological events), patterns of behavior and environmental dynamics. Additionally, there is an integration of social-structural systems and human/personal agency, in which resulting behaviors are an amalgamation and bidirectional. This “multifaceted causal structure addresses both the development of competencies and the regulation of action” (p. 24). Applied to the context of my study, Bandura’s theory could help to explain the ways in which school administrators are the agents of their values, beliefs, feelings, self-efficacy, motivation and actions.

Bandura’s (1977) view of self-efficacy may also be useful in understanding administrators’ perceptions of their ability to address bullying in their schools. He posited that self-efficacy involves both efficacy and outcome expectations. An efficacy expectation is defined as “the conviction that one can successfully execute the behavior required to produce the outcome” (p. 193). Subsequently, an outcome expectation is “a person’s estimate that a given behavior will lead to certain outcomes” (p. 193).

Bandura (1977) indicated “people process, weigh, and integrate diverse sources of information concerning their capability, and they regulate their choice behavior and effort expenditure accordingly” (p. 212). In other words, they learn from these diverse sources, which

regulate their efforts. The focal point of this learning continues to be found with Bandura and his theory of social learning, particularly as it relates to identification (Bandura, 1969). In this view, behavior is a learned result of modeling (identification), not just from parental observations, but from a complex set of set of social observations and experiences that continue to shape conduct. Stated another way, I am and continue to be what I am because of “reinforcing events that may be externally applied, self-administered or vicariously experienced” (p. 255). Pivoting to school administrators, it would seem that their experiences may shape their opinions on their self-efficacy. This shaping, in turn, would seem to then influence their efforts to tackle the mission of bullying eradication and would possibly impact their belief in the outcomes. For example, there may be those who were taught early in life that bullying was the proverbial rite of passage and they needed to develop a tough skin, grin and bear it. Or, they needed to stand and fight. As time moved on, they may have encountered “veteran” administrators who held similar beliefs or had motivational issues.

Extending Bandura’s discussion of social cognitive theory, Salanova, Llorens and Schaufeli (2011) suggested a correlation between efficacy, job enthusiasm and work engagement. These seemed to operate in a cyclic nature, with each influencing the other positively or negatively. Specifically, increases in efficacy would stimulate gains in enthusiasm, which would positively affect engagement. Affirmative feelings of engagement would then impact efficacy, hence starting the cycle again. The result would be high motivation and the likelihood of achieving the desired outcomes. Conversely, low-level perceptions of efficacy would negatively affect enthusiasm, which would influence engagement. This would cause a downward spiral in each component, stifle motivation and hinder the possibility of achieving the desired goals. It would be easy to see how this work could affect school administrators in their efforts to address

bullying. Their feelings, thoughts, or beliefs relative to their own efficacy, enthusiasm, or engagement would determine their success or difficulty in the mitigation/eradication of bullying in their schools.

Summary

From the time public awareness began to rise on the topic of bullying, many studies, programs, guides, procedures, laws, policies, plans and other similar documents have been developed. This chapter focused the reader on basic tenets of bullying and set the arena for discussion on the impact of laws, policies and procedures on school administrators. Research in this chapter has highlighted studies on the analysis of federal guidelines, state statutes and policies. Furthermore, stakeholder perceptions of bullying were discussed. Additionally, there was discourse on administrator self-efficacy, motivation and social cognitive and learning theory, with emphasis on how these constructs affect administrators' ability to address bullying and harassment. Finally, I provided insight on the literature relative to social and psychological factors that may influence the feelings, beliefs, values and behavior of school administrators. These are the persons who must lead schools in the mitigation and eradication of bullying, for the sake of the children.

Olweus (1993), Fretwell and Errion (2011) and other researchers have concluded that efforts to address bullying must involve a comprehensive, whole school (school community) approach. Certainly, this work would not be conducted with fidelity or be successful without these leaders. Information is needed to help understand administrators' perceptions, thoughts and beliefs related to bullying and ways to address this serious issue. This information would potentially benefit the participants as well as other administrators who are reflecting on their own attitudes and practices. Moreover, this information would add to the body of knowledge and assist

program developers in providing revised training for school officials. As a result, training would be more effective and the congruency with the true sentiments of school leaders may create more buy-in and understanding. The next chapter will detail the method used to gather data from school administrators for my study.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

The goal of my study was to acquire insight directly from school administrators on their perceptions, thoughts, feelings and beliefs relative to addressing bullying in schools. The specific questions were:

1. How have federal, state and local laws, policies and procedures informed and affected school administrators in the way they address bullying?
2. What are school administrators' perceptions relative to their own self-efficacy or ability to mitigate/eradicate bullying in schools?
3. What factors informed their perceptions about bullying and their ability to address the issue?
4. In their own voice, how do these school administrators address and prevent school bullying?

As previously discussed, addressing bullying in schools must involve a comprehensive approach and include all stakeholders. However, because bullying is a major school issue, school administrators must take the lead in efforts to mitigate it and its impact on students and the school community. In this chapter, we will discuss the method used to acquire information relative to the aforementioned questions.

Research Design

The research method utilized for this work was a qualitative study. My study involved an urban-suburban school district in the southeast region of the United States. As it relates to the district demographics, this school system (135 schools and centers) served a population of approximately 99,000 students, in which 88% are non-white and 71.13% of these students

receiving free or reduced lunch. It was one of the largest school districts in its state and very diverse. Students speak 142 languages and represent 157 countries. Interestingly, certain racial, ethnic, and even socio-economic groups were found in select pockets throughout the district. The entire school system was divided into five regions. Therefore, my study gathered information from each.

Participants

The focus of my study was middle-school administrators working with students in grades six, seven and eight. For the purposes of this work, school administrators were defined as principals or assistant principals. School building-level principals are the chief executive officers of their schools and are responsible for its day-to-day operations. Moreover, for schools located in neighborhoods and recognized as local focal points, school principals are community leaders. Auerbach (2009) supported this premise by sharing that community partnership and student success are promoted by the leadership and modeling of school administrators. She further posited that administrators must be proactive and be committed to reaching out to parents and other community stakeholders in order to build relationships that not only help advance academics, but also support student and community well-being. Moreover, Auerbach (2009) suggested that community engagement become a key component in educational leadership training and professional learning programs. Harmon and Schafft (2009), in their discussion of rural schools indicated that “each rural community and its schools must share a responsibility and take collaborative actions that build community and strengthen positive results for all to be successful” (p. 8). School leaders must have a lucid vision and provide effective leadership in this effort.

Purposeful Sampling

In my study, 17 middle-school principals were chosen through purposeful sampling (Ezzy, 2002). Ezzy defined purposeful sampling as “one that provides a clear criterion or rationale for the selection of participants, or places to observe, or events that relate to the research questions” (p. 74). My study sought to gather data on how bullying laws, regulations, policies, procedures and practices inform and impact the thoughts, beliefs and motivation and self-efficacy of school administrators. The purpose was also to acquire information from a district-wide sample of administrators in this school district. The school district of study was highly diverse in race, ethnicity and socio-economic status that were somewhat regionally situated. To provide supervisory equity and support, the school district was divided into five regions. Due to the *pocketing* of racial, ethnic or socio-economic status, these regions tended to have their own *cultures*. Therefore, to obtain the maximum variation of data, school administrators were selected from each region.

Interestingly, the data gathered from these administrators may be colored by the communities they serve. This is supported by Auerbach (2009) who wrote that some leaders in her study “knew their communities well and had both insight into and compassion for the families they served, each sharing some aspect of the parents’ background like ethnicity, language or single parent status. This seemed to suggest that the thoughts, beliefs and motivations of school leaders may be flavored by the communities they serve and how they identify with the area in which they work.

School administrators for my study were chosen from the five regions. This was accomplished through a request for volunteers via face-to-face contact. The selection goal was to acquire at least 2-3 middle school administrators from each region. Additionally, at least one

administrator from a center that served middle-school students was to be included. Centers are specialty facilities that are not based in every region and are open to all students who meet specific selection criteria. The goal was to potentially garner 16 participants. Because this effort was based on volunteers, the primary objective was to have each region represented with at least two administrators. Therefore, the minimum number of administrators in the sample would be 11 participants. More specifically, each principal would be approached first and asked to participate. If a principal refused to volunteer that compromised the sampling for a particular region, then permission would be requested to ask the assistant principal who handles bullying.

Subsequently, I was able to interview 16 of the 18 middle-school principals from the 18 middle-schools in the five regions. All of the five regions were represented. In fact, I interviewed all of the principals in three of the five regions. Also, one principal from a center school that served middle-school students was interviewed, which produced a total study sample of 17 participants. Table 3.1 provides a breakdown of regions, number of schools and principals interviewed.

REGION	NUMBER OF SCHOOLS IN REGION	NUMBER OF PRINCIPALS INTERVIEWED
1	3	3
2	3	2
3	4	4
4	4	4
5	4	3
Centers	N/A	1

Table 3.1 – Principal Interview Breakdown by Region Data Sources

Data Sources

Primary Data Sources – Interviews

Formal interviews constituted the primary vehicle of data acquisition. A face-to-face interview was conducted with each middle-school principal, lasting approximately 45 minute to one hour. Yin (1984) affirmed that interviews are the most important sources of information. He offered three types of interviews; open-ended, focused, and structured or survey. Focused interviews are related to open-ended interviews in that the interaction between the interviewer and the respondent may still be open-ended and conversational. However, the duration of the session is shorter (about an hour) and the interview may be framed by pre-established set questions or topic of inquiry. The participant is asked to respond to the questions or provide insight on the topic. He further stated that the use of a recording device in interviews is a matter of personal preference and should not be used without participant consent, if it will not be reviewed or if its use is a distraction during the session.

Interviews for my study were focused, with some questions prepared ahead of time. The session began with gathering pertinent demographic information and conversation to help the participants feel at ease and build an environment of trust. The prepared list of questions are included in the Appendix. On the other hand, I was open to the flow of the session and allowed the participant to provide any insight he or she would like to share. Furthermore, I reserved the right to ask follow-up or different questions in alignment with the flow of the interview.

Interview sessions were recorded, although I was willing to forgo recording in the event of an objection by the participant. There were no objections indicated by the participants. Yin (1984) believed that interviews can be subject to problems with bias, poor recall, articulation

inaccuracies. To mitigate these concerns, I conducted face-to-face sessions. Doing this allowed for follow-up questions, conversation and other strategies that sought to confirm the participants' responses.

In summary, 17 middle-school principals were asked and agreed to participate in 45 minute to one hour interviews, utilizing a list of questions developed in advance. During the course of the interview, the flow of conversation initiated other appropriate questions. With the permission of the participants, sessions were recorded. All interviews were conducted and analyzed, by a constant-comparative method discussed below, before follow-up interviews were to be held.

Aside from the follow-up questions that were asked during the formal interviews, follow-up interviews were conducted via email. This effort was to confirm gathered information, confirm themes and provide an avenue for additional information. Of note, copies of interview transcripts were hand-delivered to each study participant, with an explanation of the packet and the expectation of a follow-up email. The principals were also thanked again for their willingness to participate and they shared excitement in seeing the final product. Rubin and Rubin (1995) confirmed the premise of follow-ups in stating that subsequent interviews examine emerging themes and create understanding for both parties. I believed that verifying data and ensuring themes were understood by participant helped to minimize bias, increase recall and promote accurate articulation.

For the follow-up interviews, participants were asked to review the transcripts and themes and provide feedback. Maxwell (1998) and Guba and Lincoln (1989) refer to this process as member checks. Performing member checks decreases the chance of misconstruing what the participant meant in the interview and maximizes contextual understanding. Conducting these

checks also promoted participant well-being and buy-in relative to his or her contribution in the study. In other words, member checks created a positive relationship between the researcher and the interviewee.

Secondary data sources

In my study, additional data sets were important in the development of thematic patterns needed to draw informed conclusions. Thomas (2011) asserted that in conducting a qualitative study “without a tightly constructed theory or set of propositions to guide your research, you will be seeking data that will gather around ideas which emerge as the study progresses” (p. 162). The research questions of my study centered on the beliefs, thoughts and philosophical opinions of school administrators relative to the laws, policies and procedures issued relative to school bullying. Therefore, it was prudent to gather and review these artifacts. Subsequently, as my study unfolded, data gathered from primary and even other secondary sources gave rise to ideas for further investigation in this or future work. The following documents were acquired and reviewed:

- District and Local School Bullying Reports
- District’s Bullying Policy
- District’s Bullying Procedures (Code of Student Conduct)
- State Student Bullying Law
- State Department of Education’s Model Policy
- Federal Guidance on Bullying
- Dear Colleague Letter – October 26, 2010, the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) of the U.S. Department of Education
- District’s Bullying Awareness Campaign

The state law relative to addressing bullying in schools was quite comprehensive. Previously, there was discourse on analysis of state bullying laws and the components that should be included to enhance effectiveness. The statute began with a definition of bullying and lists behaviors that are prohibited. The law mandated that local boards of education adopt a policy prohibiting students from bullying other students and that this policy must be placed in the district's student code of conduct.

Next, the state statute provided a mandatory penalty for students in grades six through 12. If a student in one of these grades committed an offense of bullying for the third time, that student would be assigned to an alternative school. Furthermore, a method must be established in the local policy to notify the parent or guardian of the perpetrator and victim in a bullying incident. School officials also developed methods to communicate that bullying is prohibited and the consequences for violations of the prohibition to students and their parents or guardians.

To assist school districts in the development of a local policy, the state law directed the state department of education to craft a model policy and to also ensure that school systems are in compliance with the tenets of the statute. This directive identified additional components that include:

- A statement prohibiting bullying;
- A requirement that any school employee who reasonable suspicion that a student is a target of bullying must report it to the principal;
- A requirement that each school have a procedure for a prompt investigation by school administration to determine if bullying has occurred;
- An age-appropriate range of consequences for bullying violations, which shall include disciplinary actions or counseling, as deemed circumstantially appropriate;

- A procedure for any student, parent, teacher or other stakeholder to report incidents of bullying, either anonymously or by name.
- A statement indicating that retaliation following a bullying report is prohibited; and
- A provision to that the policy include the previously required components.

Lastly, the state department of education was asked to share, on its website, appropriate entities that offer anti-bullying training programs and materials. Moreover, the law provided that a person reporting a bullying incident in good faith will be immune from civil liability for any damages caused by the report. Additionally, school systems were not required to provide transportation to students transferred to another school as a resulting of bullying and lose state funding for not complying with this statute.

The district's local policy was quite comprehensive and includes all of the components mandated by the state law and aligns with the department of education's model policy. In fact, the district was listed as a contributor to the development of the model policy. In addition to the items listed above, the district's policy included detailed procedures for reporting bullying incidents, timelines for reporting and beginning investigations, penalties for school personnel for failure to comply with the policy and follow-up and aftercare for the bully and victim. Bullying reports must be documented and submitted to the principal or the administrative designee. This local policy also protected groups that do not fall into the recognized list of protected persons under the Office of Civil Rights. The rationale for this inclusion was to align with current legal standards and to ensure that there was no harassment or establishment of a hostile environment. From the local policy, more detail procedures were delineated in the district's Bullying Awareness Campaign.

Data Collection and Analysis

Interview Analysis

Recorded interviews were transcribed. Next, interview transcripts and notes taken during the interviews were analyzed by a constant-comparative method (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This method of interpretative inquiry involved a systematic process of reviewing and coding the raw data to formulate vital themes for analysis. These themes were then analyzed for interconnections, agreements and even contradictions, which form the conclusions of the study. Thomas (2011) suggested a process for analyzing interview data. Therefore, in keeping with his suggestions, I utilized the following process to analyze my interview data:

1. Conduct an examination of all data.
2. Make an electronic copy of the data, creating a raw copy and a working copy
3. Read through the data in the working copy and mark important parts. List recurring thoughts and ideas and label them as temporary constructs.
4. Conduct a secondary read-through of the data and check them against the temporary constructs. Chart the temporary constructs and indicate the reference pages, notes and observations.
5. Purge temporary constructs that are not thoroughly substantiated, but list and highlight the data associated with them for counter-examples for later use.
6. Develop second-order constructs that fit the data and appropriately summarize the emerging themes.
7. Conduct one final review of the data and refine second-order constructs. These should now be labeled as the final themes.

8. Study the final themes and look for interconnections, unanimity, agreement, contradictions and paradoxes.
9. Develop a mapping method for the findings.
10. Provide evidence from the data (quotes, transcribe excerpts, etc.) that demonstrates the themes.

Secondary Data Source Analysis

Secondary sources were examined to determine the degree to which information in the sources intersected with the formal interviews and from ideas developed after interviews were conducted. In other words, based on the flow of the formal interviews, information from secondary data sources contributed to contextual clarification or promoted the need for follow-up debriefings with the school administrators. Geis, in the book *A Case for the Case Study* (Feagin, Orum & Sjoberg, 1991), stated that after reviewing an extensive document for his case study, the information gathered returned him to previously presented hypotheses and stimulated changes in prior thinking. Systematic review of secondary sources, in conjunction with primary interviews and other information, had a grand effect on subsequent inquiry and conclusions.

Follow-Up Interviews and Member Checks

Follow-up inquiry was just as important as the initial interview sessions. Here was where the strength of qualitative inquiry comes into play. Rubin and Rubin (1995) wrote that “the purpose of follow-up questions is to get the depth that is the hallmark of qualitative interviewing by pursuing themes that are discovered, elaborating the context of answers and exploring the implications of what has been said” (p. 151). They further asserted that follow-up questioning be based on the responses in the initial sessions and therefore, cannot be developed before the primary interviews. After analysis and coding of primary transcripts, notes and secondary pieces

of information, subsequent questions and topics for further discussion were developed. Study administrators were contacted via email. They were asked to review the questions and the resulting themes and then provide responses as deemed appropriate by a certain time.

The responses acquired in this process were slated to be reviewed, coded and analyzed with previous themes. However, each participant indicated that their responses during the interview were clearly reflected and that they had no additional information to offer at this time. The process of follow-up questioning was intended to provide the participants the opportunity to clarify initial responses and offer additional insight. However, the responses provided by the participants in the interviews were candid, concise and clear. Although participants did not choose to expand their responses, participant responses were repeated by other participants throughout the course of the interviews, which gave evidence of data consensus.

Member checks in my study were an extension of the follow-up inquiry. They gave transparency to the study process and afford the participant the ability to grant a stamp of approval to the information they shared. Geis (1998) suggested that “this is the single most important way of ruling out the possibility of your misinterpreting the meaning of what the participants say and the perspective they have on what is going on” (p. 94). Ethical concerns relative to respect and the balance of power between the researcher and participants were also addressed through member checks (Goldblatt, Karnieli-Miller & Neumann, 2011). Interview transcripts and a draft of Chapter Four proposing the categories, themes, constructs and other relevant information were shared with the participants in order to allow them the opportunity for feedback and validation. Transcripts were packaged in individual envelopes and hand-delivered to each participant. During delivery, a verbal explanation was given on the envelope contents and that an email would be sent to them with a draft of Chapter Four attached. The middle-

school principals were asked to review the provided information and respond to questions in the email. In general, they were asked whether or not the information provided accurately reflected their interview responses and if they had any additional information to add to the discussion.

Role of the Researcher

As the researcher of my study, my role was to design the study, gather and analyze data, report results and provide conclusions based on the findings. Moreover, this information attained a certain level of validity and reliability that is comfortable for academic peers. With this premise in mind, it was suggested in Persson (2012) that if the cultural arena being researched was different from that of the researcher, he or she should acquire the assistance and support of a cultural insider. This insider was responsible for providing meaning to the observations (see Harris, 1976). Stated differently, a researcher who was etic to the subject would be best served by gaining the help and support of a person emic to the target study environment.

However, as the researcher, I brought both the etic and emic perspectives to the study. Emically, I worked as a district-level administrator in the area of student discipline and safety for many years. In this position, I was directly responsible for crafting policies and procedures to address bullying in schools. I provided training to school personnel and had spoken with a number of administrators. Therefore, I had insight on what is in administrators' heads relative to this issue (Harris, 1976). Conversely, I also possessed an etical perspective in that I have worked with administrators with other school districts, external agencies, and other appropriate entities and presented at educational conferences. This afforded me an extra-cultural point of view in which I could see this area of bullying from a helicopter perspective. Therefore, my inquiry in my study had the wider viewpoint that informed the interviews (etic) and the insider point of

view (emic) which brought a deeper understanding, thereby the ability to elicit rich data from school administrators.

As the researcher, it was important to be aware of my subjectivities that could interact or even impact the study. Crotty (1998) described the epistemological stance of subjectivism as the imposition of subject onto the object. Peshkin (1988) suggested that subjectivity is present in the entire research process and should be systematically identified throughout the effort. Moreover, he posited that subjectivities “have the capacity to filter, skew, shape, block, transform, construe, and misconstrue what transpires” from the beginning through the end of the study (p. 17).

As previously stated, I am a former district-level administrator who worked extensively for over 20 years in the area of student discipline. Furthermore, I have developed, published and presented work on the subject of bullying and trained school administrators. Therefore, one of my most prominent subjectivities was my work with school administrators over the years and a deep perspective of the information they shared. In the various training sessions I had previously conducted with school officials, they have shared concerns with student and parent allegations of bullying and their frustrations with having to deal with them in compliance with the policy. I also had to deal with parent complaints against school officials in which they perceived that nothing was being done. Furthermore, during my 31+ years in a school district, I worked as an assistant principal and created my own school-based program for addressing student bullying. In fact, I was interviewed by the Philadelphia Inquirer. Additionally, some of the administrators that participated in my study were past colleagues.

To attend to this issue of subjectivity, Ezzy (2002) and Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed the use of a peer debriefer. The role of the peer debriefer was to bring about awareness to the researcher on how his or her personal qualities and theoretical orientations influence the

collection and analysis of data. Debriefing also offers the researcher a forum to test theories and analyses and to work through problems and logistics of the research method (Ezzy, 2002).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that the peer debriefer act in a cathartic relationship with the researcher. In such a relationship, the researcher had the opportunity to clear a path to sound judgment and next steps by identifying any possible influence of the researcher's emotions and feelings in the research process. Although there is no formal procedure for conducting peer debriefing, Lincoln and Guba (1985) posited that the debriefer be someone who has some knowledge of the subject being studied. I utilized peer debriefing in my study to address my subjectivities.

The person selected to debrief me for my study has a Ph.D. from a major research institution and at the time of my study worked in the office I formally directed prior to retiring. She had worked as a teacher, assistant principal and district level administrator. Her past and current experiences had provided her with knowledge in the area of bullying and student behavior. She was detail-oriented, thorough and reflective. It was my firm belief that she offered great input and ensured that the study had rigor and stayed on the appropriate course.

For my study, the peer debriefer was first asked to review the direction of the research, the research questions, the proposed interview questions and process, my role in conducting my study and possible impact of my subjectivities. Upon completion of this review, the peer debriefer met with me to discuss the process and any concerns. Moving into the actual interview and data analysis process, the peer debriefer was called on to review and discuss the coding of the initial data. In looking at the coding, the debriefer sought to certify that the emerging themes were logical, accurate to the data and relevant to the direction of the study. This review was

accomplished by examining the coding that was indicated on the actual transcripts of the interviews.

Specifically, to address the issues relative to my study limitations, the peer debriefer and I had several meetings during the course of the study. In those meetings, each limitation issue was specifically discussed and the peer debriefer shared feedback on them based on the responses indicated in the interview data. The limitation involving my prior relationship with the participants was a specific focus in my work with the peer debriefer. She reviewed the interview data and challenged it against her knowledge of my work with the study principals. The peer debriefer was keenly tuned in on responses and other information that would suggest that the participants were attempting to provide canned answers. In my study, research questions were presented with little emphasis on what would be found. However, I had gone into the study with the assumption that the perceptions and experiences of the participants might result in their perception that bullying was not a major concern. Subsequently, I had wondered whether their actions and responses to addressing and preventing bullying in schools would not be purposeful and strategic. As the information was gathered and I shared themes with my peer debriefer, this particular assumption was refuted. The peer debriefer helped me to assure final results were based on all of the accumulated data.

The follow-up interviews were designed to clarify initial data and to provide additional data to solidify themes for final mapping and the reporting of findings. Since all of the participants indicated that their initial interviews captured their perceptions, thoughts and beliefs and they had nothing further to add, the peer debriefer reviewed the final themes to ensure they were true to the data collected and followed the flow of the study purpose. In doing this, the peer debriefer compared the initial constructs with the final themes and their evidence from the data. She also

inquired about my thoughts on the interview, follow-up and coding process in order to check any inferences being made that were not supported and ensure that I was not coloring the process with my subjectivities. Subsequently, the peer debriefer also checked the findings to again make certain that there were no substantive liberties taken or assumptions made that deviated from the constructs. In finality, the results of the process were true, accurate, came directly from the data and could be trusted.

Trustworthiness of the Study

Taking this discourse on subjectivities to another level, one might ask whether or not my study was worth the time or produced truthful or useful information that benefited the educational society. Lincoln and Guba (1985) utilized the term “trustworthiness” to describe this concern and suggest a paradigm shift from a conventional to a more naturalistic approach to demonstrating this matter in inquiry. This naturalistic paradigm differed from conventional methods of inquiry in that research was carried out in the natural setting by human instruments to gather data, through qualitative methods and was likely to report results in a case study mode, rather than in a scientific or technical modality. Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose four naturalist means to operationalize trustworthiness in qualitative inquiry.

Credibility was the first consideration, which involved ensuring that there was confidence that the study findings were accurate and true to the raw data from the participants. Credibility also addressed checks on the inquiry process and refining hypotheses as the study moved forward. Lincoln and Guba (1985) provide five techniques to attend to credibility (pp. 301-328):

1. *Activities increasing the probability that credible findings would be produced.*

- a. Prolonged engagement – Investing sufficient time to build trust and obtain accurate data. My prolonged engagement within this school district supplied scope to the inquiry. I brought an in depth understanding of education and the school system to my study. My former role as an administrator and a colleague aided in establishing trust with my participants. I utilized extended interviews with participants to make them comfortable, and then worked through follow-up interviews and member checks to ensure accuracy of data.
 - b. Persistent observation – Identifying the elements of data that were relevant to the problem and provided details on them. In my study, coding and labeling of the interviews and notes provided the appropriate attention to this activity. I also utilized follow-up interviews to allow for the possibility of gathering additional data as needed.
 - c. Triangulation – The use of multiple sources to verify the information and findings gathered. As previously indicated, my study involved several primary and secondary sources of data, which were analyzed for commonalities and themes that supported each other and the results.
2. *Peer Debriefing* – The utilization of a disinterested peer to keep the inquirer honest, check the inquirer’s thoughts and emotions that may influence the process, test hypothesis and assist in the development of next steps in the inquiry process. As stated above, the use of a peer debriefer was a key component of my study. As suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985), this

person was knowledgeable of the subject and had insight on what was to be accomplished in this effort.

3. *Referential Adequacy* – Involved the archiving of portions of the raw data for future validation testing of the findings. This involved electronic archival or the manual earmarking of segments of the data for future reference. In my study, interviews were recorded electronically and transcribed.
4. *Member Checks* – Sharing the data, analyses, categories, interpretations and findings with the study participants to ensure that the inquirers reconstructions adequately represent the information given by the participants. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that member checks are a critical component to the establishment of credibility. As indicated earlier, this information was shared with the participants via email and they confirmed their agreement with the themes that emerged.

The second term offered by Lincoln and Guba (1985) to establish trustworthiness is *transferability*. Transferability, in similarity with the conventional paradigm of external validity, involves the ability to generalize study findings across contexts or other settings. Lincoln and Guba (1985) did not support the verification of transferability by statement in a study; however, they propose the creation of thick descriptions that will permit a person interested in transferability to reach their own conclusions on its possibility. Following Lincoln and Guba's (1985) suggestion, my study did not state any verification of transferability. Nevertheless, findings were richly described by using multiple data excerpts to support contentions and every effort was made to clearly detail study conclusions.

The final two terms offered by Lincoln and Guba (1985) in the establishment of trustworthiness were *dependability and confirmability*. Dependability addressed the consistency of the findings and whether or not they can be repeated in another exact or similar study. On the other hand, confirmability asked if the findings were substantiated by the data and not by the researcher. Interestingly, they indicated that dependability and confirmability (and even the two other means) could be handled by keeping a reflexive journal. I used a journal to regularly record data on myself and the methodological decisions and the rationales for them. Lincoln and Guba (1985) posited logging the following three parts of information: “(1) the daily schedule and logistics of the study; (2) a personal diary that provides the opportunity for catharsis, for reflection upon what is happening in terms of one’s own values and interests and for speculation about growing insights; and (3) a methodological log in which methodological decisions and accompanying rationales are recorded” (p. 327). This reflexive journal can form a basis for the work of an auditor, which I felt seemed to be the same effort exhibited by the peer debriefer. Therefore, I kept the reflexive journal and utilized the services of my peer debriefer to conduct a dependability and confirmability audit of its contents.

Summary

As stated on several occasions, bullying in schools is a serious problem that must be addressed. Laws have been created or revised, state and local policies have been adopted and various programs and procedures have been developed. Nevertheless, all of these statutes, rules and regulations are just writings on paper without effective implementation by school administrators. They are the leaders of not only the school, but also the community and must lead the way in all stakeholders taking a stance against bullying by students. Human action is not devoid of effects of thought, beliefs, perceptions and feelings. Moreover, effective

implementation must include buy-in, input, feedback and a sense that the leader can affect change and progress. The frank, honest insight provided by the participants of my study will certainly inform and hopefully transform procedures and professional learning and also grant school leaders the occasion for self-reflection and examination.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

As previously stated, bullying is a serious problem that has the potential to significantly impact the present and future success and well-being of the students we serve. Not only should the school administrators take swift action when bullying is reported, they must also be proactive and make effort to prevent incidents from occurring and mitigate the damage of any situations that do happen. To accomplish this, school administrators must be motivated to do what is necessary to help their kids. Moreover, they must believe that they can handle any bullying problems in the school and have a comprehensive method for calling attend to this issue throughout the school year. Existing laws and/or local board policies must be followed with fidelity. The purpose of my study was to explore how perceptions, values and beliefs may play a significant role in the responses of middle-school administrators and how they view bullying in general, and the actions they take to address and prevent bullying.

In the first section of this chapter, I will establish the context of the study by sharing results from an analysis of contextual federal, state and local documents related to policies and recommended procedures focusing on bullying. In the second section, the study information from the participants begins with the principals' definitions of bullying, which includes a discussion of overuse and misuse of the term and their views on cyberbullying. Next, I will share participants' views of key factors which informed and impacted their self-efficacy or ability to address student bullying. The factors used to influence their ability include experience, the adoption of district policies and procedures, reduction versus complete eradication of bullying incidents.

Following our discussion on factors influencing self-efficacy, the discourse will turn to matters of motivation. Generally, we will review principals' motivation relative to making schools safe and establishing a positive context as the building leader. Conversely, we will examine administrators' perceptions of how their motivation was negatively impacted by the prevalence of bullying in the media.

Lastly, we will review the principals' own words as they report on how they address bullying in schools. Components of this topic will include the participants' perceptions on the importance and effect of the school district's position policy and procedures, their thoughts on following those procedures, the importance of training stakeholders and its effect on their school. Additionally, we will read their beliefs on being proactive and the measures taken to prevent and mitigate incidents. In this section, the participants also discuss how they involve students in the efforts to address school bullying.

National, State and District Context in Relation to Policies on Bullying

Federal Guidance on Bullying

Although there is no federal law relative to school bullying, the national government is not silent on this important issue. Perusal of the U.S. Department of Education's website (<http://www.ed.gov/>) reveals a myriad of information, suggestions and resources gathered into a web-based toolkit for school officials. Various studies, analyses, publications and collaborative materials are available. Furthermore, the site provides ERIC listings, files and grant information. On the DOE endorsed bullying site, StopBullying.gov (<http://www.stopbullying.gov/>), bullying is defined as, "...unwanted, aggressive behavior among school-aged children that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. The behavior is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time". Both kids who are bullied and who bully others may have serious, lasting problems.

In order to be considered bullying, the behavior must be aggressive and include:

- An Imbalance of Power: Kids who bully use their power—such as physical strength, access to embarrassing information, or popularity—to control or harm others. Power imbalances can change over time and in different situations, even if they involve the same people.
- Repetition: Bullying behaviors happen more than once or have the potential to happen more than once.

Bullying includes actions such as making threats, spreading rumors, attacking someone physically or verbally, and excluding someone from a group on purpose.”

In response the U.S. Department of Education (<http://www.ed.gov/>) makes every attempt to publish materials and best practices that will mitigate the problem with school bullying. In addition to various publications, articles and other guidance, the Department of Education (<http://www.ed.gov/>) has also hosted Bullying Summits for the purpose of hearing from professionals. Persons invited to the Summits have ranged from practitioners on the ground to persons in related fields. The data gained from these forums could be used to inform future guidance and material development.

In conjunction with publications and other resources, the U.S. Department of Education (<http://www.ed.gov/>) has also issued some *Dear Colleague Letters* on specific concerns relative to bullying (Ali, 2010). Significantly, three *Letters* stand out in addressing forms of bullying in schools. On June 25, 2000, a *Dear Colleague Letter* was issued on the bullying and harassment of students with disabilities. Chiefly, students who have been identified with mental and/or physical challenges must not be mistreated based on their disabilities. School officials are obligated to respond to allegations of misconduct and take actions to prevent incidents from

occurring. October 26, 2010 (Ali, 2010) brought to the conversation a *Letter* addressing harassment based on race, gender, religion, disability or nationality/ethnicity. This document proposes awareness and caution when dealing with these types of bullying. Basically, administrators may be inclined to feel that just dealing with a specific incident in this area may seem appropriate; however, the *Letter* stresses dealing solely with the incident at hand may not be enough. Harassment focuses on the possibility that the very environment may be hostile to the targeted group. Therefore, school officials, when dealing with an incident based on the above groups, he/she must also be cognizant of the students' actions toward all members of that group. Failure to recognize and mitigate a real/perceived hostile environment against that identified group could be perceived as being *indifferent*, resulting in more issues.

The third *Dear Colleague Letter* again highlighted students with disabilities as targets; but, not being mistreated due to that disability. The student with disabilities may be the target of bullying, in general, and not based on his or her disability. It would seem prudent that one immediate action could be to remove the disabled student from the classroom and place him/her in the same class in another classroom, with a new teacher. Precautions must be taken, however to ensure the move to another class is not in violation of the student's Free and Appropriate Education, or FAPE, based on the student's Individualized Education Plan or IEP. A student's IEP is their plan for their continued education and graduation. Depending on the IEP, the move to another class may not provide the appropriate services and training spelled out in the Plan, which is mandated by federal statute. Hence, a seemingly viable and logical reaction to a bullying incident of a student with disabilities could result in serious procedural and legal concerns.

In summary, there are no federal laws or policies relative to school bullying. However, the U.S. Department of Education has issued guidance, toolkits and publications to assist states, local school districts and education officials in addressing student bullying. Additionally, they have issued three significant *Dear Colleague Letters* from their Office of Civil Rights cautioning school personnel to address bullying towards students with disabilities, being cognizant of pervasive bullying that creates a hostile environment and violating a student's free access to a public education in the effort to resolve a bullying incident. Even though there is an absence of federal bullying statutes, the next section will review state's policies and laws on bullying.

Bullying Law, Policies and Procedures at the State Level

On April 29, 2010 in Georgia where this study was conducted, the state law on bullying was revised in response to a state senate bill. The new regulations required the state department of education to craft a model policy and required that local systems adopt a bullying policy or revise their current guidelines by August 2011.

The revised bullying statute (<http://www.lexisnexis.com/hottopics/gacode/layout.htm>) begins with a definition/description of student bullying.

“§ 20-2-751.4. Policies prohibiting bullying; assignment to alternative school; notice

(a) As used in this Code section, the term "bullying" means an act which occurs on school property, on school vehicles, at designated school bus stops, or at school related functions or activities, or by use of data or software that is accessed through a computer, computer system, computer network, or other electronic technology of a local school system, that is:

- (1) Any willful attempt or threat to inflict injury on another person, when accompanied by an apparent present ability to do so;
- (2) Any intentional display of force such as would give the victim reason to fear or expect

immediate bodily harm; or

(3) Any intentional written, verbal, or physical act which a reasonable person would perceive as being intended to threaten, harass, or intimidate, that:

(A) Causes another person substantial physical harm within the meaning of Code Section 16-5-23.1 or visible bodily harm as such term is defined in Code Section 16-5-23.1;

(B) Has the effect of substantially interfering with a student's education;

(C) Is so severe, persistent, or pervasive that it creates an intimidating or threatening educational environment; or

(D) Has the effect of substantially disrupting the orderly operation of the school.”

Interestingly, the language in the definition does not include the use of the term *repeated or potential to be repeated*. It seems to replace this language with *severe, persistent and pervasive*. In addition, StopBullying.gov (<http://www.stopbullying.gov/>) also defines bullying as unwanted, aggressive behavior among school aged children that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. In contrast, the definition of bullying as indicated in the state law, refers to the willful and intentional threat or infliction of harm. The state definition falls short of stating that bullying involves an imbalance of power. In the description, there is an allusion of a power issue in its wording. On the other hand, a person desiring an understanding of the term bullying would see some incongruence when reviewing definitions from various sources.

The next section of the state law (<http://www.lexisnexis.com/hottopics/gacode/layout.htm>) involves policy requirements, which includes:

- Prohibit bullying of a student by another student and include the prohibition in the student code of conduct;
- Establish and publish a method to notify parents or guardian;

- Require that students in grades six through 12 who have been officially found in violation by a hearing officer, panel or tribunal of three incidents of bullying in a school year be sent to the alternative school.

The third section of the law (<http://www.lexisnexis.com/hottopics/gacode/layout.htm>) directs the state's Department of Education to develop a model policy and include a list of required components to be included in that document. This model policy should include;

- A statement prohibiting student bullying;
- Requirements for faculty and school employees to report bullying to the school principal, if the employee has reliable information and meets the *reasonable suspicion* standard;
- A requirement that each school have a procedure for school officials to swiftly investigate student bullying reports;
- Age-appropriate consequences for bullying violations;
- A procedure for any teacher, student, other school employee, parent or other stakeholder to report bullying activity, with their name or anonymously; and
- A statement prohibiting retaliation after a bullying report.

The final parts of this state code instruct the state's Department of Education to create and post anti-bullying resources and provides an immunity clause for school employees operating in good faith. Additionally, the model policy shall not include any language requiring the local board of education to provide transportation to a transferring student relative to a bullying incident. Moreover, school districts out of compliance with the state bullying law will be ineligible to receive state funding.

As a result of the revised state law, the state's Department of Education crafted a model policy for local educational agencies. The model policy that was developed was contained in a

larger, more comprehensive manuscript

http://archives.gadoe.org/DMGetDocument.aspx/GaDOE%20Bullying%20Policy_August%202011.pdf?p=6CC6799F8C1371F629903F3067606F26B2DA4EBDCB1753CDC36BAE8E54C30

[EC2&Type=D](#)) prohibiting bullying, harassment and intimidation. In this document and subsequent actions, the state department of education took a comprehensive and determined stance against bullying and harassment. The agency not only created the extensive policy document on the issue, it also developed a bullying toolkit (<http://www.gadoe.org/Curriculum-Instruction-and-Assessment/Curriculum-and-Instruction/Pages/Bullying-Prevention-Toolkit.aspx>). This toolkit contains extensive information, procedures, and resources for local schools. Moreover, this toolkit includes valuable links to other pieces of information and web services to assist schools in proactively combating bullying. In such ways, the department of education personnel created a comprehensive/one-stop shop for all stakeholders concerned about student bullying.

District's Bullying Policy and Recommended Procedures

Examination of the bullying policy in the district in which my study took place indicated that not only did the local policy align with the state's model policy, local district personnel were contributors to the development of the state policy. The district's bullying policy begins with a statement outlining its obligation to provide a safe, healthy and positive learning environment and to promote mutual respect and acceptance for all stakeholders. Following this mission statement, there are three main sections:

- Prohibited Behaviors – Examples of bullying behavior that are violations of the district's expectations.

- Reporting Incidents of Bullying – Describes to the public who and how bullying may be reported to the school and identifies the receiver of the report. This section also provides a prohibition of retaliation against any person reporting or assisting in an investigation and an expectation that employees will comply with the policy.
- Responding to Incidents of Bullying – States that reports of bullying will initiate an immediate investigation no later than the following day. Furthermore, this section indicates when parents of both parties will be notified and the appropriate disciplinary actions if an allegation is found to be true. Pursuant to state law, students in grades six through twelve who commit three acts of bullying in a school year will be transferred to the alternative school. This section also provides for follow-up and aftercare for the bullying and the bullied after an incident.

The district's policy is aligned with the state law and mirrors the state department of education's model policy. Again, district personnel, who were involved with crafting the local policy, were contributors to the development of the model policy.

In compliance with protocol and rules of order, the district's policy drives administrative procedures, guidelines and communication. In the study district, discipline and related information is disseminated to students, parents and stakeholders via the *Code of Student Conduct*. This document, relative to bullying will be discussed in the next section. Later, the topic of bullying will be discussed in the section on the district's comprehensive Bullying Awareness Campaign. Both of these communication vehicles seek to provide awareness, training and information to students, staff, parents and stakeholders on the district's position relative to school bullying, handling procedures and possible consequences, if allegations/reports are found to be valid.

Bullying and the district's student handbook. The district's *2014-2015 Code of Student Conduct – Student Rights and Responsibilities and Character Development Handbook* is intended to serve as the primary communication vehicle to students, parents, guardians, school personnel and community members relative to discipline, safety and related topics. The handbook provides information on rule violations, possible age-appropriate consequences and due process procedures, delivery of legally required statements and available charts and forms. Interestingly, in a review of this document over the past five years, it has grown each year and is truly a handbook and not just a code of student conduct. In fact, the name has grown with the contents.

Specifically, as it relates to student bullying, the 2009-2010 *Code of Student Conduct* only contained a short paragraph outlining the state law's designated penalty for three incidents of bullying, the list of general consequences and that stakeholders can report bullying to school staff. This document also prohibited cyberbullying on school equipment and/or networks and blended the charge of bullying with other assault and battery. It did not outline a definition of bullying. The 2010-2011 *Code* was subsequent to the revision of the state law and contained a summary of the statute describing the behavior. Furthermore, language was added prohibiting the transmission of inappropriate messages or images via electronic communication devices, which enhanced the statement against cyberbullying. The actual charge continued to be blended with assault and battery charges.

The 2011-2012 *Code of Student Conduct* began the inclusion of the actual Board policy on bullying. Additionally, the charge of bullying was bifurcated from assault and battery and given its own disciplinary code. For 2012-2013, the name expanded to *Code of Student Conduct: Student Rights and Responsibilities and Character Development Handbook*. Revisions to the

2012-2013 document included splitting the *Code* into an elementary and a middle/high school version. Particularly in the middle/high school version, the actual bullying charge code was expanded and placed in the *Yellow Pages*. The *Yellow Pages* were designed to capture the attention of the parents/guardians relative to the types of charges that may result in long-term suspension or expulsion. Also, this document contained a general student behavior pledge vowing to assist with school safety and adhering to the *Code of Student Conduct*.

The 2013-2014 *Code of Student Conduct* continued the theme of having an elementary and a middle/high school version. There were no other substantive changes from the previous year's document. The 2014-2015 handbook reverted back to one document and removal of the *Yellow Pages*. Additionally, flowcharts relative to addressing bullying and general due process procedures were inserted, along with the bullying reporting form. Moreover, statements were included that informed international and other potential students and their parents that translations were available. It should also be noted that in this five-year period, the *Code of Student Conduct* expanded in size from 29 pages to 74 pages.

This most recent *Code of Student Conduct* offered comprehensive language on student bullying and how it should be addressed. The document contained definitions of bullying, harassment and hazing; the local policy, a flowcharts, information on possible consequences, reporting methods and the district's stance on the topic and retaliation. The *Code* provided a statement to persons who do not speak English with a method to access the *Code* online and procedures were underway to formally translate the document into the district's top ten languages. Additionally, the *Code* was posted to the district's web page and could be readily translated with the touch of a button.

The district's *Code of Student Conduct*, at the time of my study, contained the verbatim district policy and spoke to the issue of bullying in various ways. Initially, the document identified the charge and associated code number, followed by a description of the violation. This description included the expectation that students will not violate the rule. Next, specific definitions were provided for bullying and two related terms – harassment and hazing. In this document, bullying was defined as,

“...unwanted, aggressive behavior among school-aged children that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. The behavior is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time. Bullying includes actions such as making threats, spreading rumors, attacking someone physically or verbally, and excluding someone from a group on purpose.”

This definition specifically aligns with the stopbullying.gov description and expands the information contained in the state law.

The *Code of Student Conduct* addressed cyberbullying definitively, including a statement indicating the prohibition on taking pictures of others without the permission of the principal. Additionally, this document shared the legal impact of participating in the sexual/inappropriate online postings, submissions and/or conversations. In the 2014-2015 school year, the district's bullying reporting form and flowchart were inserted.

The local policy has been previously described in a section above. The reporting form included in the document allows staff members, students, parents and other stakeholders to report a bullying allegation to the school principal. Procedurally, a reporting person may just verbally make a report to any school employee, who will then document the allegation on a reporting form. At that point, the procedures require that the completed report be immediately submitted to the principal or a designed assistant principal. On the other hand, a student, parent or

stakeholder may elect to complete the form themselves and submit it to a school employee. Therefore, the reporting form was made available to them in the *Code of Student Conduct* and in various places on the district's website.

The bullying flowchart provided students, parents and stakeholders with a concise, visual representation of how a report is handled. It clearly indicates that a received report is submitted to school administration, who then launches an investigation by the next day. Once a determination has been made that bullying has actually occurred, the flowchart shows what happens and that all parties are notified. Moreover, the flowchart instructs the stakeholder on who to contact if they feel that his/her report has been ignored or ineffectively handled.

The school district in my study not only made revision in its bullying policy based on federal and state guidelines, it also placed all components of this effort in to a comprehensive campaign against bullying. As indicated in Olweus (1993), the road to reducing student bullying in schools includes addressing the misbehavior seriously and swiftly. Furthermore, the approach must be comprehensive in scope and not just involve intervention or interdiction. When mandated by the state to revise its policies, the study district took the opportunity to move their efforts to the next level. The next section covers that comprehensive approach and its components.

District's bullying awareness campaign. As a result of the state law passed in April 2010, the district sought to build a greater awareness about bullying issues among students, parents, teachers, staff members and the community. With this purpose in mind, the district created a Bullying Awareness Campaign. Subsequently, in 2014, in a desire to include related issues, the Campaign was renamed the Bullying/Harassment/Hazing Awareness Campaign. This comprehensive program was designated to be aligned with the district's bullying revised policy and included the identification of school liaisons.

The principals were asked to select two faculty liaisons to facilitate awareness activities for their schools. These liaisons, after receiving extensive training, were slated to assist with all stakeholder training, develop a team to plan and implement activities in association with the Campaign calendar and provide technical assistance to school administrators. Also, these liaisons were expected to coordinate community communication on bullying to assist with character development and to facilitate the formulation of a student anti-bullying club. They were subscribed to a database of resources, developed by district officials. This method of reducing bullying involved a comprehensive approach, which was implemented in order to engage all stakeholders.

Each month of the school year, the study district's Campaign was designed to focus on an aspect of bullying. The month materials consist of the topic, a general suggestion of activities, suggested marquee display and a character education word of the month. Based on the month and topic, additional information may be presented. Even with the structure of a district calendar, the liaisons were trained to be creative and think *outside-of-the-box*. Schools were asked to have students, staff and community members sign an Anti-Bullying Pledge. The district also included a resource site on the district's webpage with additional bullying, harassment and hazing information. In addition to past years, the Campaign also utilized district opportunities from parent conferences nights and its local television to bring awareness directly to the adult stakeholders.

To bring even greater emphasis on the district's efforts to reduce student bullying through the Campaign, each year the local board of education adopts a proclamation. This resolution outlines the board's thoughts on bullying and applauds staff efforts to deal with this important problem. In adopting the proclamation, the board designates a month as

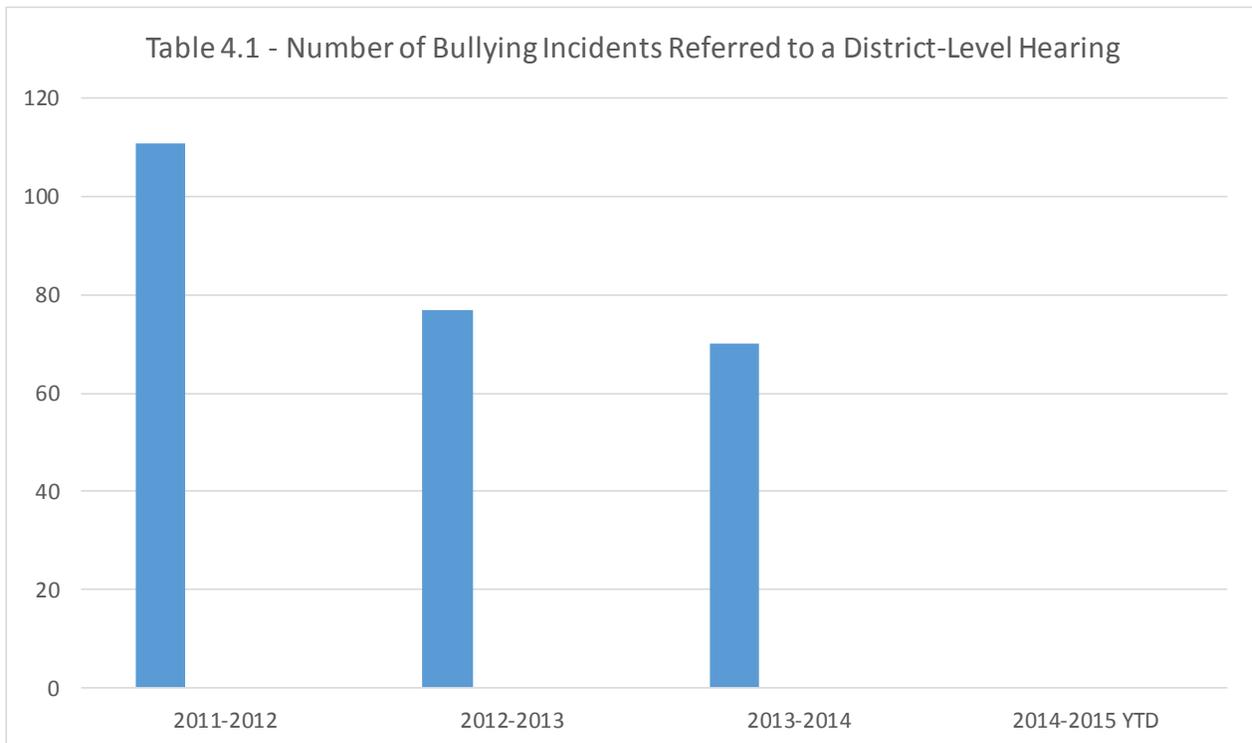
Bullying/Harassment/Hazing Awareness Month in the school district and endorses the year-long program. This action is officially voted on by the group in an authorized meeting, signed by the members, placed on the meeting agenda, formally published and broadcasted on television and online. In turn, their action communicates to the public the seriousness of the district's efforts and awareness of the problem to parents/guardians throughout the area. Moreover, it provides the opportunity to have community partners and other elected officials to stand in solidarity for the program.

The Campaign was designed to bring awareness of the issue of bullying to all stakeholders and proactively make an impact in reducing the number of incidents. Furthermore, when an incident occurred, the Campaign, through its emphasis on training, brought an understanding to the table on how bullying situations would be addressed. In addition to understanding the district's plan for addressing bullying, I also sought to understand the context by examining the district's data. The next section takes a look at bullying in schools from a district data perspective.

Understanding the prevalence of bullying as represented by district data. Interestingly, a detailed, apples-to-apples review of the district's bullying data was problematic at the time of the study. This was due to some major changes in district's technology/database operations. First of all, the district had decided to change, management systems. In making this change, data had to be migrated to the new system and checked for accuracy. There was also a learning curve for employees who needed to interface with the data, which created problems with the acquisition and dissemination of information. Access to data was hindered because my study took place at the start of the school year as the new operations were undertaken. Finally, a third issue hampering data collection was that data points relative to required reporting of bullying

allegations and incidents were changed. New data points were added that were not previously captured. Therefore, a comparison of a current piece of information would not be possible, when that information was not captured in the previous year. In spite of those limitations, some district information on bullying could be gathered and will be discussed below.

One way that the prevalence of bullying in a district can be described is to examine the number of bullying incidents which led to a referral for a hearing. District due process hearings are held when a student(s) involved in an incident is recommended by the school principal for long-term suspension or expulsion. As previously stated, the state statute mandates that middle and high school students found to have committed three (3) acts of bullying must be sent to the alternative school. It is required by state law that this consequence only be levied through official, district-level action. Table 4.1 shows the number of incidents referred for hearings for the last three years and year-to-date for the current school year through September 8, 2014.



In a review of this data relative to bullying since 2011, there was substantial reductions in the number of hearings for this type of behavior. In fact, there was a 34% reduction in the number of hearings on this important topic from the 2011-12 through the 2013-14 school years.

Furthermore, after full year's implementation of the district's campaign in the 2011-2012 school year, the number of incidents referred to district hearing for 2012-2013 realized the greatest decrease of 31%. Of special note, as of September 8, 2014, no hearings had been held on the matter of student bullying. Also, a comparison of first semester data for 2012-13 and 2013-14 revealed a 45% reduction in the total number of incidents.

Having policies, procedures, campaigns and data reviews are appropriate and needed. On the other hand, these procedures had to be implemented by human school personnel, particularly school administration. Therefore, school officials brought their own perceptions, thoughts and beliefs to the table when implementing the aforementioned regulations, which greatly affected how bullying and other forms of discipline were being addressed. The next section investigated those perceptions revealed through the principals' lens.

Middle-School Administrators' Perceptions and Approaches to Bullying

The following sections involve a discourse on the participants' perceptions and approaches to bullying in their schools. Based on the interviews, data were analyzed into major themes. The chart below provides a visual perspective of these themes for our discussion.

Table 4.2 – Chart of Major Themes

MAJOR THEMES	
Bullying: What is It and Can We Stop It!	How They Address Bullying in Schools
Overuse/Misuse of the term	Implementing district-level position, policy and procedures
Ability to address bullying – self-efficacy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using personal experiences to understand or address bullying • Adoption of recommended policy and procedures • Reduce it – yes, eradicate it – no: Confronting the realities of bullying 	Being proactive <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changing attitudes and behaviors • Data-based initiatives • Opportunities for student involvement
Cyberbullying: Bullying in the information age	
Motivation to address bullying <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making schools safe for children • Establishing a positive context as the building leader 	

Bullying: What is It and Can We Stop It?

Middle-school principals who participated in my study were asked how they would define school bullying. According to stopbullying.gov, bullying is a repeatedly intentional act of inflicting physical, emotional, relational or social harm to another student within the context of an imbalance of power. Responses varied on this question with different components from the aforementioned definition being recited by the principals. For instance, Principal 15 (2014) stated,

Student bullying is an act or behavior that’s done to another student causing a negative response, a negative behavior. It’s one direction. It is not something that’s a back and forth action. Bullying is a one-sided situation where one student receives the negative behavior from the other student. Over a period of time, there’s a period of time factor that is included with bullying.

The definition shared above described a behavior which the participant indicated as bullying. In the next definition, the participant attempted to place context in the equation. Principal 5 provided the following description by saying,

I would describe bullying as any act unwanted by a child that's inflicted on him or her by another child or adult person in the building. They can be acts such as slapping one's tray out of his or her hand, pushing them against a wall; if it is very clear that the child is not welcoming what is happening and is not participating. Even if they fail to say STOP, it can be considered bullying. But, I do think that those acts have to be followed by a conversation between the observer and the people involved to see truly what was going on, to make certain it wasn't something that happened earlier that day and, 'I'm just getting you back for what you did to me earlier'.

In the above description, the middle-school principal believed that there must be a conversation to make a determination on whether or not the misbehavior was actually bullying or some form of mutual conflict. In the next definition, the study principal suggested the issue of student feelings and perception as impacting the subsequent determination by the administrator.

Principal 9 said,

I would define student bullying in schools by saying that when a student is feeling uncomfortable by what a student is saying on a constant basis and being harassed on a constant basis. It can be physical and it can also be mental as well. It's hard to define, because to me it depends on the student and their perception of how they are being harassed and it's up to an administrator to decide if that student is being harassed. Student bullying in schools, students don't have a great definition of bullying, and so oftentimes, they'll – they'll use the term very loosely and it's up to administrators to define it.

While principals varied on specific components of bullying on which they focused, there was a consensus among these participants that a great need existed in clarifying the official definition. As will be discussed in the following section, principals stressed that bringing more clarity to the posted definition would be beneficial to their efforts to address allegations and work with parents.

Overuse/Misuse of the term. Principals in the study reported that one of primary reasons for requesting that the definition of bullying be further clarified was in response to the overuse and misuse of the term.

Since the law has been passed, everything is bullying per parents . . . It's overused, because every time I get a complaint from a parent, it's – they use the terminology of bullying. And then, as I share with them, we have to investigate and – and make a determination whether or not bullying was the case (Principal 11, 2014).

Furthermore, Principal 14 (2014) shared an interesting perspective by saying,

I think because the term has been overused in the last especially five to eight years, I would say, sometimes we can be a little jaded about what, you know, okay, here comes another talk on bullying. Tell me something I don't know, you know, already about it. But I would hope that my fellow administrators continued to take it seriously and that they have their teams in place to address it, whether it's the assistant principal, counselor support, teacher training and support and educating parents as well.

With the legislative, media and social focus on bullying, study participants indicated that the term may be used anytime there is a student conflict or some rule violation that is deemed to be the result of bullying. Principal 7 (2014) commented by saying,

I guess my definition would be an ongoing occurrence where it really makes someone feel inferior or intimidated. But from my personal experience as an administrator, I find that many of the cases that are typically referred as bullying is not necessarily bullying. That many times, it is a mutual [dis]agreement or a mutual understanding I should say.

Furthermore, Principal 12 (2014) described this concern relative to bullying by stating,

I see it as for the most part, I would say 70% of the time I see it as mutual conflict. The other 30 % there is some bullying taking place where students just, especially in middle school are just mean spirited and do mean things to kids as far as calling them names, hitting them, talking about them on social media. So, I do think it exists, by not to the extreme that the media says it does.

The principals in my study acknowledged being trained that scenarios where both parties are active participants is best considered *Mutual Conflict*. However, when addressed, it may have been reported as bullying by one of the students or by a parent. Principal 10 (2014) supported this premise by stating,

Bullying is one of those terms that many people use, and students often say that I'm being bullied by a fellow classmate. So one of the things you want to make sure is that it's actually bullying; that the student is actually being bullied or whether it's just mutual disagreement or if someone is having a disagreement. Sometimes even if it's a disagreement, they will say well, she's bullying me or she said something I didn't like. So, you have to make sure that it's just – it's bullying, it's truly bullying, and it's not just something that, you know, a buzz word that the students are using or their parents are using.

Ability to address bullying – self-efficacy. The primary premise of my study was to investigate administrators' perceptions of their own ability or self-efficacy in addressing school

bullying. All 17 study participants believed they could effectively address student bullying. In fact, most felt very confident in their ability to effectively handle this issue. When asked to describe his/her ability and skillset to effectively address bullying in school, Principal 3 (2014) stated, “I think that my skillset range of 1-10 is a 10. It’s just, like I said it’s a passion of mine.” The study principals cited several factors that increased their skillsets and assuredness of being able to effectively address bullying. These factors will be discussed in the following subsections.

Using personal experiences to understand or address bullying. One of the factors which aided middle-school principals in effectively understanding and addressing bullying was drawing on their personal experiences. When asked if they were bullied in school or were the bully, the principals were extremely candid in their responses. Most importantly, they were able to view their current effort through the lenses of these experiences, which then informed and impacted their administrative work on this issue. One principal in the study (Principal 9, 2014), indicated he was bullied in school and when asked how the experiences affected his work to address bullying said,

To be honest, I’m – I’m definitely a advocate...if kids are, you know, repeated offenders of that [bullying], you know, we have to do something else to that student. Sometimes, it may be an alternative placement, sometimes it’s bringing a parent in. You know, it depends on whatever to get it to stop, I’m willing to do it. And I give the kids and the parents an opportunity to get it to stop. I get the teachers to intervene. So, I’m an advocate of just cutting it out all together...Definitely [more sensitive towards bullying]. Because of my personal experiences.

This participant stated that he could identify with bullied students because he understands what it is like to be bullied in school. Furthermore, in support of this sensitivity, Principal 4 (2014) shared,

Growing up I did, I have – I only had one experience – and it was when I was in the 7th Grade, a kid named S.D. I remember his name... But this young man, you know, he – he, you know, just picked on me every single day, every single day....Well, what it does is it makes me more sensitive to the person that's being bullied...because oftentimes the kids who are being bullied can't really protect themselves. You know, bullies try to find somebody that they know that they can have an issue with...it's a high priority on my list...because of my personal experiences in the fact that I don't want any of my kids bullied by anybody.”

Interestingly, one principal (Principal 14, 2014) did not initially feel she had a related experience, then, upon further reflection, she embraced being a bully.

You know, actually looking back, and to be very honest, I think I may have been a playground bully, because we used to go outside and play very, very hard, and it was like the girls against the boys. And we would - I think as girls we were not going to let boys out do us...I try to have empathy or not – on both sides. There – there has something that has caused this to happen, whether the student that is perceived as being bullied has self-confidence issues or other challenges where they cannot necessarily speak up for themselves or they are seen as a weaker person. And then also from the person that may be an aggressor trying to find out what holes they're trying to fill as well by being the bully or the aggressor in those – those types of relationships...to see where the emotional influence is coming from as well.

Principal 14 (2014) embraced being a bully, while Principal 4 (2014) shared an experience of being bullied. In this next statement, Principal 8 (2014) reflected on being bullied and a bully.

I've dealt with it myself, so bullying is not a new thing. Being that I'm 43, bullying is not a new, but it has evolved and what I mean about that is as a child when I reflect back now what I did not know as bullying then it was bullying. Because I've been bullied and I've been the bully just to be honest with you... because I always wanted to be the popular kid or hang with the popular kid so we said and did things to the kids who weren't so popular. But, it was done just right there, personal interactions when we saw each other at school or in the neighborhood...

Again, the participants suggested that these experiences made them more sensitive or empathic to the students and the issue. Principal 15 (2014) brought support to this proposition in saying,

I think just the actual experiences that I spoke of earlier seeing – seeing students who are victims of bullying has made me more sensitive because I know, I know where it can push an individual.

In summary, the middle-school principals in my study were very candid relative to their personal experiences with bullying. Furthermore, whether they were a bully, being bullied, or a bystander, these administrators affected their perceptions, thoughts and beliefs about bullying and informed their actions responses to the behavior. In the next section, we will examine what these participants stated about another factor that influenced their perceptions of addressing this issue – their adoption of policies and procedures.

Adoption of recommended policy and procedures. Another factor that greatly influenced middle-school principals' perceptions of self-efficacy was the adoption of district policies, procedures, guidelines and training. When asked a question relative to their belief about being

able to address bullying, Principal 4 (2014) said, “Yes”, and went on to say the cause of this belief was a result of “the training we had”. Study principals stated that because the school district had taken a significant stand against bullying by putting guidelines in place, it gave them the belief that they were being supported. This helped to promote buy-in by all stakeholders. Principal 7 (2014) stated, “I think that having that support through the Student Code of Conduct which is the unified document for the district, has really allowed us to just reference in black and white to parents and to students, here are your consequences for doing this.”

Additionally, these administrators felt the policies and procedures provided a framework for addressing bullying and mitigated some of the problems relative to addressing such a sensitive issue in schools. A key component of the district guidelines was training. The participants were firm in their belief that the adopted procedures, along with the associated training, helped them in dealing with school bullying. The guidelines require training for all school faculty, staff, students, appropriate district-level personnel and even parents/stakeholders. In reference to training helping the principal address bullying, Principal 1 said,

Well, I – well, definitely training. I think what [the district] has done – and I will say, I mean I guess... [district administrator] has been a major factor in the training for bullying. I mean [district administrator] has not only taught assistant principals ... also taught principals... So I think the county has done a real good job with their employees that if you want to help and you want to learn more about bullying, there are resources for it... Training... That’s a key factor.

Principal 17 shared the following thoughts about training in stating “... over the years [the district] has provided training at every level; counselors... we have a bullying protocol, the APs

are trained so there's been you know, training and awareness so as a school principal, I think that we know what it looks like, what it feels like, what to do when it occurs.”

As a result of implementing the policies, procedures and guidelines, principals in my study felt bullying incidents had decreased. Principal 11 (2014) provided support for this premise by stating, “You have to inform. You know, have to inform our staff, our students, the teacher and families that bullying won't be tolerated. And I – I believe by doing so that it, you know, decreased or reduced the number of incidents.”

Principal 3 provided additional evidence by suggesting, “But definitely, once I implemented the – once the district implemented their policy, we implemented it here, I – I did see a decrease.”

Furthermore, the participants felt the guidelines built a sense of security in the parents. In other words, lines of communication had been opened and parents knew that school officials take allegations seriously and will immediately address them. Principal 7 (2014) posited, “we want parents to know that we take it seriously.” This principal went on to say, “I feel that we do a - an exceptional job here locally with educating students and teachers and - and parents on the seriousness of bullying.” To further illustrate this thought on the effects of implementing the procedures, Principal 1 said,

I think because the county does have policies and procedures put in place – that if the person, the student or the teacher, whomever, knows about the bullying, actually comes to me as a principal, - and tell me that this is going on, then I can immediately start investigating... So I can intervene, get the parents involved, get the school involved, get all the auxiliary people involved.

Principal 13 (2014) also noted that being able to apply the guidelines within the context of specific school situations was also important:

I would say that's [learning from other administrators] part of the key and that, you know, the other part is belief, self-efficacy and having a belief in yourself, you know, that you can deal with students and that you can deal with parents and - and understanding the makeup of your environment, because different administrators are placed in different environments. You don't always address the issue the same, depending on where you're located.

In summary, study participants reported that the presence and implementation of adopted policies and procedures provided a perception of district support and helped them to address bullying and communicate with stakeholders. The adopted guidelines gave them a sense of security in dealing with the issue and offered a foundation from which to operate. Moreover, these procedures furnished training, not only to school administrators, but to all stakeholders. This confidence and training to address bullying brings us to the study principals' thoughts on whether or not bullying could actually be reduced and/or eradicated.

Reduce it – yes, eradicate it – no: Confronting the realities of bullying. The participants in my study indicated that they believed they had the skillsets, abilities and knowledge to effectively address bullying in schools. However, their self-efficacy was related to whether they were discussing reducing bullying versus eradicating bullying. Their experiences, the district guidelines, training, beliefs, passion and sensitivity equipped them for the task of reducing bullying. Principal 6 said,

So for me, I feel empowered by my leaders to say this is something that we have to do and I support you in your building in being able to do it, and then I'm going to give you some tools... And then being given tools to help with it. All of those together then you – you have a package – [training] is a part of the tools.

The middle-school principals were highly motivated and possessed a high level of self-efficacy. All these components were seen as having resulted in a decrease in the number of incidents. However, principals were realistic when asked if bullying could be completely eradicated or just continue to be reduced. Principal 9 (2014) suggested,

You know, I – I say out of a scale of 10, we’re probably like an 8. I don’t think you’re ever a 10. Ten just means you’re just – it’s just – it’s optimal. As soon as it comes you’re able to eradicate it and get rid of it. I don’t think anybody is that – never a 10. I think we’re realistic knowing that we do a good job with it, that we comfort the parents with it, and you know we address the students as well, and like I said, we don’t have a ton of bullying cases. But, it’s just – it’s just a matter of making sure you address even if you only have one, you’ve got to make sure you address that one.

The principals in my study reported a belief that they could reduce the number of allegations and incidents. On the other hand, it was not their belief that bullying in their school could be completely eradicated. Reasons for this belief range from the premise that they were dealing with human beings to the issue being bigger than just the schoolhouse. When asked about his/her abilities and skillsets to reduce or eradicate bullying, Principal 1 (2014) stated, “... to reduce it – Yes. But, to totally eradicate it to – so it’s nonexistent, no. Because, as I said, I can’t control what they do at home, what they do on the social media. I think things that right here in the school I have a better handle with that.”

The middle-school principals in my study felt that they were being successful at reducing bullying in their schools. They cited several factors, including experiences, training, district support and adopted procedures that helped them to make an impact on this behavior. On the other hand, they felt confident in reducing the number of allegations and incidents, but did not

feel the same relative to completely eradicating bullying in their schools. One reason for this belief is that they felt they have limited control over external factors and forces that seek to diminish their efforts in the schoolhouse. One primary external factor is cyberbullying, which will be the next topic for examination.

Cyberbullying: Bullying in the information age. This form of bullying – the use of computers, the Internet and social media to hurt another student was a major concern among all the participants. Study principals were emphatic relative to their belief that cyberbullying was the most difficult issue they faced. Principal 2 (2014) indicated,

A lot of the times that we deal with bullying, it occurs online. It – Snapchat, what is the Yak now is – are horrible sites where it is occurring and we get parents – I’ve had parents come into me showing me all of this online asking me to address it inside the school as a bullying issue. It has gotten worse because of the way the social medias are coming. There are so numerous now. They just feel freer to say what they want to say or to be meaner to people because they don’t think there’s going to be any consequences of – of the action... More with girls. Cyberbullying is ramping up and it is carrying over into the schools.

When asked about his thoughts relative to bullying via the use of social media, Principal 16 (2014) stated, “The social media piece is just getting out of hand... [Parents] just need to know what their kids are doing.”

These middle-school principals clearly stated that in their perception, cyberbullying had increased in recent years and was the number one issue they faced each school year. Moreover, they indicated that many of the other discipline issues they address daily begin with conflicts played out on social media. Events described included students threatening fellow students, harassing others based on who they are/where they come from/what they believe, socially

isolating peers from groups and spreading rumors. When questioned about who seems to be most likely to be involved in cyberbullying, Principal 5 (2014) offered the following:

As far as the inappropriate language, name calling, the threats to kick someone's 'a' double 's' in school, girls, because it's a safer place to run your mouth so to speak than in person. You can run your mouth all day long and use profane language and cuss somebody out without getting punched in the eye. Boys tend to, you know, just say, 'Give me my one' or meet me wherever I need to meet you and we can get this over and done with. So, their conversations over the networks are very short and then they tell you where to meet them to get it on. Most of the time it's restrooms or afterschool, after they've gotten off the bus and that kind of thing. But, girls tend to be a great deal more vicious in nature, defamatory; especially with the kinds of things they put out that other girls are doing certainly can be very harmful and hurtful for the child once she returns to school or he returns to school because there are girls that do it to boys, girls that do it to girls as well and they tend to get more attention because of the type things that they are saying and doing to others. It gets to be very deep if you're nasty and so we have spent days calming you know, one situation and just trying to find out how far it's gone...

Principal 6 also shared the difficulties posed for principals in coping with events which occur through social media by stating, "... my new nemesis now is your child post something on Facebook... if I could remove social media, I can cut my discipline in half..." These principals were particularly concerned about the reactions of the bully and the victim when they return back to school after a weekend of online clashes. This principal, reflecting on increases in cyberbullying also stated,

Absolutely! Every Monday morning! Every Monday morning and so I learned a great deal about the different social media applications; the social media apps that the kids use because either they or the parents or the GBI has come by before trying to get us to identify some situations that were being - that they were handling. Sometime, it was amongst several different schools and even in some cases across states.

In this information age of every advancing social technology, cyberbullying had become a major issue in the discussion of school bullying. It must be taken seriously and addressed by school officials, particularly the principal. Therefore, the school official must be highly motivated to tackle all aspects of bullying, which is our next topic for inspection.

Motivation to address bullying. Having policies, procedures, processes and an ability to address bullying are certainly important. However, these must be coupled with a desire to actually take action. Principals in my study shared their perceptions on what motivated them, as the building leader, to address bullying in schools. They offered their thoughts on being driven to make schools safe and taking the initiative as the building leader to establish the context of addressing student bullying. Conversely, these principals were also cognizant of the negative effects of how school bullying is presented in the public area, particularly in the media.

Principals emphasized two main factors motivating them to actively address bullying; a) making schools safe for children and b) establishing a positive context as the building leader.

Making schools safe for children. The desire to make schools a safe environment for children to grow and develop was a primary motivational factor running through the interviews. In discussing this theme, some recited their personal experiences or made references to the experiences of their own children. These principals also seemed to view their students as their

children and expressed concerns that they did not want them to feel uncomfortable. Listen to the thoughts of Principal 11 (2014),

I feel like that all students can learn and should be in an environment where they shouldn't be harassed. And, I feel like too – I guess what motivates me too is that I have kids, too. I have two boys of my own and I look at like – I look at these kids as being my kids. So, when they come here, I want them to learn. Free from sarcasm. Free from the joking and the teasing of the building. And I take it personally.

Viewed another way, if their child was in the school, they would not want him or her to experience bullying or would want the officials to swiftly address any problems. Furthermore, principals noted a safe school environment that is conducive for learning is vital to a student's academic success. Principal 3 stated,

And the other big thing, you know, with – with all our focus on achievement and test scores, and all that kind of stuff, at the end of the day, the most important thing is having a safe school environment. And I, as I said, I think every – I know every child has a – has a God-given right to – to feel safe and supported and appreciated in the school environment. And, if that's not happening, I take that very personally.

The participants felt that they must promote safe learning environments and that they want to give students every opportunity to perform academically. Therefore, they take the whole issue of school bullying seriously. Principal 14 (2014) shared the following belief:

Well, my belief is that every student should be able to come to the schoolhouse and have a safe and welcoming environment to teach in – to learn in. The teachers need to be free from bullying as well. The students need to be free of that and I think it's the students' right to be

able to come into the schoolhouse and not feel threatened. And, because their – self-worth is going to increase, their student achievement is going to increase.

Effective principals are highly motivated to do everything possible to assist students in reaching their academic potential. In addition, they must also be concerned with the students' social and emotional well-being as they grow into positive contributors to society. This is akin to the same thought process in raising their own children. In fact, the middle-school principals in my study made the connection of empathy with their students by considering them as their own. In turn, this perception of being a parental figure sometimes translated into leadership in motivating the staff and other stakeholders to join in the effort to address bullying and promote a safe school environment. The next section will review this premise of being a building leader in this endeavor.

Establishing a positive context as the building leader. In harmony with their motivation, the study participants shared thoughts on their role as the principal – the building leader. The principals felt that they established the tone for all other stakeholders. They also set the stage for how the school community viewed and addressed this important issue. Principal 6 (2014) offered the following statement: "...Because, I think – I – because to me a true sign of a leader is for me to affect change in others. I set the tone. I set the tone. So, if I am saying – if I am saying – and I'm not using the catch words, buzz phrase or whatever – and they see me following through."

The principals in this work state that this important endeavor starts with them. They must be the catalyst and engage staff, students, parents and the community in helping the students and promoting safe learning environments. Principal 3 was asked if he sees himself as the catalyst, to which he responded by positing, "Oh, yeah. It's very important to me. And so I – I think all

the combination of all of the above [guidelines, procedures and prevention strategies] I think is why we've seen a decrease. That's a passion of mine and I've always talked with the community and with the students as well as my staff."

These principals posited that they must communicate high expectations and demonstrate how serious they take this effort and how important it is to them. Principal 13 (2014) shared his feelings about building leadership by stating,

I feel as a leader in the building, it is definitely up to me to be up on the laws of bullying, what's taking place, how it can impact students. The good and the bad. And so, also I have to make sure that I keep parents [informed], because they're – they really determine what takes place in their home. I see myself as the spokesperson to some degree... I do feel I have to spearhead that movement, so to speak, and I have to be the main spokesperson for anti-bullying.

There was also a negative aspect that motivated these principals in taking bullying seriously and addressing the issue. The principals in my study cited concerns relative to news stories that tell of harmful outcomes that resulted from bullying incidents. The outcomes principals discussed included fights, violence, shootings and suicides. Principal 15 (2014) provided thoughts on this concern by saying, "...students who are victims sometimes they become suicidal, sometimes they are the ones in turn that inflict you know, some kind of physical assault on themselves or someone else."

Moreover, these principals had also heard reports of schools facing legal challenges in and out of courts. School officials have had to deal with another court – the court of public opinion, which can be quite vocal and social troubling. Principal 15 (2014) continued this discourse by indicating, "We've had incidents in the District where you know students have been bullied and

it's caused some major emotional challenges like – high profile. It's very uncomfortable, very uncomfortable and it causes a level of urgency and a level of careful thoroughness about the work that we do.”

Principal 17 (2014) advanced, “Portrayal of events informs you know, kind of adds sway to what occurs you know when kids are bullied in school because you just, as I said, the news media, you know connects you know, school shootings invariably with some form of bullying, whether its physical, verbal or social isolation.”

Even though the number one goal of these administrators was to ensure the safety and well-being of the students in their care, they were also brutally aware of the legal and societal issues that could be detrimental, not only to their school, but also to their careers. Concern seemed to be a great motivator for these administrators.

The principals in my study shared factors that motivated them to address school bullying. In the section above, they discussed being a building leader who must be cognizant of the challenges surrounding the bullying issue and transfer their motivation to teachers, staff and other stakeholders. These middle-school principals indicated that they must be the catalyst and the driver of efforts to deal with this problem and be the role model to the persons they lead. Once all of the factors are in place that moves the school officials to action, they must effectively address the issue, which will be our next topic for review.

How They Address Bullying in Schools

When school officials are prepared to address bullying in their schools, they must deal with it in an effective manner. Ineffectively handling bullying or not addressing it at all, could both have very serious negative and tragic outcomes. The goals of effectively addressing bullying is to provide a safe learning environment, promote academic success and help students to build

their feelings of self-worth and hope of a bright future. This section will examine the tenets of addressing bullying in an effective manner, as indicated through the perceptions, thoughts, beliefs and practices of the middle-school principals in my study.

Implementing district-level position, policy and procedures. The participants of my study were quite vocal in their appreciation of the district's stance and guidelines on student bullying. Having a policy and procedures in place moved them to not only implementing them; but implementing with fidelity. The principals reported that executing the policy, with fidelity, reduces incidents. Subsequently, when an allegation was received, an immediate investigation was expected. The participants were clear that all allegations must be taken seriously and investigated. Principal 12 (2014) stated,

I like the policy because children can tell, parents can tell, teachers can tell, so it gives me a broader view of what's going on. It's not just a child coming and saying, 'He hit me. He's bullying me.' So, when we get the reports, it just gives me the time to say, 'Okay, let me see what's on the report, let's pull the kids in. Let's pull the people in to see what happened.' So, like the idea that there's a step-by-step process and procedure in place, so I know it can follow. I have the checklist to say: 'Okay, I did this, I did that.' And then at the bottom okay, 'is it bullying or is it not bullying?' So, I like the process.

Principal 3 (2014) said, "I think the strategies that we've implemented and with the district's support, that we've actually seen a decline in it [bullying]."

The principals seemed to posit that communication was vital to bring complete resolution to these types of issues. When asked to reflect on how the district's regulations affected their how they address school bullying, the consensus was that parents of all parties must be contacted

about the incident. Listen to the words of Principal 11 (2014) as he reflected on the district's bullying policy by stating,

We have a policy on bullying in which we take every situation seriously. Any form of bullying we investigate. And, we also look at both parties, you know, the victim and the accused – and we notify the parents whenever there's any wrongdoing. We just let both parties know, the parents know what's going on.

Principal 14 (2014) summed up the position of the district's guidelines by stating,

Our district has a very comprehensive and very clear expectations regarding bullying, reporting of bullying, the consequences for students that are reported as bullies – the reporting timelines. Again, instant or instantaneous – very short turnaround time within the schoolhouse to handle the instances, very clear lines of communication on what – who's supposed to be notified if the instances are brought to a teacher's attention or administrator's attention. The expectations are communicated not only to the staff, but to the students and parents. It's really clearly outlined in the Student Code of Conduct for our district what bullying appears to be – and the consequences if a student is – convicted not the right word – accused of and/or found guilty of so to speak, those behaviors.

Each principal in my study indicated a working knowledge of the district's policies and procedures relative to addressing student bullying. They appreciated the district's stance on this issue and believed that the guidelines had been effective in reducing allegations and incidents. In describing the procedures and how they handle bullying, the participants indicated that effective intervention began with swift responses to allegations. They posited that the key to implementing the procedures with fidelity was to launch an investigation immediately upon receipt of a bullying report. Principal 14 (2014) provided support to this premise by saying,

I believe the – the training that we received as administrators through the – the very clear guidelines and process and policies that our district have, there should be no question about what happens in the schoolhouse. Even the report of bullying it's not an option to investigate it, it's an obligation to investigate it. Whether it goes out in to a full-fledged bullying incident...

Procedurally, when a report is received from the victim, parent or stakeholder, the allegation must be documented and investigated by school officials. If the allegation is found to be true, progressive discipline is administered and the parents of all parties are contacted. Also, the guidelines provide for a comprehensive approach to bring awareness to staff, students, parents and stakeholders, which includes training. Principal 10 indicated,

The district policy is aligned with the state law. And, in the district, you know, we try to put in procedures and protocols in place so that we make sure that we follow the state law. We make sure that students and staff are trained... This is my 15th year, so maybe 15 years ago, if a student had come and said, you know, he hit me, I may, you know, have dealt with it, but not necessarily as a bullying situation...But today, yes, if, you know, some's been teased or taunted or whatever, then it is definitely documented as a bullying situation. So, I think the policies have made me more aware... you make sure you address the issue, and I think it makes you more aware. If anything, the policies just makes you more aware of what's going on and what to do.

These administrators understood the mandate of implementing the guidelines with fidelity. They realized the need to investigate bullying reports, document and communicate. Moreover, they indicated they must take all allegations seriously and respond swiftly. Principal 3 (2014) posited,

Well, I am aware of the district policies that we're required to follow, and that is once it's reported to me, I have to act on it immediately, and there's protocol and paperwork that has to be filled out, and investigation has to be done immediately. And then after – if they're – if the child is charged with bullying, certainly a range of disciplinary action can take – be taken place, with the most severe being after three bullying charges.

The principals in my study shared that in order to address bullying effectively, not only should the district have comprehensive procedures in place, they must be implemented with fidelity. The school officials reported that they must be knowledgeable of the regulations and ensure that training is conducted. Moreover, when allegations are received, they indicated that they must take them seriously, immediately launch an investigation and handle any real incident based on the Code of Student Conduct. On the other hand, it would be prudent to make every effort to prevent incidents from occurring. Being proactive, which is the next section of our conversation, was how the principals hoped to prevent a student from being bullied in the first place.

Being proactive. In addition to implementing the district's guidelines with fidelity, study participants also spoke of proactive measures taken to prevent incidents and mitigate harm. These proactive measures were conducted through various ways such as, (a) changing attitudes and behaviors, (b) data-based initiatives, and (c) student involvement opportunities.

Changing attitudes and behaviors. One way principals worked to proactively prevent bullying was to utilize various approaches to counsel or train groups of students or individuals. Principal 15 (2014) shared the following relative to proactive measures by stating,

...we make different announcements about no bullying allowed or how to report bullying.

We try to build relationships with students and give them an opportunity to share in a non-

threatening environment. We have different counseling groups of at-risk students and different identified students, so maybe they have conversations – so we try to be preventative and we try to be proactive in providing a safe place for students to be able to express themselves. We communicate with parents – So notifying the parent can reinforce whatever we’re trying to do here in the schoolhouse in regards to modifying the behavior of the student at the school.

Principal 3 (2014) also utilized counselors in the classrooms and discussed the issue of bullying a great deal. The implication was that there was constant messaging of the topic. She stated, “The other thing has been just it being a focus for ours at school. We talk about it a lot. Our counselors go into classrooms and - and talk about it. So, I think that has made a big, big difference too.”

Not only was it important to provide training for students, it was also necessary to inform the staff. Principal 10 (2014) provided evidence of these proactive measures by suggesting, “...that’s where the training comes in. That’s where the anti-bullying campaigns, the presentations, the classroom guidance, the - all – everything that we do throughout the year. Students are aware [training] – students, staff.”

A correlative component of counseling and training was communication with the stakeholders. In fact, there was no counseling or training without the aspect of communication. Study principals used various methods to communicate, like those described in the above section. In addition, Principal 1 postulated,

Well, I think one of the things that we do is that at the beginning of the year, and throughout the year, we have a TNN television broadcast. So, we actually, each day or each week, we talk about different bullying topics, so that always keeps kids on their minds. We talk about

the long-term effects of bullying, the short-term effects of bullying a lot ... Constant messaging.

In a previous section on personal experiences affecting how they address bullying, Principal 14, 2014 indicated the need to determine the underlying catalytic agents on both sides that contributed to the incident. By doing this, she desired to get into and treat the root causes of the issue. The causes could be completely unrelated to the actual scenario. Interestingly, Principal 17 took a unique path in reducing negative behavior like bullying by implementing the following initiative:

...we've had so many things this school year that if you, if you, if we had not done them, I don't know how our kids – it changed our kids, the way of thinking, simple things, hygiene drive because kids weren't able to get the proper hygiene items. Clothing drive, coat drive, we had a very cold winter. We had kids walking to school without coats and coming to school without coats, so the community got together and bought... now you have a place in your school where a child can go get a warm coat. Come on! It changed the attitude, it changed it because sometimes he may just be angry because of his situation. Maybe embarrassed because of his situation...It affects family [and reduces] those negative behaviors.

Data-based initiatives. Another aspect of proactive measures used by these middle-school principals was to review the data. Upon analyzing data, school officials noted information that could be used to inform changes and adjustments relative to such features as the type of bullying which had been occurring, the location where incidents were taking place, and the time of day when bullying was occurring. Study participants reported that they used data to determine the primary locations for bullying incidents were the restrooms, locker rooms and hallways. The

resolution to the issues with these locations involved one general, overarching strategy – supervision. The principals in my study stated that they had modified adult supervision during class transitions, during locker room preparation for physical education classes and restroom breaks. Additionally, these building leaders implemented gender-specific supervision when appropriate and adjusted the bell schedule to allow teachers to escort their students to the next class. This strategy maximized the adult eyes on the students' movements. Proactively, Principal 9 suggested,

So we looked at how and where each infraction kind of takes place. So, you know, with bullying, most times it was like PE, - locker rooms. So, you know, this year - and it was also in the mornings, because our students sit in – they sit in the cafeteria in the morning time. And in they also sit in the gym. Prime places for bullying to take place for somebody being mean or saying something or hitting you on the way in and out. So, what we did is we increased supervision during the morning transition time in the gym. We changed the procedures on how to go dress out so that, you know, that there's not – we didn't have any fights in the gym in the morning and during the – and in the locker rooms, because there was a presence there. And, they let the presence be known I'm here while you all are dressing out. And, one person would sit in the gym as the kids transitioned in. It took a little bit of time off of their class time, but they appreciated the safety...

One principal reported that there was not a time during the day that students were not with an adult. In response to locations and actions taken to prevent incidents, Principal 4 (2014) stated, Here it's mostly in the hallway. And it's during transitions. We trained our staff over then again, aware of the bullying that's taking place in the hallway or any type of behaviors that's in the hallway, we've trained our staff to be situation aware and how to deal with it – in terms

of the way the transition to... In terms of making sure that during every class change or doing every transition, teachers are in the hallway. And that bathrooms and water fountains are monitored, that sort of thing.

Principal 15 (2014), analogous to the work of the other administrators in this section, used data to make determinations on the locations of misbehavior and with that information make necessary adjustments. To that end, he shared,

Each month, we run a discipline report and so the discipline report can tell us what kind of behaviors are our most frequent discipline referrals. Having conversations with the administrators and the security team, we can identify what we call ‘hotspots’ where we know that different types of behaviors take place. So, we can be proactive and be in those areas and we can try to modify our transition paths and we can influence different levels of supervision whether it’s in the cafeteria or whether in the locker room so we can put supervision in those places.

Opportunities for student involvement. Study officials reported that they have established various methods to get students involved in the initiatives to reduce bullying in schools. They have instituted student anti-bullying clubs and opportunities for students to be trained by partner agencies as Peer Leaders/Helpers. Principal 7 indicated, “... we do school-wide events too, like Red Ribbon Week and No Place for Hate. We have clubs, you know, we have clubs like Peer Helpers.” Many of the schools have chosen to be No Place for Hate sites, sponsored by the Anti-Defamation League. This program promotes substantial student involvement and recognizes students for their efforts. Principal 2 (2014) indicated,

We have a [student] club that operates in our building. We actually just had our first ‘No Place for Hate’ Week, where we tried to get the kids more involved in showing their culture

so we can at least – the more you’re exposed to it, the less that you’re afraid of it and the less likely you’re going to say something about it. We do Anti-Defamation League training with our teachers – [Training for] Parents, students and teachers.

Schools are provided with opportunities to receive assistance and resources from various sources and entities that specialize in teaching respect and acceptance of differences. Principal 15 (2014) shared, “We have some, we have different clubs or organizations like the ‘No Place for Hate’ you know, we make different announcements about no bullying allowed or how to report bullying. We try to build relationships with students and give them an opportunity to share in a nonthreatening environment.” This demonstrates the consistency of programs in the study district and the willingness of the principals to utilize the resources provided. Principal 11 (2014) reported, “We have, you know, pep rallies that we focus in on ‘No Place for Hate’, and students get a chance to tell how they feel about bullying and then I get a chance to hear from their perspective too.” The principals in this work strongly stressed the importance and effectiveness of student engagement in the reduction of school bullying and harassment.

Many of the strategies suggested in this section on proactive measures by the participants correlate with the district’s Bullying Awareness Campaign addressed earlier in this chapter. This comprehensive Campaign provided guidance, tools and resources relative to training of stakeholders, year-long activities, student clubs, consistent messaging, monthly topics and local and district support. Guidance involved providing school officials not only with procedures and protocols, but, also resources and access to technical assistance. Stakeholder training included the use of prepared presentations for students, staff, parents and the community. The Campaign was designed to provide consistent messaging against bullying behavior throughout the school year. Based on a given monthly topic relative to bullying, school liaisons facilitated trainings,

rallies, parades, marquee signage, class lessons and many other activities to keep the message going throughout the school year. The district urged local school principals to take ownership of their schools' efforts and the district provided leadership and support by having designated persons available to provide training, technical support and assistance.

Moreover, schools availed themselves of additional assistance from external partners, such as, the Anti-Defamation League's No Place for Hate program, which included a focus on cultural sensitivity and embracing differences. The Peer Leaders/Helpers Program, provided by the Anti-Defamation League, trained students to lead their fellow students in efforts against bullying. Red Ribbon Week, mentioned by principals in my study, also involved student participation in bringing awareness to destructive behaviors, including bullying. These proactive measures demonstrated attempts in creating positive school climate that could potentially diffuse bullying situations.

Summary

As previously stated, bullying in schools is a major problem that can greatly impact the academic achievement and overall well-being of students. It also continues to present public relations and legal challenges for local schools and school districts. There is no real argument that it is a significant concern that must be swiftly addressed.

Middle-school principals who participated in my study were asked to define bullying. Subsequently, they suggest that the term be further clarified to reduce misuse and/or overuse of the word by students, parents and other stakeholders. The principals strongly felt that they could effectively address student bullying and had a high perception of their own self-efficacy. They reported several factors contributing to this perception, including training, their district's strong stance on bullying, adoption of a written policy, procedures and guidelines, personal experiences

and a desire to help the students in their care. On the other hand, study participants felt strongly that they have and could reduce school bullying; but, not eradicate it.

Of particular interest was the principals' thoughts on cyberbullying. They indicated that this area of bullying was particularly problematic. It seems to form the basis for much of the fights that occur and it was something that has increased over the years. Additionally, they posited that this component of bullying seemed to involve mostly female students. Of particular concern to these principals was what happens at school when all parties return to school after an online clash. Many of the disputes they address in school began with online issues.

On the subject of actually addressing bullying in schools, principals stated that having the district take a substantial stance on the issue and having district-level guidelines in place positively affected their efforts. Moreover, the guidelines, in concert with the policy, district campaign and the *Code of Student Conduct* provided several tools to address bullying in a proactive, preventive and responsive manner.

In the next chapter, I will discuss the meaning of the data gathered for my study. This discussion will be driven by the emerging themes revealed in this chapter by the participating school principals. Furthermore, I will discuss how the information from the results align with current literature and extend knowledge on the perceptions, thoughts and beliefs of school administrators in addressing student bullying.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter offers a discussion, conclusions and recommendations relative to the primary problem raised in my study. Bullying is a serious problem in schools and can affect students both socially and academically (Banks, 1997; Nansel et al., 2001). The effectiveness of anti-bullying programs falls to school administrators who are vitally important to preventing, reducing and eliminating bullying in schools. Administrators must lead the effort and provide the catalyst for action by teachers, parents and other stakeholders. My study sought a better understanding of this dilemma by providing data and findings on school administrators' perceptions, thoughts and beliefs that inform how they tackle this issue. Subsequently, anti-bullying program development could be modified and thereby increase their success of implementation and effectiveness. Also, there could be a positive impact on the professional learning of school officials, in which the training they receive would be affected by the knowledge gained from my study. The specific questions guiding this inquiry were:

1. How have federal, state and local laws, policies and procedures informed and affected school administrators in the way they address bullying?
2. What are school administrators' perceptions relative to their own self-efficacy or ability to mitigate/eradicate bullying in schools?
3. What factors informed their perceptions on bullying and their ability to address the issue?
4. In their own voice, how do these school administrators address and prevent bullying?

First of all, in the following section I will discuss the importance of some of the federal, state and local laws, policies and procedures as it relates to the analysis that was conducted. Analyses of these data sources provided the lens through which the principals view the topic of bullying

and established the foundation of how bullying is addressed in schools. Succeeding that conversation, I will then discuss the major themes revealed in Chapter 4 and their significance in informing the perceptions, thoughts and beliefs of the middle-school principals. Finally, I will offer some recommendations will be offered for future thought and study.

Analysis of Federal, State and Local Laws, Policies and Procedures

A review of the secondary data sources related to bullying policies and procedures, revealed that, although there are no federal statutes prohibiting bullying in schools, much has been done in this effort to address this important issue. The U.S. Department of Education has published a number of guidance documents, initiated studies and held nationwide Summits. On December 2011, the Department commissioned an analysis of state bullying laws and policies (Stuart-Cassel, Bell, & Springer, 2011). This analysis not only reviewed all current state statutes, the authors also reviewed proposed legislation and suggested components and strategies for effective regulations. Additionally, 'Dear Colleague Letters' have been issued by the Department's Office of Civil Rights (Ali, 2010) that speak to issues of bullying and harassment that are in violation of identified protected groups. Bullying or harassment of these groups constitute noncompliance with the Constitutional rights afforded to all of us. Except for the rights issue, bullying information from the federal government is just that – information. Chiefly, the purpose of the federal guidelines was to provide tools to inform states on best practices and mitigation processes. It is evident that the federal government recognized the unique nuances of states and sought to deliver a vehicle for state and local officials to review and revise current policies.

The commissioned study and other federally-initiated actions were important to addressing bullying by informing state and local stakeholders about generally established best practices and cautions regarding inaction or responses that may constitute violations of federal

law. Again, the federally commissioned study by Stuart, et al. (2011) and a previous study by Greene and Ross (2005) both examined state laws. The only difference between the two were the number of states that had bullying laws in place when the study was conducted. Although there has been increased public and legal awareness of this issue (Rigby & Smith, 2011), there has been no indication of any drive to adopt a federal law.

In the state where my study was conducted, the state law was revised in 2010. In this revision, state lawmakers enhanced the definition of bullying, provided a stiff penalty for repeated incidents, mandated communication to parents and instructed districts about what should be contained in their student codes of conduct. Furthermore, the law instructed the state Department of Education to develop a model policy and required school districts to develop a bullying policy or revise their existing policies to align with the state model. These revisions and mandates were important in that they provided the foundation for local school districts to adopt or revise their policies and procedures. The new state law required that school districts either adopt bullying policies or revise existing regulations. As will be discussed later, one of the emerging themes from the principals in the study was that they reported felt a higher level of self-efficacy as a result of have laws and procedures in place. The revised state law became the precursor for the districts' making changes in how school officials were advised to address bullying in schools. Not only did the changes in state law provide a basis for attacking the issue of bullying, it also braced the position of school officials, thereby giving them a resource on which to operate and communicate and lifted their confidence.

In turn, the study district not only revised its policy, it took the initiative to launch a year-long, districtwide campaign. This campaign included revisions to their Code of Student Conduct, a structured training plan, identification of school liaisons to facilitate the year-long

activities, a calendar of topics and activities and community awareness. The participants in the study reported that the school district's strong position against bullying and the comprehensive, districtwide approach to address the issue had been the key in enhancing their skillsets and ability to implement proactive measures, handle situations, reduce incidents and create a positive school climate. Kennedy, Russom and Kevorkian (2012) suggested that a focus on professional development relative to bullying increases self-efficacy and confidence in administrators to address the issue and communicate with stakeholders. The revision of local policies and procedures, in conjunction with the improvements in state law, certainly informed and impacted the mindset of the middle-school principals in my study. They no longer had to act based on their own discretion and other beliefs. Moreover, having higher procedural expectations from parents and other stakeholders, proactively caused principals to be more informed through strategic training.

Middle-School Principals' Perceptions of Bullying and Efforts to Address Bullying

From the primary interviews with principals, several themes emerged related to their views and the ways in which they address bullying in their schools. In this section of the chapter, I will discuss each major theme, its significance/importance and suggested recommendations for subsequent actions beyond my study.

Varying Definitions/Descriptions of Bullying

Bullying is a repeatedly intentional act of inflicting physical, emotional, relational or social harm to another student within the context of an imbalance of power (<http://www.stopbullying.gov/>). On the other hand, the term defined in the study's state law seems to lack clarity on two components of the above definition. The state law did not stress that bullying is a repeated or repeatable behavior, although, there seems to be some allusion to this by

using including the terms persistent or pervasive, which addresses a period of time.

Furthermore, the state law did not directly address the imbalance of power, which is a major component in the federal definition and which separates bullying from other types of similar misbehavior.

Principals' definitions of bullying varied with different components from the federal definition being emphasized by different individuals. While principals varied on specific components of bullying on which they focused, there was a consensus among these participants that a great need existed in clarifying the official definition. They indicated that bringing more clarity to the posted definition would be beneficial to their efforts to address allegations and work with parents. The implication of this premise was the need to have a clear definition impacts not only the identification of the behavior, but also the number of allegations that are reported. An inability to identify student bullying would skew the perception of school officials relative to whether there was or was not an issue to address (Cheng, Chen, Ho & Cheng, 2011). Kennedy, et al. (2012) suggested the need for more training to clarify the definition of bullying, which would improve identification of the behavior. Reports of bullying from students, parents or other stakeholders could result in mislabeling or have tragic consequences. The allegation may be mishandled, ignored due to a lack of information, or blown out of proportion, due to confusion and misinterpretation of the facts.

Mishna, et al. (2006) suggested in their study that 4th and 5th grade students, parents, teachers and administrators seemed to describe bullying based on their perceptions of what constitutes a bullying event and then determine whether or not an incident actually occurred. Similarly, the perceptions, thoughts and beliefs of the participants in my study not only affected how they identified bullying, but also their subsequent responses were influenced. In light of these

findings, I concur with the recommendation by Kennedy, et al. (2012) that future bullying policy and procedure development must include concrete and helpful information on identifying and addressing bullying. It may not be enough just to provide a definition of bullying. There may also be the need to require more detailed training on the various types of the behavior and more work to ensure that all school officials can accurately identify all possible forms of bullying. It should also be noted that discrepancies in the descriptions of bullying occur between administrators, parents, students and school staff (Newgent, et al., 2009). These stakeholders report incidents to school administrators, who then must investigate. These discrepancies in what is bullying affect reporting of the incidents and how they are addressed.

Failure to accurately identify bullying means that an incident that was not truly bullying is incorrectly handled and thereby creates problems for all parties. Conversely, treating an episode as some minor infraction, when it is actually a bullying situation, could cause the incident to be mishandled or just swept under the rug. As Banks (1997) and Unnever and Cornell (2003) have found, the reason for students not reporting bullying is because either nothing was done, it was mishandled or bullying is part of the culture and cannot be stopped. This could result in the continuation of the behavior or retaliation against the victim, which are the primary fears of the victim and bystanders. This is where effective handling of bullying begins. If it is not accurately identified, it cannot be accurately addressed. Additionally, the lack of clarity with the term leads to overuse and misuse of the term by stakeholders, which is the next emerging theme for discussion.

Overuse/Misuse of the term. With the legislative, media and social focus on bullying, study participants indicate that the term may be used anytime there is a student conflict or some rule violation that is deemed to be the result of bullying. When discussing the increased misuse

of the term, principals suggested what was occurring might be best described as mutual conflict. As indicated in the definition of bullying in this federal definition, there must be an imbalance of power for an incident to be classified as bullying. Mutual conflict involves a disagreement between parties in which both are culpable. In that scenario, there is no one-sided power issue. However, due to the recent spotlight on the subject, students and parents loosely report situations as bullying. This can result in the overuse and/or misuse of the term leading to a flawed report. Since administrators must take all allegations of bullying seriously, this means that no matter the rationale for the allegation, the incident must be investigated.

Given the principals' perceptions of the frequency of reported incidents which seem to represent a misuse of the term bullying, a number of questions are raised. Did the parent understand the definition of bullying or just decided to report the problem as bullying? Where did the parent get the information? Did the parent just take the child's word for the situation without fact checking? Did the parent consider that there was another side of the story? In the principal's account stated above, was the parent really unaware of the revealed information on the child or just chose to ignore it? Did the parent choose to use bullying as a strategy to defend the child's behavior, with the hope that the truth would not be revealed? Answers to these and other questions could point to a parent's intent to deflect and misuse the term of bullying. In addition, it could point to a need for greater communication and/or education of stakeholders on the actual parameters of what is and is not bullying. One possible recommendation for future research would be to inquire about the correlation of stakeholder overuse and misuse of the term bullying to their misunderstanding of the definition. Furthermore, this future research could look at the impact of stakeholder training and whether or not it reduces the number of allegations.

Mishna, et al. (2006) studied students, parents, teachers and administrators and found that perception affected identification and the subsequent response. As it relates to parents, students and teachers, the misperception of what constitutes bullying could result in over-identification or misidentification. Consequently, school administration would receive a number of bullying reports to investigate, resulting in a small number of actual bullying incidents. As discussed above, the amount of time and resources utilized would inform a principal's perception, thoughts and beliefs on the true school climate relative to bullying (Flynt & Morton, 2008). This would greatly impact subsequent efforts to address the issue.

Misuse is the identical twin of overuse and can result in the same problems indicated above. Use of the term, when the motive is to excuse a student's behavior, push to get a consequence removed or intentionally filing a false report is misuse. In the course of a school day, with a large student population, this could result in a number of allegations, which is overuse. The sheer volume of bullying reports informs the perceptions, thoughts and beliefs of the administrators and their responses to the behavior (Dake, et al., 2004).

This finding of overuse and misuse of the term of bullying is significant and reinforces contemporary research on this subject. For example, Simplico (2013) suggested, "The topic of bullying is the flavor of the month in education" (p. 348). He further stated that today's child is being overprotected and nurtured to phenomenal levels, which has caused misuse of the topic and schools to resort to over-the-top strategies. Research would benefit from future study of the rationales for overusing and misusing the term, how it informs school officials and its effects on the school environment. The next conversation will focus on this response and the administrator's ability to address bullying.

Middle-school administrators' ability to address bullying. All 17 participants in my study felt that they had the skillsets and abilities to address bullying in their schools. When some took the opportunity to describe their impressions of their own self-efficacy, they described it as high. Factors that influenced their belief in their self-efficacy included an awareness based on personal experiences with bullying. Some reported being a bully in school, while others indicated they were a target/victim. Those that did not fall in either category stated that they witnessed bullying. In each of these three circumstances, principals believed that because of their experiences, they had gained an enhanced sensitivity for the plight of the target and wanted to protect the students from harm.

This is important information because, these principals indicated that their personal experiences had an impact on their perceptions, thoughts and beliefs relative to school bullying and their subsequent motivation to address the matter. Before any direct action or response is taken, there must be a desire to deal with the bullying. This can operate in various degrees. For instance, the principals in my study, shared that they had sympathy for bullying and that it must be taken seriously. In contrast, before conducting this research, I had a prior assumption that the principals may draw on their experiences and as a result have the belief that bullying is harmless or something that will pass. I had wondered if principals had successfully got over bullying incidents that could lead them to believe that the students will also. Previous literature indicates bullying could be seen as part of school's social environment and the student should just toughen up and get through it (Olweus, 1993). From such a stance, the principals would be less motivated to take action or their actions would be half-hearted and ineffective. There is even the possibility that no action would be taken at all.

In my study, not only did participants draw on their own personal experiences, participants also revealed empathy for those who had been bullied or students, after reflecting on their own children or noted that bullying could involve their children. As with the previous statements on personal experiences and empathy, the study principals who reflected on their children felt a connection with bullying that exceeded just compliance with policy. Their students were not just students, they were their children. Therefore, as their children, they felt a need to protect them by promoting a learning environment that is safe and positive. In other words, principals who came from this perspective seemed to have a strong sense of nurturing and caring for children. These feelings seemed to take school officials beyond mere compliance with district mandates and into a place of doing everything possible to help the students. This premise informs various aspects of the schoolhouse, from principal selection to professional development and training.

The participants in this section submitted that these experiences made them more sensitive to the students and the issue. Moreover, these experiences seemed to have an effect on how the middle-school principals approached their current work on addressing student bullying. Such experiences and the principals' feelings of self-efficacy had a positive effect on their motivation and the desire to take action to address bullying in their schools. Bandura (1969, 1977, 1999) suggested that external/social forces, along with interpersonal, behavioral and environmental factors inform perceptions of self-efficacy, motivation and subsequent actions and responses. In fact, Bandura (1977) wrote that "people process, weigh and integrate diverse sources of information concerning their capability and they regulate their choice behavior and effort expenditure accordingly" (p. 212). The participants in my study clearly stated that their past experiences drove their current efforts to address bullying.

Adoption of recommended policies and procedures. Another factor that greatly influenced these middle-school principals' perceptions of self-efficacy was the adoption of district policies, procedures, guidelines and training. Swearer, et al. (2010) indicated that school-wide programs were far more effective in decreasing bullying incidents than classroom approaches. In the present study, principals stated that because the school district had taken a significant stand against bullying by putting guidelines in place, it gave them the belief that these guidelines were being supported. All participants implemented the district's regulations and believed that they provide a framework in dealing with issues, feeling supported and ensuring they communicated clearly with parents and the community. Furthermore, the middle-school principals reported implementing the protocols with fidelity had reduced the number of incidents in their schools. The study participants were grateful to have structured guidelines in place that also communicated a strong position against bullying. The procedures informed their skillsets, provided methods for addressing incidents and modules for stakeholder training. Again, this improved their own beliefs of self-efficacy and motivation and the realization of incident reduction. They did not feel that the structured procedures were a hindrance, but an enhancement.

There are important implications to having specific policies and procedures in place. Kennedy, et al. (2012) indicated the belief of students, parents, teachers and administrators that there is a need for policies and procedures that include information on identifying and addressing various types of bullying. Similarly in the present study, the principals reported positive thoughts about having adopted regulations and that they assisted them in addressing bullying in their schools. The district guidelines informed their efforts and provided a consistent platform from which to train, handle and communicate with stakeholders. Additionally, these regulations

provided the study principals with a perception of district support and a feeling of comfort that they have direction.

Effectively Addressing and Preventing Bullying in Schools

Previous literature indicated that a comprehensive approach to addressing bullying is the most effective method to reducing allegations and incidents. The middle-school principals in my study provided procedures and guidelines through a district policy, regulations and a comprehensive campaign. They shared not only their thoughts on the importance of implementing the guidelines with fidelity, but also using proactive measures to reduce bullying allegations and incidents. The following sections will discuss (a) taking action, (b) analyzing data and (c) being proactive, in greater detail.

Taking action. The middle-school principals in my study reported that executing the policy, with fidelity, reduced incidents. When an allegation was received, an immediate investigation was expected. There was also the expectation that the allegation was documented and reported to the principal or designee, who then launched the investigation. The participants were clear that all allegations must be taken seriously and investigated. This reinforces the premise suggested by Domino (2013) that intervention and training was vital to the realization of any reduction in bullying incidents and the promotion of positive learning environments in schools.

This indicated that the regulations, policy, training and campaign communicated an expectation that bullying is a significant problem and reports must be taken seriously and investigated. In fact, their district policy clearly stated that any employee's failure to comply with the policy and regulations would be subject to sanctions up to and including termination. In previous research, students recounted that victims and bystanders are reluctant to report an incident for fear of adults handling it wrong, sweeping it under the rug, retaliation or other

reactions (Unnever & Cornell, 2003). Students will not report bullying if they believe that the allegation will not be investigated, they are told to toughen up or the incident is handled wrongly. The implication of taking this seriously and responding swiftly is that it will be consistently addressed, not leaving a student or parent to wonder if an allegation will be thoroughly looked into and handled. Given the response of the participants in my study, principals strongly support policies which require quick and thorough investigations of bullying allegations. Since bullying has a number of short and long-term consequences, it may be prudent for future policy, regulation and program development to ensure that language is included to clearly communicate expectations to swiftly document and resolve any received allegations to all stakeholders.

In taking action against bullying, study principals sought to organize training for stakeholders. By sharing with all stakeholders what bullying is and what is expected, school officials make great progress in the efforts to reducing bullying allegations and incidents. Parents have knowledge from which to speak to their child, students understand what is prohibited behavior and the consequences for violations, and community members put things in place to promote neighbor awareness and action.

Moreover, study principals scheduled adult supervision during the school day. This was probably one of the most important bullying reduction strategies. Olweus (1993) spoke to the importance of adult supervision in addressing school bullying. Bullying incidents occur wherever adults are not. Therefore, it was important for principals to schedule adults to monitor hallways, restrooms, locker rooms and class transitions, to name a few.

Analyzing data. In addition, the middle-school principals in my study indicated that data were reviewed to determine several key components to effectively preventing bullying:

- Time of incidents – This information not only included at what time of the day incidents are occurring, but also which day of the week.
- Locations of incidents – These data involved the identification of the hotspots or where the incidents are occurring. Principals analyze if bullying was occurring in the hallways, restrooms, classrooms or the bus stops.
- Types of incidents – What forms of bullying are happening? Principals used these data to determine the strategies to be taken.
- Planning for operational revisions – Identification of the above information will assist school officials in developing a plan of action to mitigate, reduce and prevent incidents. This may include the implementation of various operational adjustments or additions, for example, changing class transition procedures.

As data were analyzed, diverse steps were taken to address issues. For instance, identification of students at-risk for bullying or identified bullies, led to different counseling groups so students would have a safe place for conversation. Principals also noted regular analysis of discipline reports and locations of hotspots where incidents occurred also led to changing operations or supervision. Moreover, principals indicated that procedures for dressing out for gym classes were revised, bell schedules were changed and the monitoring of bathroom breaks were adjusted.

Administrative use of data as a tool to address student bullying, though not a new concept to handling student discipline, is an extremely important and supported by research. Varjas, Henrich and Meyers (2009), in their section on practical implications, suggested “schools interested in preventing bullying and its negative effects collect information about bullying” (p. 173). Additionally, Shah (2012) suggested that effective educators evaluate their campuses and

track student misbehavior in order to make modifications in adult supervision or other measures that will mitigate the concerns. My study reinforces this premise of data review to effectively address student bullying in schools. A consensus of the study participants were very clear on how the use of the data informed their planning and responses.

Being proactive. Being proactive is important for several reasons. First of all, being proactive operates from the premise of supervision and education and influences the school's environment. The students are being taught appropriate behavior and to make better choices before inappropriate behavior occurs. The training teaches the expectations and the adult supervision demonstrates that the adults will inspect what is expected. Secondly, proactive measures promote an overall positive school climate and culture that will impact bullying and other misbehavior, which stimulates perceptions of safety and academic success (Bucher & Manning, 2003).

Some school climate programs used by these principals, e.g. Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports and the Anti-Defamation League's No Place for Hate, were proactive in their design. By using these types of approaches, the study participants promoted activities and initiatives that communicated the anti-bullying message to all. It should be noted that these activities and initiatives were, for the most part, student focused with student involvement. District training for school personnel suggested that schools get their students involved. The perspective of the training and the principals was that students should be directly involved in the conversation about bullying and given the opportunity to devise strategies to help their fellow students. Furthermore, the students would have insight on what would make the messaging more effective to their colleagues. Within district expectations, school facilitators were given latitude to be creative with student involvement. Some principals described initiatives that simply

created a caring environment (e.g., clothing drive, hygiene drive) as also changing students' attitudes and negative behavior.

The importance of this proposition is in the area of training and program and professional development. Any comprehensive approach to addressing bullying in schools must include student involvement. They must have a voice in this effort to deal with student bullying and the general improvement of their schools climate and culture. To effectively address bullying in the short and long-term, there must be a comprehensive approach involving all stakeholders. This comprehensive method also includes strategies and actions to prevent incidents from occurring (Banks, 1997; Fretwell & Errion, 2011; Espelage, et al., 2013). In addition, this discourse on using proactive measures to address student misbehavior provides more evidential research to the literature and is supported by Fenning, Pulaski, Gomez, Morello, Maciel, Maroney, Schmidt, Dahlvig, McArdle, Morello, Wilson, Horwitz and Maltese (2012). This study (Fenning, et al., 2012) recommended that schools develop preventive tools to effectively deal with discipline issues and my study supports that premise by outlining several student-focused initiatives principals used to try to engage students in creating a positive school culture. Ultimately, the primary goal of addressing bullying is to achieve a school culture and climate where academic success and social-emotional well-being can be achieved.

The impact of cyberbullying. The middle-school principals in my study indicted one form of bullying, cyberbullying, was the most difficult issue they face. These educators clearly stated that in their perception, cyberbullying had increased in recent years and is the number one issue they face each school year. Moreover, they indicated that many of the other discipline issues they address daily begin with conflicts played out on social media. Instead of directly confronting another student, bullies seem to find courage in threatening or socially isolating their

classmates via social media. Furthermore, by using fake registrations and sites that promote anonymity, students can hide their identity, which allows them to be more daring in their misbehavior. The principals in my study reported that cyberbullying was having a significant effect on their school climate. They indicated that many of the in-school discipline issues that occurred had an online beginning or connection.

Principals also indicated parents or other stakeholders often brought in Facebook pages or other evidence of alleged cyberbullying and asked the school principal for their assistance in addressing the issue. The study district's policies and its Code of Student Conduct clearly indicated the jurisdiction parameters of the school relative to cyberbullying. Basically, it may be problematic, outside of some exceptions, to discipline a student for online offense outside of school and/or on their own hardware and network. Therefore, these principals were faced with a dilemma and fear of potentially violating a student's constitutional rights to free speech (Hinduja & Patchin, 2011). It would be prudent for future research and legislative efforts to clarify this touchy subject for schools. As indicated above, principals are faced with climate concerns that started with online misbehavior that should be addressed. The question is to what extent such cyberbullying can be addressed. Also, cyberbullying has implications on parent, student and community awareness and training, along with policy and professional development for school officials relative to proactively handling cyberbullying. Moreover, there is a need for state and federal lawmakers to resolve the constitutional issues school officials face when presented with evidence of cyberbullying away from school.

In examining the nature of what is purportedly happening on-line, principals noted students are threatening fellow students, harassing them based on who they are/where they come from/what they believe, socially isolating from groups and spreading rumors. When asked

anecdotally about any perceived gender differences in the amount of cyberbullying, the participants were nearly unanimous in identifying girls as the major offenders. This premise was supported in the literature by Crick and Grotpeter (1995) who suggested that this type of bullying behavior is mostly committed by girls. Furthermore, Varjas, Henrich and Meyers (2009) suggested that “males reported more physical victimization, verbal victimization and verbal bullying, and less relational victimization than females’ (p. 171), which relates to cyberbullying. A study by Elledge, Williford, Boulton, DePaolis, Little and Salmivalli (2013) suggested “girls were more likely to endorse higher frequencies of cyberbullying than boys, but the effects were modest in size” (p. 706).

The CDC has indicated that cyberbullying is a major public health concern (Hertz & David-Ferdon, 2008). They reported that incidents have increased exponentially and consequences are not being carefully considered or maintained. This information and perception has great implications on program development and stakeholder training. As previously indicated, one principal in the study held lunch groups for girls and others initiated student clubs and classroom counseling sessions. Additionally, it would be prudent for future research to investigate if the anecdotal information by the study principals is empirically true and what can be done to stop it. If we know that girls are the primary violators of cyberbullying, it would be beneficial to further investigate the causes of such behavior and what can be done to mitigate it.

Consequently, cyberbullying is a complex issue in which attempts to address it is akin to walking through a field of personal, professional and legal landmines. A study of cyberbullying perceptions of middle-school students conducted by Varjas, et al. (2009) suggested “that electronic and online activities may represent a unique modality of victimization and bullying” (p. 170). Additionally, these activities were not “associated with feeling less safe in school” and

indicated the perception that these behaviors were unrelated to school and situated in the community (p. 171). However, as reported by the principals in my study, electronic/online issues were brought to them and were the catalyst of in-school problems. One chief goal of understanding this major concern is to help students successfully cope when it occurs, which is also fraught with complexity. Parris, Varjas, Myers and Cutts (2012) provided some insight into this matter. Their study of the perceptions of cyberbullying coping among high school students revealed three general strategy categories they used to manage themselves in cyber situations that were not identified in prior research. These themes included reactive coping, preventive coping and no way to prevent cyberbullying (p. 291). The implication of my study was to inform teaching strategies and programs to address this issue and support students.

In addition, Couvillon and Ilieva (2011) proposed several preventative programs and strategies to address cyberbullying. Of those suggestions, many of them were already included in my study district's comprehensive campaign. Couvillon and Ilieva wrote that "Cyberbullying prevention is a proactive schoolwide approach, rather than an event-driven, after-the-fact action that needs to remediate damage and be rather narrowly defined by a specific incident" (p. 99). A consensus of the participants in my study believed that cyberbullying was a major issue; but gave no indication that they were not equipped to address it.

Recommendations for Future Study

The information uncovered in my study brings to light the perceptions, thoughts and beliefs of middle-school principals relative to addressing bullying in their schools. The purpose of my study was to bring this knowledge to the academic community to inform program development and professional improvement. In addition, by viewing this important issue through the lens of these administrators, my hope was that school officials will closely examine their own

perceptions, thoughts and beliefs and reflect on their knowledge, training, abilities and self-efficacy. Ultimately, the final product would be effective handling of bullying events, implementation of proactive measures and the reduction of bullying incidents. However, my study also raises additional questions and topics for future inquiry. The following sections will suggest some areas of further work on school bullying and administrators.

Since my study only involved middle-school principals from one school district, future studies could extend the premise to include assistant principals and a larger sample of school districts. In addition, although some important information and insight emerged from my study, the research focused only middle-school principals in one large urban-suburban school district. It would also be prudent to expand inquiry to elementary and high school levels. Furthermore, it is believed that understanding principals' perspectives at different grade levels could highlight bullying scenarios unique to that particular grade level or reveal issues that did not emerge with middle-school principals. Such information might lead to differentiated guidelines, professional development or professional learning for administrators at different levels.

As indicated in the section on limitations, my study did not make any attempt to correlate school bullying data to the interview data of its principals. It was my goal to gather honest and candid insight from these participants on the perceptions, thoughts and beliefs relative to addressing bullying. It was my belief that concerns about their data being aligned with their bullying records would stifle their openness to share. Future research could extend this work and show the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of administrative perceptions, beliefs, self-efficacy and motivation in terms of (a) the number of bullying incidents and the severity of these incidents or (b) the number and quality of proactive initiatives in schools.

My study addressed information from the participants on prior experiences with bullying and how those experiences informed their impressions and actions on in their schools.

Subsequently, it would be prudent to conduct further study on past experiences and utilize that information in the development of programs, training and professional development. Mishna, et al. (2006) indicated that there is a need to examine attitudes and beliefs of educators. Bringing those experiences into this effort would more effectively align the training with the perceptions, thoughts and beliefs of the receiving officials and take them into a place of personal reflection.

Communication with stakeholders is a key factor to effectively addressing bullying in schools. Students desire to know that their report was taken seriously (Banks, 1997). Parents like to know that action is being taken, which impacts their involvement (Waasdorp, Bradshaw & Duong, 2011). Moreover, the school community must be comfortable in knowing that schools are safe places and are positive learning environments. Additionally, it would be important for all stakeholders to have a clear understanding of the definition of bullying and what is expected in schools. This comes about through communication and awareness. My study discussed this component of addressing bullying and the study district's awareness campaign, which includes training for all stakeholders. It would be important for future study to further investigate this proposition of stakeholder communication and its effect on student bullying.

Another important area to be addressed relates to the ways in which school principals consider the concept of their school climate as it might relate to their efforts to prevent bullying. Brighi, Guarini, Melotti, Galli and Genta (2012) found school climate was a predictor of student victimization. Furthermore, Brighi, et al. (2012) suggested that "a poor school climate may also indicate that school personnel are less likely to respond effectively to bullying incidents" (p.

383). Bradshaw (2013) concluded “poor school climate is associated with increased bullying and negative student outcomes” (p. 293).

Although principals in my study were not asked questions explicitly about school climate and culture, their interview response described these terms implicitly. Specifically, the interview questions did not involve the use of the terms of school climate and culture. Moreover, the entire discussion on addressing bullying in schools involved the concepts and tenets of promoting positive school climates and cultures, particularly by changing the mindset and actions of the adults. Therefore, it would be prudent for future study to conduct deeper inquiry on the relationship of school climate and culture to school bullying.

Finally, I only sought to gather data and insight from school principals. However, it was quite clear that *the village* must be involved in the effort to address bullying in schools. Therefore, it may be prudent to conduct the same type of study with other stakeholders, including teachers, students and parents. This information would be important in the development of programs to help these persons help schools in dealing with bullying and enhance global awareness. They can be the ambassadors that would spread the message that the school and school district desire to have a school environment and community that is free from bullying and harassment and is positive, respectful and welcoming.

Summary

Today’s society is extremely complex and lacks the aspects of simpler life experienced in bygone days. Studies show that bullying has always been around (Olweus, 1972, 1978; Heinemann, 1972) and although such behavior has not necessarily received the attention it now realizes. Decades of research and recent public and legal scrutiny have brought us to this mandate to address bullying in schools. As we discussed, there are several causal factors that

drive students to feel it is appropriate to hurt another student physically, verbally, emotionally and/or relationally. Bullying, particularly with the onset of social technology, is now more complex, as with society in general; however, the methods and strategies to deal with this issue are relatively straight forward in nature. From the principals' perspectives, the best approach to addressing bullying is comprehensive and includes all stakeholders.

On the other hand, efforts to address bullying by school administrators must also be accompanied with an awareness of their own perceptions, thoughts and beliefs. School officials must note that prior personal and professional experiences inform and shape their self-efficacy, motivation, sensitivities, lenses and subsequent responses. The methods and detail in which they choose to deal with student bullying is influenced by external and internal factors. In other words, when it comes to bullying, what is my opinion of this issue and how far do I go to address it? Do I analyze data and take steps to create a safer environment for students? Do I utilize planning and proactive measures to prevent bullying incidents from occurring? Do I follow state and local district guidelines and continue to seek more knowledge and understanding of all aspects of bullying, including cyberbullying? Do I authorize yearlong activities to ensure continuous messaging on the issue of bullying? Do I organize training for all stakeholders to bring awareness of and garner support on the issue of bullying? Do I just do the minimum and be in compliance or do I recognize the seriousness of this issue and do everything to protect my kids? It is my hope that the latter is the mindset of school administrators.

However, it is also my hope that after reading my study, any school officials, programs or professional development agendas that are just about the minimum will be highly motivated to do more based on the information contained in my study. Remember, this is about the children – the precious cargo that parents and guardians hand over to us each school day. Moreover,

whether you were a bully, being bullied or a bystander back in school, you are where you are now because of an educator/adult like you are *now*. It is vital that we *pay it forward* and help the students we serve get to their *now*.

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APPENDIX INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Demographic Information

Interviewee ID No.: _____

Age: _____

Gender: Male/Female

Number of Years in Education: _____

Number of Years in Administration: _____

Interview Questions

- How would you define or describe student bullying in schools?
 - personal experiences as an administrator or teacher?
 - personal experiences growing up?
- Describe what you know about any laws and policies on bullying.
- When it comes to your everyday work in schools, how have the laws and policies you described affected you?
- When you implement these laws and policies, what do you expect will happen?
- Are there any other issues or factors you would like to share that form your opinions about bullying in school?
- Do you believe that you can effectively address bullying and reduce or eradicate it in your school? What factors cause you to feel this way?
- How do you address bullying in your school?
- What methods, procedures or processes do you utilize to prevent bullying in your school?
- In your experience with working with administrators, how would you describe their motivation to address bullying? Would you like to share thoughts on your motivation to address bullying?
- What changes would you suggest to lawmakers, policymakers, program developers and other decision makers to improve the work of addressing bullying in schools?