Implementing Effective Programs to Increase Safety and Reduce Bullying in Connecticut Private Schools, USA: A Policy Perspective

Angela M. Hudson Davis[1], Paul A. Bourne[2]*

[1]Capella University, USA
[2]Director, Socio-Medical Research Institute, Kingston, Jamaica

ABSTRACT: *Introduction: Providing a safe, supportive, and encouraging school environment is a social responsibility that parents delegate to lawmakers, teachers, and school administrators. It is in some respect a public right—or at least a perceived right—that the public has come to expect from its lawmakers, teachers, and administrators.* ***Objectives****: This research seeks to evaluate the role of Safe School Climate Coordinator in establishing a school climate programs and related policies to improve school safety and reduce bullying.* ***Methods****: The research employed the qualitative methodology from which six key themes emerged: mental health support; resource constraints; impact and influence of technology and social media; clear definition and distinction of bullying, harassment, and teasing; parental involvement and support; and importance and significance of the network's culture. Nine participants from seven private schools in Connecticut took part in semi-structured interviews that were specially designed and conducted by the researchers. The nature of the interviews allowed participants to provide useful insights into the role they played in enhancing school climate by carefully developing and implementing policies and programs that reject violence and promote a school environment that is safe and conducive to learning.* ***Findings****: The administrators were involved in training teachers and staff in detecting bullying activities and to immediately address them if identified. In order to protect the privacy and confidentiality of the participants and any information that was shared during the discussion, no personally identifiable information was used. A three-letter code or initials was used to further mask the identity of the participants. Each school administrator contributed equally to the discussion and actively participated in the semi-structured interviews. Most were interested in the outcome and willingly agreed to provide input regarding the development and implementation of school safety and anti-bullying manual as a deliverable for this action research project.* ***Conclusion****: The Safe School Climate Coordinator role was examined to ascertain actions taken to improve school safety and prevent bullying activities. The results of this study highlighted the importance of robust policies and careful oversight by the school administrators in maintaining a safe and bully-free environment. A safe and nurturing school culture paired with strong leadership can positively influence the school's environment resulting into improved academic successes and favorable behavioral outcomes of students.*

Keywords: *Behavioral outcomes of students, bullying, safe schools*

INTRODUCTION

Research has shown that students who are committed to learning and achieving academic excellence seek the safety and protection of a positive school environment, often referred to as the school's climate (Guerra, Williams, & Sadek, 2011). Academic climate and excellence go hand-in-hand and support each other (Hughes & Pickeral, 2013). These factors define the school's culture and ethos, which students carry with them for a lifetime. In this regard, students expect to be valued, cared for, nourished, and supported within the school environment (Guerra, Williams, & Sadek, 2011). Depending on the school's climate and environment, which forms the basis for its academic standards and culture, the school acts as an incubator for sound or dysfunctional childhood development (MacNeil, Prater, & Busch, 2009; National School Climate Council [NSCC], 2007).

Providing a safe, supportive, and encouraging school environment is a social responsibility (Wimberly, 2002) that parents delegate to lawmakers, teachers, and school administrators. It is in some respect a public right—or at least a perceived right—that the public has

come to expect from its lawmakers, teachers, and administrators (NSCC, 2007). Furthermore, schools that provides and advocates a supportive learning environment foment positive childhood growth and development, which results in increases in academic achievement (NSCC, 2007, 2010). A school environment that is not safe or fails to provide a place for students to learn and develop freely is ripe grounds for bullying to be initiated, develop, and grow, depreciating the school's climate, ethos, culture, and environment, which in the long-run have long-term negative effects on the victims of bullying (Khoury-Kassabri, Benbenishty, Astor, & Zeira, 2004; NSCC, 2007).

Nationally, 37% of students reported incidents of bullying; 20% reported being physically attacked; 85% of students reported bullying inside the school facility; 52% reported incidents of cyber-bullying, which often included threats of violence (Robers, Kemp, & Truman, 2013). The reported rates are significant and highlight the need for a unified approach to the problem of bullying. The rates of bullying in Connecticut schools vary across districts, which makes it increasingly difficult to determine the true extent of the issues. The Safe School Climate Coordinator may focus attention on developing a more streamlined and consistent approach to accurately reporting the bullying rates to the school district and the Board of Education

*Correspondence regarding this article should be directed to: paulbourne1@gmail.com

in order to assess fully the impact of the implemented policies and assess where changes are needed. Stanley et al. (2004) defined violence prevention programs in schools as a part of the measure to reduce violence, address academic achievement, and meet the concerns of various stakeholders, including parents and faculty. These concerns have led to the need for more research into the role of the Safe School Climate Coordinator. The research aimed to examine the role of Safe School Climate Coordinator in establishing a school climate programs and related policies to improve school safety and reduce bullying.

According to Dwyer Sadlier (2011), a robust school climate program is considered and effective measure of promoting a learning environment that is safe and free of violence. A small number of private schools in Connecticut participated in this research. The researchers applied a qualitative methodological approach to this project by engaging key individuals who had a role in school climate programs or policy development through semi-structured interviews (Creswell, 2003; Crotty, 2005; Neuman, 2006; Punch, 2005; Silverman, 2005). The qualitative methodology was appropriate for this project as it allowed the researchers to obtain relevant information about the school climate and the role of the Safe School Climate Coordinator through inquiry. Stringer (2014) noted that action research is collaborative, and through inquiry and investigation, it allows the researchers to take precise steps to address the issues at hand (Herr & Anderson, 2005; Stringer, 2014). The action from this research served to develop a school safety and anti-bullying manual as a means of raising awareness concerning the impact and effects of bullying. This manual was developed with input from the participants, and upon completion, it was delivered to the superintendent for further distribution.

The negative impact that bullying has on academic achievement has been demonstrated in several empirical studies. One study found that there was a strong link between bullying and decreases in academic achievement accompanied by an increase in emotional disorders (Glew, Fan, Katon, Rivara, & Kernic, 2005). It is imperative that schools promote the physical and mental health well-being of all students in order to foster behavioral attitudes that give rise to an ethical society. The promotion of good physical and mental health augments academic achievement, leading to improved students' prosperity, which serves to help them reach their full potential (Brooks, 2014). This research aimed to examine the issue of bullying from a public health point of view and to assess the issue in a specific region of Connecticut's private school network. Furthermore, the study will assess the role of a Safe School Climate Coordinator in developing and implementing programs in schools that can serve as effective policy measures to improve school safety with the goal of reducing or eliminating bullying activities in the school environment.

The Safe School Climate Coordinator plays a crucial role in managing the district's climate plan and collaborating with others within the district to develop strategies to identify, respond to, and prevent bullying in district schools. However, too often schools lack the resources required to effectively develop and implement practical safe school climate programs that are vital in addressing aggressive bullying behavior perpetrated by some students. It is important that effective intervention strategies are developed to reduce or prevent bullying behavior in schools (James & McCallion, 2013; Le Floch et al., 2014). For reasons of confidentiality and to protect the safety and objectivity of the Safe School Climate Coordinator appointed, schools often do not name the individual responsible for implementing the tasks. It is, however, important to specify at some level that is responsible for these activities and to coordinate appropriately these efforts (NSCC, 2007, 2010).

It was not until the 1999 tragedy at the Columbine High School, in Columbine, Colorado, that bullying was brought into a much sharper focus because of reports that the shooters were bullied by other students (Perkins, Craig, & Perkins, 2011). Since this tragic event, bullying behavior has taken on a more serious connotation due to the violent overtone of the Columbine tragedy, which showed an increase in more violent activities resulting in death (Cornell, Sheras, Gregory, & Fan, 2009).

Bullying includes but is not limited to physical actions such as hitting, kicking, pushing, and taking possession of an individual's person property. The verbal aspects of bullying are taunting, teasing, name calling, and threatening. Lastly, the emotional forms of bullying include harassment, spreading rumors, intimidation, social exclusion, and even extortion. These aggressive behavioral actions are ongoing and can escalate into fights outside the school's perimeter, supervision, and purview as time goes on (Buxton, Patel Potter, & Bostic, 2013).

Over the years, there has been a rise in youth violence involving physical altercations and shootings. It has been purported that these events may have been due to the perpetrator's having been a victim of bullying at some earlier stage of his or her life (Vossekuil, Fein, Reddy & Borum, et al. 2002). Therefore, many states have mandated anti-bullying laws and policies programs due to the growing concerns related to adolescent safety in school settings and environment (Cohen & Freiberg, 2013). Advocates are encouraged by this legislative move. They feel that implementation of anti-bullying legislations will help create an environment that supports all students and serve to reject bullying and all forms of aggressive and violent behavior as being unacceptable and unwelcome in the school environment (Cohen & Freiberg, 2013).

According to Dwyer Sadlier (2011), a robust school climate program is considered and effective measure of promoting a learning environment that is safe and free of violence. A small number of private schools in Connecticut participated in this research. The researchers applied a qualitative methodological approach to this project by engaging key individuals who had a role in school climate programs or policy development through semi-structured interviews (Creswell, 2003; Crotty, 2005; Neuman, 2006; Punch, 2005; Silverman, 2005). The qualitative methodology was appropriate for this project as it allowed the researchers to obtain relevant information about the school climate and the role of the Safe School Climate Coordinator through inquiry. Stringer (2014) noted that action research is collaborative, and through inquiry and investigation, it allows the researchers to take precise steps to address the issues at hand (Herr & Anderson, 2005; Stringer, 2014). The action from this research served to develop a school safety and anti-bullying manual as a means of raising awareness concerning the impact and effects of bullying. This manual was developed with input from the participants, and upon completion, it was delivered to the superintendent for further distribution.

THEORETICAL & CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In Garen's 1994 empirical research, he claimed that the principal–agent theory is a phenomenon that has not been examined to its full capacity and that more work is needed to provide evidence that it is consistent with the philosophy. Furthermore, it was difficult to conclude if the size of the principal–agent compensation is a factor in how well the organization will perform (Garen, 1994; Hill & Jones, 1992). This could also be true about the superintendent–coordinator partnership and the success of the implementation of the school climate programs and whether or not, based on the district and funding source, the plans are more readily executed or delayed. Factors such as these must be considered in this type of research as they could hamper the move to implement programs that would be beneficial to improving the school climate.

There is increasing evidence that leadership in any school

district is of utmost importance (Black, 2010; MacNeil, Prater, & Busch, 2009). Although there has been a shift of the overall school administration and to that of student achievement, there has been a lack of focus on school climate as it relates to education and safety (MacNeil, Prater, & Busch, 2009). It is imperative to assess whether or not student learning and achievement is sustainable if the climate of the school is not at an optimal level. Through this research, the agent theory will be explored to determine the level of authority that the Safe School Climate Coordinator will have in effectively making improvements in the anti-bullying program.

The second theory that will further support this research project is the social–ecological model, which is based on Bronfenbrenner's 1979 social–ecological theory (Swearer, Espelage, & Napolitano, 2009). The application of this model in studying the role of the Safe School Climate Coordinator will be useful in understanding the approaches that will be taken to develop anti-bullying programs (Ayers, Wagaman, Mullins Geiger, Bermudez-Parsai, et al. 2012).

Bronfenbrenner's introduction of the ecological model was a response to the narrowly focused manner in which psychologists conducted research in the early 1970s. Bronfenbrenner created a framework that demonstrated the benefits of shifting the focus of research to include the child and family and the environment around them (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Concentric circles represent the overlapping connections between the individual, society, and culture, with the connection of the individual to their society and culture represented as well (Eisenmann, et al., 2008). The ecological model can be illustrated by four circular layers that depict the interrelationship of the individual social and ecological structure (Bronfenbrenner, 2005): mesosystem, microsystem, exosystem, and macrosystem. The inner circle is the individual or the youth, who is surrounded by their family and peers in the ring identified as the microsystem. The exosystem comes next and represents the extended family, neighborhood, and mass media that the child will encounter each day. The outer circle is the macrosystem, defined as the laws, economic systems, culture, and social conditions that can have a positive or negative effect on the individual (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Eisenmann et al., 2008).

Two propositions were made that explicitly underscored the defining properties of the ecological paradigm (Gauvain & Cole, 1993). The first proposition indicated that during the course of human life there are significant developmental changes that take place (Gauvain & Cole, 1993). These changes become more complex because of the correlative interplay between the ever developing bio-psychological human being and the persons, objects, and symbols in the environment (Gauvain & Cole, 1993). The second proposition extended Bronfenbrenner's claim that the shape, ability, structure, and order of the contiguous methods that affect the development of the individual may vary completely as a joint function of the attributes of that person; the environment, both instantaneous and distant in which they exist (Gauvain & Cole, 1993).

Prevention strategies applied to the school climate program must take into consideration the individual, relationship, community and societal circumstances that could have a negative impact on the effective implementation and sustainability of the bullying prevention program (Dahlberg & Krug, 2002). The social–ecological model applies directly to the prevention or intervention programs that the school climate coordinator will be responsible for developing. Therefore, these programs must target the environment in which these students learn and play, or the programs may not be as effective as planned (Espelage & Swearer, 2004).

The school climate is relevant to all those involved (i.e., students, school staff and parents). Even with the best systems in place, effort should be made to assess and to further improve the environment. In developing and implementing strategies, it is important to consider cultural and socio-environmental factors, which could affect these

plans. All plans to improve the school security climate should be proactive with safety and well-being first and foremost. The Safe School Climate Coordinator is therefore encouraged to support and foster the structure to improve the school climate and ensure a safer environment that it conducive to learning (Gregory, Henry, & Schoeny, 2007).

Methods

The research design used to examine the school safety and anti-bullying programs in the school network is the qualitative methodology. In order to comprehensively examine this role of safe climate coordinator, literature searches were used to guide the design. The qualitative research was applied to gain a better understanding of the complicated phenomenon by obtaining as much information necessary from the participants (Kothari et al., 2012).

Sample

Twenty members from selected private elementary schools, within the Connecticut School Network system, were identified and selected as potential participants. These individuals were solicited to participate based on their role in improving the school climate and years of service within in the school system.

The potential participants were identified with the assistance of the school superintendent. This plan was appropriate effectively to identify and select participants who had the ability to provide valuable information related to the role of the climate coordinator in improving school safety. This approach is also relevant in ensuring there is input from those with far-reaching experience in the school system (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). A letter, with an invitation to participate, was sent to each individual, with explicit details about the research and with a request to consent to participate in the study. Upon receipt of their agreement, a meeting was scheduled to meet with each participant, individually, to review the requirements and allow the participants to ask questions. Upon ensuring that each participant was provided with the information and all questions were answered to the satisfaction of the participants, written informed consent was obtained. The researchers did not begin collecting data until consent. Leedy (1993) noted that the researchers must obtain informed consent before data collection.

Setting

The setting for the research was in the participants' school. The researchers met with each participant, in their office, and for those who did not have a private office, the library was booked to conduct the interviews. Before the commencement of the interviews written consent was obtained from each participant and research requirements were reviewed. Also, a separate was obtained to audio-taped the discussion. To ensure that this criterion was met, the interviews were scheduled and completed at a time that was convenient for the participants in a location of their choosing, that is, in their office or the school library. The interviews allowed for the collection of data that were used to identify potential patterns and areas requiring improvement in the current school climate and safety procedure(s). In addition to the semi-structured interviews, the researchers reviewed school's documentation such as policies and procedures to ascertain in appropriate safety and anti-bullying policies were in place.

The semi-structured interview approach is used as an opportunity to perform more in-depth queries of the interviewees' responses to gather additional information or obtain clarity of the information provided (Bordens & Abbott, 2008). Data from the semi-structured interviews were analyzed carefully to gain a better understanding of the impact of the role of the safe school coordinator (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003).

To ensure the plausibility of the research and to increase the quality of the information obtained, the researchers selected school documentation, school as school policies and student handbooks for review. This assessment was valuable in supporting the facts obtained through the semi-structured interviews and provided constructive details to help in the development of the school safety manual. The approach of combining the semi-structured interviews with the review of relevant school documents and presenting the results from both perspectives is described as triangulation (Waters-Adams, 2006).

Instrumentation/Measures

For this study, the researchers developed a semi-structured interview protocol that was utilized by the researchers and research assistant throughout the data collection process. Also, an informed consent document, which outlined the steps in the research process, was developed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Data Collection

The research applied the following research methodology to the data collection and analysis: 1) The primary data was in the semi-structured interview responses supplied by the research participants (i.e., elementary school administrators), and 2) The secondary data was in the form of school documentation (i.e., Parent-Student Handbook, Policies and Procedures and literature on the subject researched. The objective of the research was to gain a better understanding the role of the Safe School Climate Coordinator in implementing school safety policies. A small number of private schools supplied participants.

The data for this action research were collected through semi-structured interviews of nine participants, through observations, and school documentation reviews. The interviews were conducted individually and were done in the participants' office or the school library and took between an hour and an hour and 15 minutes. The information for the semi-structured interview was obtained through tape-recordings and the field notes documented by the interviewer and the research assistant. The interviews were appropriate to gain a perspective of the individuals who were involved in the development and implementation of the school climate plans. The method used to obtain the information was appropriate for the qualitative research (Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest, et al. 2005). The researchers and research assistant carefully documented the participants' responses in field notes and with the aid of a tape-recorder. These notes were carefully reviewed to ensure accuracy and that there were no gaps in the collected data.

The population was diverse in their position and opinions and therefore provided critical information without becoming overwhelming, as it would be if the sample size were too large (Mason, 2010). The selection of these key individuals to participate in the study was adequate to support the validity and robustness of the research. Furthermore, the individuals selected were representative of the school population and the community in which the schools were located.

In addition to the information gathered through the semi-structured interviews, school policy documents that relate to school safety and bullying were also reviewed. The review of these documents was necessary to gain perspective on the practices of the school district in addressing bullying activities. This approach further strengthens the qualitative methodology to support the semi-structured interviews to substantiate the observations and to validate the research hypotheses (Creswell, 2003; Mack et al., 2005). The researchers also conducted some observations of the practices of the selected schools and staff to determine how they address any such issues.

Review of the data provided a rich context of the interviews and a better understanding of the actions taken in the event of a bullying incident. Furthermore, this data review was valuable in supplementing the interviews to answer the research questions. Moreover, the comparison of the data obtained through the semi-structured interviews and the documentation review was an effective way to triangulate the data. Data triangulation, as described by Thurmond (2001), is the "combination of two or more sources of data or theoretical perspectives, within the same research, to increase the understanding of the phenomenon" (p. 253). This approach was useful in identifying the appropriateness of having an assigned Safe School Climate Coordinator to spearhead the development of anti-bullying programs.

Data Analysis

The researchers analyzed the following types of data: 1. Qualitative (i.e., field notes, etc.): code data and assign numbers to each code. An assessment of the number of times that these numbers appear will be performed to determine the frequency of their occurrence in the data collected; 2. The results were assessed to provide evidence of trends in the qualitative data; 3) Data was combined to form new variables to determine emerging themes; The researchers reviewed and transcribed the recordings and field notes from the interviews. The raw data were organized by using Microsoft Excel to sort and code the information collected. The data collection and processing were managed by the researchers. In preparation for the data analysis, the researchers reviewed the research plan and ensure that all interviews were satisfactorily completed and that all field notes and audiotaped recordings were secured as required. To ensure the protection of the data, a secured limited-access filing cabinet, which is water and fireproof, was utilized.

Ethical Considerations

Consideration for the safety, privacy and respect for all participants was first and foremost throughout the research. The researchers ensured that the confidentiality and rights of the participants were protected and that there was no breach of the privacy and confidentiality during the research activities. Ethical considerations were of the utmost importance and every effort, as required by local and federal laws to protect the rights and welfare of the human participants.

Data Collection Procedures

Summary of Document Review

The data collected and analyzed through the school policies provided more concrete information related to the requirements for students and parents on school safety and bullying expectations. The Parent-Student Handbook from each school for the school year, 2015-2016, was reviewed. The aggregated data from the handbooks of the seven schools illustrated the alignment across schools with a statement on bullying and the disciplinary actions and procedures that are imposed if any student is found to exhibit this behavior. The documents were reviewed for the robustness of the information and how issues related to bullying will be handled.

The corrective actions for any bullying behavior may include detention, suspension or expulsion. The detention period is normally an hour spent after school and this time is monitored by a teacher. A suspension can be served either in school or outside of school. During the in-school suspension, a student will be excluded from the classroom activities but will be required to do the school work during this period. The more serious consequence of expulsion is the formal and permanent removal of the student from the school premises. The expelled student will not be allowed to return or participate in

any school functions or sports activities. All decisions related to the disciplinary actions is invoked by the administrator and reported to the superintendent of schools. However, the administrator has the final say on all disciplinary matters.

The information in the handbooks varies across schools. Although all school handbooks included information about bullying, some lacked the specifics about the behavior and the adverse effects that bullying has on the targets and bystanders. Furthermore, the definitions could be better aligned and more clearly presented to include such information as how to recognize the behavior and more detailed information on reporting requirements. The Parent-Student Handbook is one that is signed by parents and students and, therefore, should include the necessary information. When compared to the Network level policies, the handbooks could be revised to include additional information such as clearer definitions of teasing and harassment to ensure that parents and students are fully aware of the required procedures and consequences for rules violations. The handbooks could also be helpful in providing additional details of how to recognize the behavior and be knowledgeable in addressing it.

The network level policies include guidance on student conduct, which outlines the expectations for the use of electronic devices, internet engagement, harassment and bullying. Student safety, buildings and school safety, along with the crisis intervention plans are presented to the Health, Safety and Wellness sections of the policy. These policies should include guidance on teasing as it is often reported that the terms teasing, harassment and bullying are used interchangeably although they are quite different and have significantly different outcomes.

Findings

Participants' Demographic Profile

Research participants consisted of the Connecticut School Network's school superintendent and eight administrators from Connecticut School Network located in the State of Connecticut. The participants represented about 17% of the schools in the network. The participants had been employed between five and 25 years in the school system. All had many years of teaching experience before their current roles as administrators. Five administrators were men, and four were women. It is also important to note that one of the participants was the superintendent of the school district and had been with the school district for over 11 years. One participant was recently appointed to the role of administrator. However, that individual had over 14 years of experience teaching in both the public and private schools. Two participants had seven years of experience in the administrator role. One participant reported that they have been with the institution for five years, and another indicated six years of service. One participant had greater than 21 years of service, and another reporting 25 years of service.

These individuals were well versed and attuned to the needs of their schools and play a pivotal role in overseeing their anti-bullying safety programs. Furthermore, each participant willingly shared binders of training materials and information on bullying. At the beginning of the discussion, all participants declared their duty to maintain a safe and nurturing school environment for their students and staff. Each participant also reported that their local safety policies outlined in the Parent-Student Handbook were developed based on the district's policies. It is the expectation that all students and parents read and acknowledged the requirements to ensure full compliance. It was agreed, at the time of consent that each participant's identity would remain confidential, and therefore, a code, in the form of initials, was assigned to each to protect their privacy.

The administrators were involved in training teachers and staff in detecting bullying activities and to immediately address them

if identified. In order to protect the privacy and confidentiality of the participants and any information that was shared during the discussion, no personally identifiable information was used. A three-letter code or initials was used to further mask the identity of the participants. Each school administrator contributed equally to the discussion and actively participated in the semi-structured interviews. Most were interested in the outcome and willingly agreed to provide input regarding the development and implementation of school safety and anti-bullying manual as a deliverable for this action research project.

School Safety & Fire Drills

Regarding school safety, most of the handbooks included information related to student safety, building security and crisis intervention. Some handbooks indicated that a crisis plan was in place and others provided specific details about activities needed to test these plans such as fire and lock down drills. Fire drills are carried out every month and lock down drills are done every six to 12 months, depending on the school's safety plans. With regards to the building security, all doors are locked, and visitors are required to announce themselves before entry is granted. All schools have cameras installed at a minimum at the front entrance door, at a minimum, and many have cameras installed around the perimeter of the school buildings. Two of the schools have closed-circuit cameras installed inside the building as a precautionary measure. These cameras have the ability to monitor the activities in various areas of the school.

Limitations

Before beginning the study, the researchers considered and evaluated those areas that could affect the project. Any methodology used in research has certain limitations and, therefore, conducting research in school districts that are extremely busy can pose significant challenges (Sandretto, 2007). The limitations of the current work are as follows: There could be manipulation of the interviewer, by the interviewee, to get their point across that could lead to the collection of useless or unimportant information; The school district leaders may have been unwilling to allow staff to participate in the study; The responses from the participants may not be consistent and could potentially limit the information gathered for the study; This research was not incentivized, and therefore, there might have been a lack of interest in participating; The Connecticut legislation on bullying may not be fully implemented across private schools as it would be expected in the public schools, and the research included a limited number of private schools from several different communities; however, because of the small number of schools involved, the findings will be limited if compared with public schools or other school districts. Therefore, the researchers were also aware of the limitations of the results, which may not be generalized to a wider population of schools across Connecticut. Although the aforementioned limitations affect the generalizability of the findings; the findings provide invaluable insights into a phenomenon that can be empirically examined in the future for generalizability.

DISCUSSION

The structure of the schools in the United States is primarily designed to ensure that students are provided with the tools and academic opportunities that are necessary to become successful adults (Wimberly, 2002). However, the lack of positive relationship with school staff and peers, and a climate that is not deemed as safe could potentially jeopardize the learning experience for students (Wimberly, 2002). The significance of this claim is reflected in the work of Osterman (2000), in which it is noted that schools should be made into better communities that care and support young people, and that failures that these needs are met could result in unhealthy

and enduring consequences. Studies have shown that a positive relationship between the student and school staff, especially between teacher and student, is crucial to the development of the students' resilience ability and creates an overall positive environment (Cohen, 2009; Jamal et al., 2013). If students feel connected being part of a supportive relationship with their school community, the result is a reduction in stress, mental, and physical illness. However, school bullying and victimization could increase if there is a perception that the school is an uncaring place and lacks a sense of community (Osterman, 2000).

Teachers, school superintendents, principals, and other school personnel can help to foster an institution whose culture guarantees that students can thrive socially, emotionally, and academically (Black, 2010). It is important for the growth of our youths that this is done in a safe and healthy environment. In response to the growing concerns about school violence, of which some are linked to bullying, many states have taken the necessary steps to implement anti-bullying policies. Connecticut's 2011 anti-bullying law was executed to strengthen the school bullying laws and to make it mandatory for schools to take actions that would ensure that all students are afforded the opportunity to learn in a place that is free of teasing, humiliation, and assault (CGA, 2011).

Roughly 25% of Connecticut high school students and approximately 35% of students in the ninth grade reported being bullied while at school (CGA, 2011). Students who reported being bullied or are the target of bullying experience emotional and psychological distress frequently. The evidence is through the lack of sleep, increased school absenteeism, anxiety, depression, and suicide (Kim & Leventhal, 2008; Luxton, June, & Fairall, 2012; Mouttapa, Valente, Gallaher, Rohrbach, et al. 2004).

The profile of a bully will differ depending on the author. So to characterize and distinguish the bully from others, the researchers will draw on the various profiles from the published literature. A bully is a person who is the aggressor or the perpetrator of the bullying activities. This individual frequently uses repeated threats or aggression towards another student or person. The characteristic exhibited by the bully, towards the victim may include negative, menacing, and aggressive verbal and physical behavior (Espelage, 2010; Sassu, Elinoff, Bray, & Kehle, 2004). Both male and female students engage in bullying activities. However, male students reportedly engage in more physical and direct verbal threats, while female students will apply less aggressive means such as gossiping about another student or excluding them from activities (Sassu, Elinoff, Bray & Kehle, 2004). Buxton et al. (2013) noted that the bully may be acting out their aggression towards others because of their own physical or sexual abuse that they have experienced at home.

The bully is frequently involved in other capricious actions such as the consumption of substances and smoking (Nansel et al., 2001). Furthermore, they exhibit poorer judgment, take greater risks, and do poorly academically. The lack of achievement; inability to compete academically; or poor reading, math, or basic academic skills may motivate some students to act out by trying to compensate for their weaknesses in a challenging academic world by drawing attention to themselves. It is never a substitution for success, but it provides the bully with a social and mental stimulation or feeling of self-worth where one is lacking. A social response might be to challenge these individuals with extra work or provide necessary tutoring that they may need to increase their skills to compete academically with other students. Furthermore, they may have problems with truancy and increased absenteeism. Interestingly, the bully is not socially inept and has little difficulty making friends. However, the bully's social network may support the bullying behavior as they may have similar problematic behavior or be bullies themselves (Nansel et al., 2001).

Although it may seem that there is one type of bully who carries out the activities that can affect the well-being of others, this may not be true, and several types of bullying have been identified. Espelage and Swearer (2004) claimed that there are at least three different types of bullies and teachers and faculty must be familiar with bullying activities and have the knowledge to recognize the bullying characteristics to be prepared to address a situation that involves bullying behavior. Where teachers are faced with these situations, it is imperative that they are aware and have the ability to recognize these behaviors. It is also crucial that the assigned Safe School Climate Coordinator is aware and has the knowledge and training about these differing character traits and should be considered when programs and policies are developed so as to avoid risk to effective implementation. The characteristics of the three types of bullies, as noted by Espelage and Swearer, (2004) are: 1. Aggressive–this type of bully is fearless and the initiator of the bullying activities. This individual may be impetuous, violent, and tenacious. Donegan (2012) added that this individual is the most common type and is inclined to be dominant and does not present any sympathy toward the victims. 2. Passive–this type of bully is not as popular as the aggressive harrier but apt to be more insecure in their behavior. Furthermore, they are likely to be the advocate of the aggressor and join the activities to receive some form of reward (Donegan, 2012). 3. Relational–this type of bullying is usually more common among girls, in which there are attempts to gain status through the exclusion and manipulation of others (Duncan, 2006).

As there are stark differences with each of the bully-types and due to the public health concerns that are linked to the behaviors, it is important to note clearly and define each type. Furthermore, school administrators should develop effective intervention strategies to circumvent bullying activities or any actions that could negatively impact the school environment (Nansel et al., 2001). Staff, teachers, and students must be trained and aware of the expectations. The increased knowledge will be valuable in identifying and preventing the behavior, which will improve the climate of the school. As schools continue to develop and implement their climate plans the needs of all students should be considered and how to engage effectively them socially and academically as another way of reducing the bullying activities.

Victims of bullying are not targeted based solely on their size, shape, race, ethnicity or social, economic status. The victim is characterized as those shunned or denounced socially by other students (Buxton et al., 2013). Therefore, anyone can be susceptible to this behavior if they are not properly equipped to handle the encounter or the situation. Copeland, Wolke, Angold, and Costello (2013) reported that being a victim of bullying increases the risk of negative effects, which comprises physical, behavioral, emotional, mental, and psychological problems. Furthermore, victims experience an increase in low academic performance (Copeland, Wolke, Angold, & Costello, 2013). Also, evidence indicates that being a victim may increase suicidal ideation and suicide attempts.

The victim of bullying activities is the primary target of these aggressive and unwelcome behaviors. So why does the victim of this aggressive behavior become a target? Often, this individual may be characterized as being powerless or lack stature when compared to the bully themselves (Thornberg et al., 2012). Furthermore, they may be unable to defend themselves because of the situation that they might have been placed. In much of the literature reviewed, there is the usual conclusion that the victim is one who is timid and may not be as vocal as the aggressor. Urbanski and Permuth (2009) agreed that those who are bullied exhibit lower self-esteem. Moreover, these youths experience rejection from their peers, are lonelier and insecure, and may be avoided or even disliked by their peers are a school (Urbanski & Permuth, 2009). Thornberg, Halldin, Bomsjo, and Petersson (2013) added that the victims, more often than not, are perceived as being different and that they "are considered deviant, which disrupts the existing order and threaten the status and its

demand for conformity" (p. 311).

Furthermore, bullied individuals are noted as exhibiting lower social and emotional adjustments (Nansel et al., 2001) than those who are not bullied. A 2013 study conducted by the American Educational Research Association (AERA) noted that some other types of students are at a higher risk of being the target of bullying. These include students with a disability; gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) youths; immigrants; and ethnic minorities who are characterized as higher-achieving (AERA, 2013). The bullying behaviors may begin as early as elementary school and may increase as students move into middle school and upper-level grades. During these developing years, students are considered vulnerable and. Therefore, these activities can be traumatic for the victims, which may lead to further public health concerns (AERA, 2013). Furthermore, another research supports the fact that the school climate is no longer safe, negatively affect the student grades and the physical safety of the school (AERA, 2013).

The bully-victim is an individual who was both a bully and a victim of bullying. Often, a student that was the victim of bullying may, in turn, bully other students as part of a revenge strategy. The bully-victim or aggressive victim consists of approximately 10% of the student body and are portrayed as individuals who are rejected by peers, have poor academic attainment and learning difficulties (Mouttapa et al., 2004). Moreover, they may have difficulties forming lasting relationships with others due to the lack of trust (Buxton, Patel Potter, & Bostic, 2013). According to a recent report, students that observe family conflicts and violence at home may increasingly be the bully or the victim of bullying (Buxton, Patel Potter, & Bostic, 2013). Furthermore, this claim was also supported by a recent study in which reported that a higher number of student bullies are from a single parent, and lower income household, and the parent(s) may suffer from mental health problems (Shetgiri, Lin, Avila, & Flores, 2012). Also, these students may live in an unsafe environment and may often be neglected by their parent(s) (Shetgiri, Lin, Avila, & Flores, 2012).

Trach, Hymel, Waterhouse, and Neale (2010) claimed that bullying is a group event, which involves the victim and the bully, and the observer or bystander as well. The observer or bystander is the individual who is present but not actively involved in the activity; however, linked to this activity (Twemlow, Fonagy, & Sacco, 2004). Although the bystander does not play an active role concerning the bully and the victim, they become connected because they have witnessed the aggression. All too often, the bystander may not become involved as they might be unaware of their role in such a situation. This observation is especially important as anti-bullying programs are developed to ensure there is awareness raised (Trach, et al., 2010).

Bullying

The current Connecticut anti-bullying law defines bullying as repetitious actions by one or more students in the form of recorded, spoken, or electronic form or physical action or expression aimed at another student, which is meant to taunt or disgrace or ostracize the person. Furthermore, bullying actions through electronic communication or devices are also covered under the current law. The law was expanded to note that bullying: 1) Results in the intended student's physical or emotional harm or damage to personal property. 2) Places the intended student in fear of injury damage to their property; 3). Establishes an environment that is inhospitable; 4) It infringes on the rights and welfare of the pupil; and 5) Disrupts, in a substantial manner, the educational process or orderly school operation (CGA, 2011).

Cyber-Bullying

Bullying behavior is no longer limited to school property or physical buildings. Approximately one million students are victims of bullying via social media sources or the Internet (CGA, 2011). This form of bullying activity is frequently referred to as cyber-bullying. Cyber-bullying is generally defined as one person's intentional or repeated harassment of another via technological systems such as the Internet and cellular telephone (Luxton et al., 2012). A plethora of research done over the years has raised awareness about cyber-bullying. A study conducted by Luxton et al. (2012) reported that over 30,000 suicides occur each year in the United States, and an increasing number of suicides or suicide attempts might have a direct link to bullying as a result of use of the Internet or social media sites (Luxton et al., 2012). In a 2008 study, Hinduja and Patchin analyzed responses received from 1,378 youths under 18 years of age; results revealed that approximately 33% of the male respondents and over 36% of the female respondents admitted to having been cyber-bullied. Cyber-bullying activity occurs more frequently in chat rooms than among other social media outlets (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008). Also, the No-Bullying organization reported that victims of bullying are more prone to consider self-murder or even carry out suicide than students not bullied ("What is Cyber Bullying?" 2014).

Researchers have reported that there is a greater risk of students being bullied through cyberspace because of the vast number of cellular telephones and Internet users (Epstein & Kazmierczak, 2007). However, because of "legal complexities and issues surrounding freedom of speech and civil liberties" (Luxton et al., 2012, p. S195), caution is often exercised to limit any potential infringement on an individual's rights. The focus of this current research will not focus on cyber-bullying; however, it is imperative to highlight these activities as they pertain to children and the potential detrimental effects. Students have increasingly exposed to these activities online the public health risks of these crimes might not be immediately reported. A national study, done recently to assess the trends in bullying, physical fighting, and weapons carrying among youth in the sixth to tenth grades, reported that bullying is a public health problem (Perlus et al., 2014). Also "bullying perpetration and victimization" were directly related to "involvement in violence and other criminal offenses" in the future (Perlus et al., 2014, p. 1,100).

Parents

Parents play an integral role in a child's development. Even with the most robust policies in place, within the school environment, it still requires a partnership between the parents and school staff to ensure that students adhere to them. It is, therefore, imperative that there is more parental involvement in helping to address and prevent bullying activities in the schools. All too frequently studies point to the role of the school administrators and faculty to discipline in addition to educating the students. However, too few studies point to the obligations that parents have in leading charge of training and disciplining the child and that it not be left solely to the school staff. As evident in a recent study, the development of appropriate study habits that results in students achieving their academic goal is dependent on the efforts of the parents in combination with the teachers (Rana & Kausar, 2011). However, the teachers and school administrators need this support and involvement of the parents in achieving the educational goals while respecting the rules of the school.

Safe School Climate Coordinator

The district superintendent and administrators are responsible for ensuring appropriate arrangements are made, protocols employed and are adhered to by school staff and students. With the advent of the Safe School Climate Coordinator, there may be closer oversight of the bullying behavior and whether or not the actions meet the requirements. The partnership with the climate coordinator, the

superintendent, and climate specialists may help to leverage crucial resources necessary to address school safety, and to reduce the rate of school violence and bullying activities (CGA, 2011). The development and implementation of one school climate plan in each school district could help in bringing a standardized approach to bullying prevention.

The safe school coordinator is a role mandated in the Connecticut anti-bullying law enacted in July 2011 (CGA, 2011). The law charged the school superintendent of each district to designate a Safe School Climate Coordinator from its current staff. As outlined in the bill, this individual is required to: 1. Execute the safe school climate plan; 2) Collaborate with the specialists, school board members, and the superintendent to identify and respond to bullying in district schools promptly; 3) Provide evidence extracted from the safe school climate assessment to the Connecticut State Board of Education; 4) Schedule routine meetings with the specialists to review and discuss issues related to bullying, and where necessary, recommend modification to the climate plan.

The role of climate coordinator is dissimilar from that of school resource officers, who are law enforcement officers who have been assigned to a particular school (CGA, 2011). The school resource officers are not school officials, although they are positioned in these facilities. However, the safe climate coordinator is a member of the school system and may be well known by the students in those schools (CGA, 2011). There is limited evidence of the effectiveness of the school resource officers because of the scarcity of available literature on this subject; however, since the 2013 shooting tragedy at Sandy Hook School in Newtown, Connecticut, there is greater interest for policymakers to revisit this program.

The Safe School Climate Coordinator role is considered to be a crucial transformation in the way the State of Connecticut will tackle the issues related to bullying. Connecticut revised the anti-bullying legislation passed July 2011 (CGA, 2011). This law requires that each district appoints a Safe School Climate Coordinator, who works with the school superintendent, to ensure the implementation of these programs, as required by law. A search of the literature shows that the National School Climate Center supports the role of Safe School Climate Coordinator to coordinate the implementation of the state's anti-bullying program to address this important issue related to bullying prevention and improve school safety. However, it is suggested that the title is not what is important is that there is clarity in the anti-bullying activities and that there is an individual who is responsible for coordinating the efforts for promoting a positive school climate (NSCC, 2007, 2010). The Safe School Climate Coordinator will primarily focus on strengthening the district's anti-bullying program to improve the climate of the schools where students go to learn (CGA, 2011).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results of the data analyzed, the school administrators who served as the Safe School Climate Coordinator plays a vital role improving school safety. Each administrator is the primary leader of their school and makes safety their priority to assure the climate is safe for students and staff. This is possible through the development and implementation of safe school policies. Most administrators have cameras installed within and throughout the schools' buildings and the outer perimeter to monitor activities in and around the school property.

In light of recent school violence such as the massacre that took place at Sandy Hook Elementary school in 2012, added security and precautions are taken to secure entry doors and limit entry to the buildings by requiring visitors to announce themselves before gaining access to the building. All schools have a buzz-in system installed, which is controlled by the office staff when the system is engaged. Some schools equip their staff with walkie-talkies as an added step to maintain constant contact in the event of an emergency. Also, schools' crisis plans are tested through routine fire and lock-down drills.

All schools utilize the School Reach System. In the event of an emergency parents and/or key family members can be contacted and provided information related to the nature of the emergency. In addition, the School Reach System can be programmed to generate messages through e-mail or telephone. Every year the Parent-Student Handbook is revised and presented to each family for review. Parents sign-off on the Parent-Student Handbook to acknowledge their understanding of the schools' policies and disciplinary procedures. At the beginning of the school year, there is a review of the school policies with parents and students. Special emphasis placed on the school violence and anti-bullying activities that would not be tolerated in the school. Where there are violations of these policies students may be subjected to discipline through detention, suspension and even expulsion.

As an added measure, most administrators collaborate with local law enforcement officials to aid in assessing schools' security and safety policies to identify any gaps in policies and procedures, including building security. The purpose is to raise awareness providing training to students and parents. Policies are assessed on ongoing on an ongoing basis and modifications made as needed. Furthermore, teachers are required to receive safety training to increase awareness of bullying. These programs are delivered through routine in-services and teacher development programs.

Conclusion 1

Administrators who also serve as the Safe School Climate Coordinator appeared to be well positioned to assume the challenge of improving school safety. They have demonstrated their willingness, capacity, and capability to address the problem effectively through the diligence demonstrated in ensuring the schools maintain an atmosphere that is free of violence and conducive to learning. This conclusion does not suggest that bullying in nonexistent in these schools. With the ongoing training of teachers and staff, and increased awareness of both parents and students bullying can be effectively mitigated as a major cause for concern or worry. The schools in the sample place a strong emphasis on promoting an environment that is nurturing and free of violence, where learning and respect for all students, teachers and school staff is emphasized.

Recommendation 1

Administrators should assess their anti-bullying policies and procedures to consider alternative strategies for managing and reforming those who bully other students. Where possible, there should be an assessment of the cause of the bullying behavior to aid in consultation with the parents, teachers and healthcare professionals to address the issue and improve student behavior. Action plans may include additional homework assignment, tutoring and extracurricular activities. These strategies may be an effective way of tackling bullying behavior without taking extreme punitive measure, which can include expulsion.

As a result, of this action research, a *School Safety and Anti-bullying Manual* was developed. This manual includes recommended prevention and intervention strategies to help to mitigate extreme measures such as expulsion. Some preventive measures include collaboration with the central community leaders, climate surveys, increased training and awareness for parents and students. Interventions include remedial activities such as peer mediation and support for families affected by this behavior. The laws governing the privacy and confidentiality in reporting and investigating cases related to bullying was also included to inform parents and students

of their rights.

The Manual is recommended as a supplement to the Parent-Student Handbook, and the training offered to families on a yearly basis as it includes explicit details about bullying, teasing, and harassment; the laws that are in place to protect those who are targeted by these behaviors; and the consequences.

Participants provided assurance that their anti-bullying policies and procedures are in place and are fully implemented. Each year students, parents, and staff are informed of the expectations. Furthermore, these policies are reviewed annually and modifications made to ensure the most current information is included, which is also reflected in the Parent-Student Handbooks. Students are monitored, and character building is promoted throughout the school year. School staff looks for patterns of behavior and persistent actions among students that raises concerns. Where there is evidence or report of bullying a conference is held with the students involved, and where necessary, parents are contacted to report the incidence and to assist in addressing the issue.

Participants reported that current policies in place were effective in providing adequate guidance for students and teachers. Also, external groups, such as law enforcement, mental health and other organization, are consulted to provide safety training and information to students, parents, school staff and administrators. These groups are routinely invited to provide training to the staff and students and to increase awareness of bullying. Participants were satisfied with the training provided. Administrators claim that the low rate of bullying within their school system serves as evidence that their program is effective and working. Participants review and revise policies on an ongoing basis, which adds another level of assurance that the policies and programs adopted are up-to-date and serve to protect the safety and welfare of the students and staff.

All participants indicated that their mission to foster a climate of academic excellence and challenge students with a rigorous and demanding curriculum was fundamental to mitigating activities associated with bullying. Students and parents are also made aware of the expectations and consequences of violating the policies and schools' philosophy. Also, teachers and school staff are provided with the required training and annual refreshers to help them to recognize accurately the behavior and to take the necessary actions to address it. The participants cite the low rate of bullying activities as evidence of the robustness of the anti-bullying policies in place.

Conclusion 2

Although many parents are involved in enforcing the schools' policies, there is still room for improvement. Most of the participations declared that parents' involvement is paramount to ensuring that the students come to school ready to learn. Parents should keep school staff apprised of any changes in the home environment that could affect the students' demeanor for the staff is aware and prepared to work with their students to respond to any concerns in behavioral changes before they become unmanageable.

Recommendation 2

Based on the findings from the study, administrators should continue to solicit parents' support, not only through the signing of the handbook but by identifying ways that would be beneficial to the students and the schools and to clearly communicate this need. Furthermore, climate surveys are strongly recommended as an effective approach to soliciting parents', students' and staff feedback regarding their impression of the school climate and the effectiveness of the policies in place. Espelage and Swearer (2004) recommended that administrators should conduct surveys and assessments of students, parents, and teachers from that school in addition to other schools within the district to obtain the evidence needed to develop

and implement anti-bullying programs.

Where necessary, Connecticut schools can adopt the Board of Education Climate Assessment instruments to use as a guide to developing their surveys. The schools would develop strategies to determine the frequency of administering the surveys and report the data and analysis to the superintendent. The superintendent would work collaboratively with the schools to determine deficiencies, which would help in identifying policy or program changes leading to improved school climate.

All participants agreed that that there is the potential for an increase in bullying activities in schools when the school environment is poor. A school that does not promote a place for the positive development of their students may create an unsafe environment, which may threaten the intellectual social, emotional, and physical well-being of those individuals. In addition, the physical characteristics of the school building, for example, how it is lit and monitored, can lead to increased bullying activities. Therefore, it is imperative for each school to provide a warm, inviting, and safe atmosphere for all who enter the premises. The administrators pointed out steps they have taken within their purview to promote an environment of respect and cohesiveness that leads to an improved learning milieu where students can thrive.

Conclusion 3

School administrators have well-established policies to promote a safe and secure school climate and prevent bullying in their schools. The use of cameras inside and around the perimeter of the school buildings and the appointment of hall monitors is helpful in protecting students on school grounds. There is ongoing evaluation of the current policies and improvements are made routinely to increase the safety of the schools for both students and staff. The need to protect the students is an ongoing effort. The goal is to raise awareness and send a clear message that bullying is prohibited and will be immediately reported and addressed if observed.

Recommendation 3

All participants expressed the need for better financial support to help make improvements that would aide increasing and improving school safety. Where possible, there should be continued solicitation with the State of Connecticut for additional funds to make improvements to the school buildings to prevent events such as the Newtown Massacre. The financial support could be used to improve lighting in and around school and other areas that the school administrators believe needs attention.

Bullying can affect the social dynamics of the school community to a significant degree. This sentiment was echoed by all participants; hence, they emphasized the necessity of having policies in place to prevent bullying activities. For example, if there is a risk of bullying activities, certain students may be denied participation in events that they enjoy. There may be a lack of trust of school staff and students, which may create fear among the students, which may affect their learning and attendance. The school climate may be viewed as one that is a hostile environment, and the students may not feel comfortable or even welcome and parents may move to withdraw their children from schools with an environment that is not safe.

Over the years bullying has moved from within the purview and walls of the school premises and has extended to other areas such as the parks, playgrounds, movie theaters, concert halls, sports arenas and social events, just to name a few. Furthermore, with the increased use of electronics, there is strong evidence to suggest that bullying activities have spread to the Internet and social media sources such as Foursquare, Twitter, Snapchat, Whisper, or Tinder. In addition to having an impact on the social dynamics within the school system and premises, administrators are also faced with ensuring students

are aware of other locales where bullying activity is popular and organize workshops to teach students how to protect themselves in the event they are targeted.

Conclusion 4

Administrators' practice of developing policies to prevent bullying from negatively impacting the schools' social dynamic is demonstrated through the review of the documents and supported through the interviews. Administrators' and school staff's zero tolerance policy for bullying behavior and ongoing monitoring of suspected bullying activities are helpful in preventing bullying before it starts. Administrators reinforce the schools' philosophy, which places a strong emphasis on academic achievement.

Recommendation 4

Increased parental involved is fundamental in reducing bullying activities. Parents must be held accountable for ensuring that anti-bullying policies are supported and reinforced. Where there are violations of these procedures, there should be a collaboration between the parents and school administrators to address the issues to mitigate further occurrences. Communication is important and where there may be evidence that a student may be bullied or there are reports that they no longer enjoy the social dynamics of the school this must be brought to the attention of the administrator must immediately intervene and stop these activities from becoming a serious threat to the students and their prosperity and development.

The *School Safety and Anti-Bullying Manual* delineates intervention steps as a guide for parents, students, and school staff to use when mean behavior such as bullying or harassment is observed. The recommended actions are simple and explicit and apply in cases where there is a perpetrator, target and a potential bystander or witness to the activities. It also reminds the observer that they should intervene when they observe these activities and to take actions immediately to diffuse the situation, and to report the incident if it is deemed significant.

SUMMARY

Bullying is a public health issue that continues to plague schools in the United States. Schools that were once considered to be a safe and conducive environment for learning have now become unsafe places where violent activities such as bullying exist (Bastian & Taylor, 1991). Bullying and other acts of violence disrupt the learning process and reduce the quality of the educational outcome. Furthermore, the violence can, to a significant degree, retard the psyche of the child and discourage learning, especially if bullying the incidences occurs in a school setting. While measures are taken to improve school safety, such as legislations and policies, the prevalence of bullying is still at a rate that is concerning to educators, policy-makers, and parents. A review of the literature revealed that this aggressive behavior, which includes name calling, the exertion of power, and psychological and physical threats, occurs and these acts have a negative influence on the social environment and by extension the educational attainment of the students (Bourne et al., 2015).

The importance of robust school safety program is well established and is fundamental to mitigating bullying activities and securing an environment that promotes wholesome learning and development. Effective leadership is key in addressing the needs of the schools and ensuring students achieve the academic goals in an environment that are safe (Black, 2010). The behavior of the principal leader can positively influence the students' achievement and the climate of the school (Black, 2010). This study found that the administrators have well-established policies in preventing bullying activities. Furthermore, the administrators demonstrated

their responsibility of developing, implementing, monitoring and revising policies and ensuring that these policies and programs meet the needs of the students and staff of the school.

Although the administrators are doing an admirable job in reducing bullying, it is recommended that there is consideration of a staff that can provide assistance to these administrators in sharing these duties. As there are more demands placed on the administrators, having a trusted individual to coordinate the reviews and revision of the policies would free up the administrators' time to focus on other school curriculum activities and requirements.

School safety is of the utmost importance to ensure that students can learn in an environment that is safe and nurturing and free from bullying activities. Federal and state governments have passed laws to ensure bullying activities are eliminated and that schools have the appropriate tools in place to mitigate this behavior. A *School Safety and Anti-Bullying Manual* were developed and highlighted the public health implications of bullying. For example, research has shown that bullying can disturb the social development process for students who are exposed to its adverse effects, retarding, blocking or hindering optimal human social, physical, emotional, and mental development. Furthermore, the lack of effective actions to address the behavior may result in increased school violence and even higher dropout rates (Perlus et al., 2014; Rigby, 2001). It is because of these reasons bullying is seen as a public health issue.

The Safe School Climate Coordinator role was examined to ascertain actions taken to improve school safety and prevent bullying activities. The results of this study highlighted the importance of robust policies and careful oversight by the school administrators in maintaining a safe and bully-free environment. A safe and nurturing school culture paired with strong leadership can positively influence the school's environment resulting into improved academic successes and favorable behavioral outcomes of students.

REFERENCES

American Educational Research Association. (2013). Prevention of bullying in schools, colleges, and universities: Research report and recommendations.

Ayers, S. L., Wagaman, M. A., Mullins Geiger, J., Bermudez-Parsai, M., & Hedberg, E. C. (2012). Examining school-based bullying interventions using multilevel discrete time hazard modeling. *Prevention Science*, *13*(5), 539-550.

Bastian, L. D., & Taylor, B. M. (1991). School crime: A national crime victimization survey report.

Black, G. L. (2010). Correlational analysis of servant leadership and school climate. Catholic Education: *A Journal of Inquiry and Practice*, *13*(4), 437-466.

Bordens, K. S., & Abbott, B. B. (2008). Research design and methods: A process approach (8th edn.). New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

Bourne, P. A., Clarke-Christian, J., Sharpe-Pryce, C., Hudson-Davis, A., & Francis, C. (2015). Strategies for dealing with violence in schools: Perceived effectiveness of conflict management strategies used by education leaders in reducing students' disagreements. *African Journal of Psychiatry*, *18*(2), 248.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (Ed.). (2005). Making human beings HUMAN: Bioecological perspectives on human development. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Brooks, F. (2014). The link between pupil health and wellbeing attainment: A briefing for health teachers, governors and staff in education settings.

Buxton, D., Patel Potter, M., & Bostic, J. Q. (2013). Coping strategies for child bully-victims. *Pediatric Annals*, *42*(4), 57-61.

Cohen, J. (2009). Transforming school climate: Educational and psychoanalytic perspectives. *School Studies in Education*, *6*(1), 99-103.

Cohen, J., & Freiberg, J. A. (2013). School climate and bullying prevention. In T. Dary & T. Pickeral (eds.), School climate practices for implementation and sustainability. New York, NY: National School Climate Center. *School Climate Practice Brief*, (1), 47-51.

Connecticut General Assembly, Commission on Children. (2011). Anti-bullying bill becomes law.

Copeland, W. E., Wolke, D., Angold, A., & Costello, E. J. (2013). Adult psychiatric and outcomes of bullying and being bullied by peers in childhood and adolescence. *JAMA Psychiatry*, *70*(4), 419-426.

Cornell, D., Sheras, P., Gregory, A., & Fan, X. (2009). A retrospective study of school safety conditions in high schools using the Virginia Threat Assessment Guidelines versus alternative approaches. *School Psychology Quarterly*, *24*(2), 119-129.

Creswell, J. W. (2003). Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches (2nd edn.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Crotty, M. (2005). The foundations of social research: Meaning and perspective in the research process. London, England: Sage.

Dahlberg, L. L., & Krug, E. G. (2002). Violence: A global public health problem. In E. Krug, L. L. Dahlberg, J. A. Mercy, A. B. Zwi, & R. Lozano (eds.), Geneva, Switzerland: World Health Organization. *World report on violence and health,* 1-56.

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (eds.). (2003). The landscape of qualitative research: Theories and issues (2nd edn.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Donegan, R. (2012). Bullying and cyberbullying: History, statistics, law, prevention and analysis. *The Elon Journal of Undergraduate Research in Communications*, *3*(1), 33-42.

Duncan, A. (2006). Bullying in American schools: A social-ecological perspective on prevention and intervention, edited by Dorothy L. Espelage & Susan M. Swearer [Book review]. *Journal of Catholic Education*, *10*(2).

Dwyer Sadlier, H. (2011). Creating and supporting safe and respectful school climates: The principal's role. The *International Journal of Diversity in Organisations, Communities, and Nations*, *10*(6), 183-198.

Eisenmann, J. C., Gentile, D. A., Welk, G. J., Callahan, R., Strickland, S., Walsh, M., et al. (2008). SWITCH: Rationale, design, and implementation of a community, school, and family-based intervention to modify behaviors related to childhood obesity. *BMC Public Health*, *8*, 223-232.

Epstein, A., & Kazmierczak, J. (2007). Cyber bullying: What teachers, social workers, and administrators should know. *Illinois Child Welfare*, *3*, 41-51.

Espelage, D. (2010). Bullies and victims.

Espelage, D. L., & Swearer, S. M. (2004). Bullying in American schools: A social-ecological perspective on prevention and intervention. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Garen, J. E. (1994). Executive compensation and principal-agent theory. *The Journal of Political Economy*, *102*(6), 1,175-1,199.

Gauvain, M., & Cole, M. (eds.). (1993). Readings on the development of children. New York, NY: Scientific American.

Glew, G. M., Fan, M., Katon, W., Rivara, F. P., & Kernic, M. A. (2005). Bullying, psychological adjustment, and academic performance in elementary school. *Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine*, *159*, 1,026-1,031.

Gregory, A., Henry, D. B., & Schoeny, M. E. (2007). School climate and implementation of a preventive intervention. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, *40*(3-4), 250-260.

Guerra, N. H., Williams, K. R., & Sadek, S. (2011). Understanding bullying and victimization during childhood and adolescence: A mixed methods study. *Child Development*, *82*(1), 295-310.

Herr, K., & Anderson, G. L. (2005). The action research dissertation: A guide for students and faculty. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Hill, C. L., & Jones, T. M. (1992). Stakeholder-agency theory. *Journal of Management Studies*, *29*(2), 131-154.

Hinduja, S., & Patchin, J. W. (2008). Cyberbullying: An exploratory analysis of factors related to offending and victimization. *Deviant Behavior*, *29*(2), 129-156.

Hughes, W. H., & Pickeral, T. (2013). School climate and shared leadership. In T. Dary, & T. Pickeral (eds.), School climate practices for implementation and sustainability, *School Climate Practice Brief*, *1*.

Jamal, F., Fletcher, A., Harden, A., Wells, H., Thomas, J., & Bonell, C. (2013). The school environment and student health: A systematic review and meta-ethnography of qualitative research. *BMC Public Health*, *13*(798), 1-11.

James, N., & McCallion, G. (2013). School resource officers: Law enforcement officers in schools.

Khoury-Kassabri, M., Benbenishty, R., Astor, R. A., & Zeira, A. (2004). The contributions of community, family, and school variables to student victimization. *Journal of Community Psychology*, *34*(3), 187-203.

Kim, Y. S., & Leventhal, B. (2008). Bullying and suicide. A review. *International Journal of Adolescent Medicine and Health*, *20*(2), 133-154.

Kothari, A., Rudman, D., Dobbins, M., Rouse, M., Sibbald, S., & Edwards, N. (2012). The use of tacit and explicit knowledge in public health: a qualitative study. *Implementation Science*, *7*(20), 1-20.

Leedy, P. D. (1993). Practical research planning and design (5th edn.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Le Floch, K. C., Birman, B., O'Day, J., Hurlburt, S., Mercado-Garcia, D., Goff, R., et al. (2014). Case studies of schools receiving school improvement grants: Findings after the first year of implementation (NCEE 2014-2015).

Luxton, D. D., June, J. D., & Fairall, J. M. (2012). Social media and suicide: A public health perspective. *American Journal of Public Health*, *S2*(2012), S195-S200.

Mack, N., Woodsong, C., MacQueen, K. M., Guest, G., & Namey, E. (2005). Qualitative research methods: A data collector's field guide. Research Triangle Park, NC: Family Health International.

MacNeil, A. J., Prater, D. L., & Busch, S. (2009). The effects of school culture and climate on student achievement. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, *12*(1), 73-83.

Mason, M. (2010). Sample size and saturation in Ph.D. studies using qualitative interviews. Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/ *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, *11*(3), 1.

Mouttapa, M., Valente, T., Gallaher, P., Rohrbach, L., & Unger, J. B. (2004). Social network predictors of bullying and victimization. *Adolescence*, *39*(154), 315-335.

Nansel, T. R., Overpeck, M., Pilla, R. S., Ruan, W. J., Simons-Morton, B., & Scheidt, P. (2001). Bullying behaviors among American youth: Prevalence and association with psychosocial adjustment. *JAMA*, *285*(16), 2,094-2,100.

National School Climate Council. (2007). National school climate standards: Benchmarks to promote effective teaching, learning and comprehensive school improvement.

National School Climate Council. (2010). The School climate challenge: Narrowing the gap between school climate research and school climate policy, practice guidelines and teacher education policy.

Neuman, W. L. (2006). Social research methods: Qualitative and quantitative approaches (6th edn.). New York, NY: Pearson/Allyn and Bacon.

Osterman, K. F. (2000). Students' need for belonging in the school community. *Review of Educational Research*, *70*, 323-367.

Perkins, H. W., Craig, D. W., & Perkins, J. M. (2011). Using social norms to reduce bullying: A research intervention among adolescents in five middle schools. *Group Processes and Intergroup Relations*, *14*(5), 703-722.

Perlus, J. G., Brooks-Russell, A., Wang, J., & Iannotti, R. J. (2014). Trends in bullying, physical fighting, and weapon carrying among 6th- through 10th-grade students from 1998 to 2010: Findings from a national study. *American Journal of Public Health*, *104*(6), 1,100-1,106.

Punch, K.F. (2005). Introduction to social research: Quantitative and qualitative approaches (2nd edn) London, England: Sage.

Rana, S. A., & Kausar, R. (2011). Comparison of study habits and academic performance of Pakistani British and White British students. *Pakistan Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, *9*, 21-26.

Rigby, K. (2001). Health consequences of bullying and its prevention in schools. In J. Juvonen & S. Graham (eds.), Peer harassment in school: The plight of the vulnerable and victimized, New York, NY: Guilford, 310–331.

Robers, S., Kemp, J., & Truman, J. (2013). Indicators of school climate and safety: 2012 (NCES 2013-036/NCJ 241446).

Sandretto, S. (2007). Action research for social justice (Discussion paper).

Sassu, K. A., Elinoff, M. J., Bray, M. A., & Kehle, T. J. (2004). Bullying: Basic facts.

Shetgiri, R., Lin, H., Avila, R. M., & Flores, G. (2012). Parental characteristics associated with bullying perpetration in US children aged 10 to 17 years. *American Journal of Public Health*, *102*(12), 2,280-2,286.

Silverman, D. (2005). Interpreting qualitative data: Methods for analysing talks, text, and interaction (2nd edn.). London, England: Sage.

Stanley, P. H., Juhnke, G. A., & Purkey, W. N. (2004). Using an invitational theory and practice to create safe and successful schools. *Journal of Counselling and Development*, *82*(3), 302-309.

Stringer, E. T. (2014). Action research (4th edn). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Swearer, S. M., Espelage, D. L., & Napolitano, S. A. (2009). Bullying prevention & intervention: Realistic strategies for schools. New York, NY: The Guilford Press.

Thornberg, R., Tenenbaum, L., Varjas, K., Myers, J., Jungert, T., & Vanegas, G. (2012). Bystander motivation in bullying incidents: To intervene or not to intervene. *Western Journal of Emergency Medicine*, *13*(3), 247-252.

Thornberg, R., Halldin, K., Bolmsjo, N., & Petersson, A. (2013). Victimising of school bullying: A grounded theory. *Research Papers in Education*, *28*(3), 309-329.

Thurmond, V. A. (2001). The point of triangulation. *Journal of Nursing Scholarship*, *33*(3), 253-258.

Trach, J., Hymel, S., Waterhouse, T., & Neale, K. (2010). Bystander responses to school bullying: A cross-sectional investigation of grade and sex differences. *Canadian Journal of School Psychology*, *24*(1), 114-130.

Twemlow, S. W., Fonagy, P., & Sacco, F. C. (2004). The role of the bystander in the social architecture of bullying and violence in schools and communities. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, *1036*(1), 215-232.

Urbanski, J., & Permuth, S. (2009). The truth about bullying: What educators and parents must know and do. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Vossekuil, B., Fein, R., Reddy, M., Borum, R., & Modzeleski, W. (2002). The final report and findings of the Safe School Initiative: Implications for the prevention of school attacks in the United States.

Waters-Adams, S. (2006). Action research in education. London, England: Routledge.

What Is Cyber Bullying? (2015).

Wimberly, G. L. (2002). School relationships foster success for African American students: ACT policy report.