

2021

## Exploring Stakeholder Opinions of a School Sentinel Security Program

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# Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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John Beraud

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
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Walden University  
2021

Abstract

Exploring Stakeholder Opinions of a School Sentinel Security Program

by

John Beraud

Dissertation Submission

for the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Public Policy

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November 2021

## Abstract

School shootings are tragic events that receive immediate, intense, and immense media attention. In the aftermath of an attack, lawmakers and school administrators receive public pressure to provide the necessary resources to incorporate school security programs that seek to improve school safety. The School Sentinel Program (SSP) operating in one Midwest U.S. state's school district allows school personnel or volunteers from the local community, once screened and trained, to act as armed guards on public school campuses. The SSP allows firearms on school campuses outside of the hands of school resource officers, and these policies have often been met with intense resistance to their incorporation. The intent of this qualitative case study was to explore the opinions of primary stakeholder groups, specifically parents, teachers, administrators, and local law enforcement, regarding the SSP. Schneider and Ingram's social construction of target populations theory served as the theoretical foundation for this research. Semistructured interviews with seven stakeholders were the primary data collection method. The evaluative coding method was used to analyze the data. The key finding demonstrated that stakeholders viewed the SSP as a positive complement to the school's security program once general operational parameters were explained by school leadership. Findings may lead to positive social change by encouraging school leadership to adopt school security programs, with popular stakeholder support, that can more effectively prevent and deter external threats to public schools.

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## Dedication

I dedicate this project to my mother, Marion Dianne Beraud, who worked tirelessly all her life to raise a couple of boys; I sincerely wish you were here to witness this accomplishment in my life for this is by extension the product of your hard work and parental molding.

The second dedication is to my uncle, John Michael Beraud. Your fatherly influence had very long-reaching effects. I would have loved to discuss this program with you at length. Your presence is sorely missed!

Finally, I dedicate this project to those who participated in the data collection, specifically Participant 3. Providing opinions of school security policies where the addition of firearms are included comes with great public scrutiny that few seek. Without their involvement, nothing would have come from all this effort. I salute you for participating.

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My fourth and final acknowledgement, and most importantly, is to my wife, Gregoria. I am eternally grateful for how we have complemented each other over the years. Our journey is far from over, and I look forward to a future of adventure together. I love you always!

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore and document the opinions of major stakeholder groups including parents, teachers, administrators, and local police officers regarding the perceived security effectiveness of the School Sentinel Program (SSP) of 2013. This unique school security program, which is being operated in the southeast portion of a Midwest U.S. state, allows volunteers or school employees, once psychologically screened and trained by state law enforcement agencies in areas such as use of force, first aid, and firearms proficiency (State of South Dakota Attorney General, 2013), to serve as armed security for public schools (School Sentinel Program, 2013). Understanding stakeholder opinions of this unique program may provide insight into whether the use of armed guards who are not school resource officers (SROs) has broad support from the groups that are subjected to its requirements.

School security includes a wide range of policies that affect many people within local communities. Chapter 1 outlines why controversial school security policies are difficult to implement yet may be needed to deter external threats. The theoretical basis for the study was social constructions of target populations, which was used to gain insight into how school security policies affect stakeholders. Finally, definitions, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, significance, and a summary are provided.

### **Background**

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) (2018) provided a guide to K–12 public schools to prevent and protect against potential perpetrators seeking to conduct a

mass murder. The DHS (2018) stated that although comprehensive security measures are the best possible protection and schools are seen as soft targets, security measures must be continuously evolving to prevent or mitigate threats. Additionally, Anklem et al. (2014) found that the presence of carry conceal holders, coupled with other types of security measures, has a positive mitigating effect against perpetrators seeking to commit a mass atrocity. With this key deterrent factor in mind, some schools throughout the United States, such as those under the Texas Association of School Boards (2018), have adopted policies arming certain school district personnel.

Public pressure brought by stakeholder groups, specifically parents, to increase security of public schools has gained wide traction in the wake of prolific mass shootings (Mowen & Freng, 2018). Jonson (2017) noted that school administrators often spend significant public financial resources to incorporate security measures that may, and sometimes may not, provide additional security deterrence to prevent mass shootings. In accounting for the contextual factors, policymakers remain vigilant in seeking additional effective security measures that can be incorporated with existing limited financial resources.

Several studies have addressed the opinions of stakeholders regarding arming teachers to supplement SRO presence as the primary deterrence on school campuses. Primary stakeholder groups in existing research have included school principals, teachers, and local law enforcement but have not included parents of the children within the school as a subset of participants. Parental opinions have been generally captured in national studies related to broad school security questions through polling mechanisms.

Policies arming volunteer personnel outside of SROs or school personnel have not been addressed in the scholarly literature due to the small number of states enacting such legislation and schools that have adopted such policies where firearms are placed in the hands of volunteers on school campuses. Understanding stakeholder opinions, including parents, regarding a school security program in which armed volunteers are trained and approved to supplement public school security constituted a gap in the literature. Exploring this research topic may assist lawmakers in enacting policies that could improve school security deterrence without having to expend significant public funds to hire armed guards to protect school children.

### **Problem Statement**

Public school K–12 security has become a primary focus for parents, teachers, school administrators, police, and legislators due to high-profile mass shootings. As more of these atrocities occur, the pressure increases on lawmakers and school administrators from their constituencies to enact policies that increase the deterrence to external threats. A Hanover Research (2018) study noted that public school administrators predominately choose to incorporate SRO as the primary component of physical security plans on public school campuses. Additionally, Kirby et al. (2016) noted in threat assessment modeling that SRO presence is the single most effective physical security deterrent component of school safety plans.

Many policies seeking to increase public school physical security have been implemented hastily and at great financial cost without sufficient empirical review of the effectiveness of incorporated security measures (Jonson, 2017). Support exists for the

presence of armed guards on school campuses. A Quinnipiac poll taken on February 28, 2018, a few weeks after the Parkland High School shooting, provided an example of how the electorate are very concerned about increasing school security (Brown & Rubenstein, 2018). This poll cited a majority of support (51%) among Florida voters for increased security at school entrances, but only 32% believed that arming teachers is a positive policy to reducing school shootings (Brown & Rubenstein, 2018).

Placing armed guards on school campuses to supplement SRO presence is a school security policy that seeks to increase the deterrence effect of school safety plans. Rock (2018) reported that the cost of 10–12 part-time security guards in one specific school district would be between \$250,000 and \$300,00 annually. Therefore, hiring security guards to supplement SRO presence requires financial investments that are generally out of reach for most school districts in the United States unless funding comes from the federal government (Bump, 2018).

The state of South Dakota passed legislation in 2013 that allows school boards to certify volunteers from the local community with carry conceal holder licenses from the local community to serve as school sentinels. One school district began operating the program beginning in the 2016–2017 school year and has continued to maintain its operation. This sentinel program draws from the local community to provide the human element within public school physical security plans and removes the notice that schools are a gun free zone. At the time of the current study, it was unknown whether there was a consensus of approval among stakeholder groups regarding the effectiveness of the SSP. Exploring the opinions of parents, school administrators, teachers, local police officers,



and groups subjected to the program under review may add to the academic literature regarding public school safety and security policies.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore and document the opinions of major stakeholder groups (parents, teachers, administrators, and local police officers) regarding the perceived security effectiveness of the SSP (2013). Assessing stakeholder opinions of the program may produce an understanding of the level of popular support for the program, which may assist in duplicating this program where states have enacted this type of legislation. Stakeholder opinions may reveal whether this unique public policy is successful in the eyes of those subjected to its requirements.

### **Research Question**

The single research question I sought to answer was the following: What are the opinions of community stakeholders, such as parents, teachers, administrators, and local police officers, regarding the effectiveness of the School Sentinel Program (2013)? In exploring major stakeholders' opinions of this school security program, I sought to contribute to the body of knowledge on school safety policies. An understanding of stakeholder views of the SSP (2013) may provide local policymakers with information to create and defend the incorporation of school security policies that increase deterrent measures in similar school environments.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework for this study was the social constructions of target populations (see Schneider & Ingram, 1993). Schneider and Ingram's (1993) central

theoretical tenets contend that social constructions with power have the ability and means to influence public policy and that policymakers seek to logically link policy with shared public values. When considered independently, each stakeholder subgroup in the current study varied in classification according to Schneider and Ingram's social construction power matrix. However, for the purposes of this study, all stakeholder subgroups were considered under the same social construction group because they are all subjected equally to the tenets of the SSP. The classification for all stakeholders was the dependent group that contains positive construction but is weak in political power.

Social reality encompasses the daily interactions between individuals and the community (P. Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Schneider and Ingram (1993) outlined how lawmakers care deeply about the possible failure of and subsequent negative public reaction to policies they introduce. Schneider and Sidney (2009) further examined social construction theory's impact on policy design, concentrating on how lawmakers develop certain policy designs and responses to social problems. I used Schneider and Ingram's theory to explore the effectiveness of the SSP (2013) in relation to public school physical security and overall school safety.

In an assessment of the social construction of targeted populations theory, Kreitzer and Smith (2018) asserted that the theory provides a method to explain how lawmakers shape not only policy but also how stakeholders provide feedback and feed-forward effects of public policies. Second, the theory provides a basis for researchers to explain how and why policymakers create policies that incorporate inequalities within the policy process (Kreitzer & Smith, 2018). In the current study, I sought to provide

stakeholder feedback regarding a school security policy that supplements SRO presence on public school campuses, and to understand the security implications brought about by incorporating additional non-law-enforcement volunteer armed security.

### **Nature of the Study**

The nature of this study was qualitative with a case study design. Creswell et al., (2007) noted that for case studies contextual data are essential to understanding the phenomenon under study. Qualitative methodology was the best approach to explore and understand the security effectiveness of the SSP (2013) according to stakeholders' opinions. I followed Schneider and Ingram's (1993) assertion that lawmakers are keenly interested in a policy's success so they can connect to locally held values. Exploring aspects of the SSP may benefit school security policies in other U.S. states if implemented in a similar fashion and in a similar school environment.

The methodology for this study included semistructured interviews with members of key stakeholder groups who are subjected to the SSP (2013). These stakeholder groups consisted of parents, teachers, school administrators, and local law enforcement personnel. I anticipated that three to five members from each stakeholder group representing all levels of public education (i.e., elementary, middle, and high schools) would be interviewed. To obtain permission to interview stakeholders, I contacted the superintendent of schools and the local sheriff. Data were transcribed and coded using the Max Qualitative Data Analysis (MaxQDA) software. Interviews from all stakeholder groups and all levels of public education provided an array of stakeholder opinions of the SSP (2013).

## Definitions

*Active shooter:* The term used to identify an individual actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill people in a population area (Federal Bureau of Investigation [FBI], 2020).

*Armed personnel:* This term includes any person lawfully authorized to carry a firearm, whether concealed or exposed, on their persons. Examples include law enforcement officers (both active and retired), armed security guards, and armed school personnel such as administrators and teachers. This term also includes armed sentinels, a central research focus of the current study (see Reyes, 2014).

*Carry conceal holder:* Any citizen who is licensed to carry on their person a concealed firearm, specifically a loaded pistol concealed on their person, in a vehicle or in public (Government Accountability Office, 2012).

*Deterrence:* This term is used to address the physical measures in place to prevent malicious activity from occurring (Marcella, 2018).

*School administrators:* A term used to describe personnel in school leadership positions, such as principals and assistant principals. This term generally does not include administrative staff such as counselors, custodians, or secretarial personnel (Teacher.org, 2020).

*School resource officer (SRO):* A career law enforcement officer, generally under the direct operational control of the local police chief, who is deployed in a community-oriented policing assignment to a public school (National Association of School Resource Officers, 2020).

*School security plans:* This term addresses actions in which school leadership has incorporated SRO presence, physical security measures, incident response, threat assessment models, and active shooter drills into a comprehensive plan to prepare for and deter active shooters (DHS, 2018).

*Social construction:* Specific groups of people who have common characteristics such as politics, culture, history, and religion. The four distinct groups are advantaged (power groups with positive social dispositions), contenders (powerful groups with negative public dispositions), dependents (powerless groups with positive public dispositions), and deviants (powerless groups with negative public dispositions; Schneider & Ingram, 1993, 1997, 2005; Schneider et al., 2014).

*Target hardening security measures:* This term refers to both the tangible and visible security mechanisms in place within any school. These measures may include metal detectors, security cameras, remotely locked doors, and electronic notification systems (Warnick et al., 2018).

### **Assumptions**

Assumptions are the unverified assertions that provide a basis for the purpose of the research (Simon, 2011). I assumed that the adoption of armed sentinels increases the deterrence of active shooter incidents. The absence of active shooter incidents may be an indicator of the success of the deterrent effect armed sentinels may provide to public schools. However, whether adding armed sentinels is a positive aspect of school security can be demonstrated by the opinions of those subjected to the policy, a central focus of

this study. Deterrence is an intangible aspect of security and is a subjective measurement that was not addressed within the scope of this study.

A second assumption was that participants would have different levels of knowledge of the SSP (2013). I assumed that the parent stakeholder subgroup may not have detailed knowledge of the legislative requirements or the functioning of the SSP within the public schools that their children attend. I anticipated that the teacher subgroup may have a higher level of knowledge of the SSP's operation within public schools where they work. The school administrative and law enforcement stakeholder subgroups were directly responsible for implementing and operating the SSP within public school in the county. Therefore, I assumed these subgroups would have more knowledge of the legal and operational details of the SSP in comparison to the parent or teacher subgroups. Accounting for these assumptions was a central tenet to exploring and documenting stakeholder groups opinions of the SSP.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

Scope and delimitations are researcher-set boundaries that focus the research effort (Simon, 2011). Policies have been enacted in many public schools to increase their security posture. However, policies regarding firearms on public school campuses have become contentious in public debates. This study's central focus was to obtain the opinions of major stakeholders of the SSP (2013), which allows for schools to supplement SRO presence with armed sentinels. The primary focus of qualitative interviews is to obtain the lived experience of the individuals under study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). For this reason, individual semistructured interviews were the primary means

of collecting data in the current study. Understanding stakeholder opinions of contentious public policies regarding school security may assist lawmakers in navigating these contentious debates when seeking to implement school security policies unique to their local or state constituencies.

In designing this study, I anticipated that the primary stakeholder group would be parents of school children within the school district under review. The second stakeholder group would be teachers and administrators of this same school district. The third anticipated stakeholder group would be local law enforcement officers who are or have been SROs for schools within the district. Being directly subjected to the SSP (2013), either by having children as students in one of the schools or by being employed at the school within the district, was a necessary component of being considered a stakeholder. External stakeholder groups, such as elected representatives at the local and state level and residents without school-age children, were not included in the study because these groups are not directly subjected to the school security policy under review.

### **Limitations**

Limitations are weaknesses in the research that, if not addressed, can affect the outcome of the study. Several limitations existed related to the central focus of the study. First, the SSP (2013) is by no means ubiquitous among school security plans in the state or nationwide. The uniqueness of this program made assessing its success in the eyes of a broader stakeholder population difficult because it operates in only one school district in the state. A second limitation was that only a small portion of the resident stakeholders could be interviewed for the study. A larger pool of participants from the school district

may have provided an enhanced understanding of the opinions of the school security program under review. A final limitation was that attitudes vary throughout the U.S. population regarding how best to create and implement school security policies to protect school children. However, only a small segment of this population could be interviewed in this study.

There are two researcher biases that must be addressed. As a former military officer, I have great knowledge of firearms and how they affect security policy. A second researcher bias was that I am a father of school-age children, and policies that I believe enhance the security of my children at school must be recognized. Understanding and acknowledging how these biases could affect my research was the first step in ensuring the creation of data collection instruments that were free from undue personal influence.

### **Significance**

The SSP (2013) may provide an effective supplement to public school comprehensive security plans and may contribute to the prevention or reduction of mass shootings. The development of this program as a legitimate and effective deterrent to those seeking to conduct a mass shooting could enhance its ability to be promulgated to other locations throughout the United States where SRO presence requires supplementation or where no SRO presence exists. The primary aspects of the research, coupled with an understanding of the law's enactment, promoted the logistic understanding and development of effective school safety programs that fulfill the primary tenets of positive social change sought by Walden University.



## Summary

Policies putting firearms on school campuses in the hands of personnel who are not law enforcement officers have encountered immediate and fierce opposition. Although the policy's intent is to enhance school security, the views of stakeholders directly subjected to the SSP (2013) were unknown. The SSP allows for armed sentinels, once trained and approved, to complement SRO presence on public school campuses in one school district in a Midwest state. I sought to explore and document opinions of stakeholders subjected to this unique school security policy.

The assessment of programs supporting sentinel armed security on public school campuses was largely absent from the academic literature. This was likely due to public pressure brought by proposed policies that authorize non law enforcement personnel to carry or access firearms on public school campuses. This study was needed to understand how those subjected to contentious public school security policies perceive their potential effectiveness. The scholarly literature related to school shootings and school security policies that include the presence of firearms in the hands of SROs or school personnel was extensive. In Chapter 2, I review historic and current federal and state security policies for schools, investigatory documents of specific school shootings, and public sentiment of school security policies, including research on school policies that allow arming school personnel such as teachers.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

The security policies of K–12 public schools, particularly those that seek to allow additional armed personnel on campuses, are hotly debated topics that are of keen interest to primary stakeholder groups, specifically parents, teachers, administrators, and law enforcement. Mass shootings at public schools have brought enormous pressure to bear on lawmakers and school administrators to enact policies that improve the deterrence against external threats (Donnelly, 2020; Kirby et al., 2016). Some of these policies have been enacted hastily and at great financial cost with little consideration as to the deterrence effectiveness against external threats (Jonson, 2017). However, lawmakers and school administrators continue to implement security policies that existing financial resources can support and where the deterrence to external threats is maximized.

Several studies addressed the opinions of educators regarding firearms on school campuses. Chrusciel et al. (2014) examined opinions concerning firearms on public school campuses in the hands of teachers and administrators. The research sample included the perspectives of executive law enforcement ( $n = 228$ ) and school principals ( $n = 1,086$ ) in South Carolina concerning the presence of SROs, armed teachers, and administrators on school campuses as school safety policy. Overwhelmingly (97.8% and 96.5%, respectively) the sample populations supported trained and armed SROs on school campuses but generally did not approve of any other group possessing firearms for the purposes of supplementing school security. The surveys did not include an option for the evaluation of opinions for armed guards other than SROs on school campuses.

Parental opinions, though often overlooked in research, affect public school security policy. Cuellar and Theriot (2015) surveyed 936 school personnel and found that parental and community involvement heavily influenced the types of school safety strategies that are implemented in public high schools in the United States, highlighting the influence of a primary stakeholder group. However, security policies addressed in studies focused mainly on physical security measures such as controlled access, surveillance, and metal detectors. Armed personnel other than SROs, such as sentinels, were not a feature incorporated into the research (Cuellar & Theriot, 2015; Mowen, 2015; Mowen & Ferg, 2018).

The purpose of the current qualitative case study was to assess the opinions of key stakeholder groups regarding the SSP (2013) currently being operated in one Midwest U.S. state. The SSP is a state program that allows volunteers, once psychologically screened and trained by state law enforcement agencies, to serve as armed security in public schools. To fulfill the purpose of this study, I explored the opinions of primary stakeholder groups such as parents, teachers, administrators, and local law enforcement to understand how these groups perceive the success or failure of the security deterrence the SSP potentially provides to public schools in a specific county. I sought to understand whether primary stakeholder groups agree that having armed sentinels on school campus improves school security or further endangers safety.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

A review of the literature regarding three high-profile school shootings and stakeholder opinions of security measures, with an emphasis on individuals carrying

firearms, in public schools was conducted to assess the research concerning school safety. In searching for information on school security measures and stakeholder opinions of these policies, I accessed the Walden University library and the internet for information. Research Gate, LexisNexis, Pro Quest, Thoreau, and Educational Resource Information Center were databases reviewed. Keywords such as *school safety*, *school security*, *SROs*, *armed teachers*, and *parental opinions* were used to obtain resources for this study.

The information that was reviewed to support this study included peer-reviewed articles that addressed school policies that sought to deter or prevent school shootings and the opinions of stakeholder groups. This information included research of SROs, arming school employees including teachers and administrators, and physical deterrence measures such as metal detectors, controlled entry, and surveillance systems implemented by public schools.

Federal and state legislation and policies that are currently in place and those currently being proposed to address school security with an emphasis on individuals possessing firearms on public school campuses were also included. In addition, state government-sponsored investigations and media reports for three prominent school shootings (the 1999 Columbine High school shooting in Littleton, CO; the 2012 Sandy Hook Elementary school shooting in Newtown, CT; and the 2018 Marjory Stoneman High School shooting in Parkland, FL) were also incorporated. Lastly, the study included over 40 news media articles that addressed the details of active shooter events that have occurred at public schools. The review included over 10 articles with polls taken of

stakeholder groups regarding school policies concerned with firearms on school campuses.

### **Theoretical Foundation**

The theory of social construction of target populations (Schneider & Ingram, 1993) served as the theoretical foundation to answer the research question: What are the opinions of community stakeholders, such as parents, teachers, administrators, and local police officers, regarding the effectiveness of the SSP (2013)? The central tenets of Schneider and Ingram's social construction theory contend that groups with power have the ability and means to influence public policy and that policymakers seek to logically link policy with shared public values. The creation of policies that seek to allow personnel, such as teachers and administrators, to be armed on public school campuses have been met with quick and fierce political opposition (Swisher, 2019). The SSP (2013) has the potential to garner similar public reaction. Vondracek (2018) noted how many school districts in the Midwest state where the program is law have been apprehensive to incorporate armed sentinels into school security plans.

The current study's theoretical foundation provided a basis to understand the opinions of stakeholders concerning the effectiveness of a contentious school security policy. Social construction theory provides a method to understand how public resources are distributed to certain groups throughout society (Schneider & Ingram, 1993, 1997). The enactment of certain policies, while no specific public resource may be available to distribute, can still affect the social construction of certain groups in several ways. The SSP (2013) is a program that has potentially influenced the participation patterns and

political orientations of affected stakeholder groups. The exploration of stakeholder opinions of this program could illustrate these influences upon school safety programs (see Schneider & Ingram, 1993). This literature review includes a discussion of how political and policy influences have potentially manifested within each stakeholder group relative to SSP incorporation and continued operation.

### **Social Theory**

Individuals and their respective actions, both in large and small settings, are involved daily in social theory. Social theory contains the scientific models and frameworks used to study and interpret social life. Many aspects are studied under various social theories, such as social life, power, race, gender, ethnicity, and social behavior (Harrington, 2005). Social construction theory is a subcategory of social theory that seeks to outline how specific social groups influence the policy creation and distribution of public resources (Schneider & Ingram, 1993, 1997).

Social sciences also encompass several fields seeking to understand the relationship between the individual and society (Mercadal, 2019). Harrington (2005) noted that social theory is not activism and should only be used to scientifically study the phenomena of social interactions of individuals in society. Harrington outlined how the application of political theories includes the study and interpretation of government systems to support the freedoms, equality, and justice of societies and individuals. Mercadal (2019) and Harrington outlined how social and political theories have a common general goal to establish methods to understand the complexities of everyday life among individuals in society.

Coleman (1986) introduced the theory of action that provided a foundation for general social theory by seeking to understand how the actions of actors within social settings combine and affect social systems and how these actions, shaped by system constraints, shape the behavior of societal systems and the actors within them. These types of purposeful actions by actors within social systems illustrate how human will can shape social institutions (Coleman, 1986). With human will as a central component of systematic social change, it is necessary to highlight the importance of understanding the subjective experiences of actors within society (Mercadal, 2019).

Classical social theory has not evolved without criticism. Antonio and Kellner (1991) outlined how emergent mass social organizations and their interdependence produced cultural and social fragmentation. This fragmentation's consequence would not serve to garner sufficient collecting power to produce the progressive social change sought by many within society. However, Antonio and Kellner argued that the classical style of social theory still had the potential to contribute to understanding some of the most pressing social problems within contemporary research. Antonio and Kellner concluded by affirming classical social theory's ability to seek methods of cooperation and social transformation.

In summary, social theory is the application of scientific methods to evaluate and understand the social behavior of individuals within society (Harrington, 2005). Antonio and Kellner (1991) outlined how classical social theory should be complemented with contemporary social theories to obtain a complete understanding of social phenomena under study. Social theory is the overarching framework to study and understand the

actions of individuals within society. The specific theory used as the basis of the current study was how social constructions influence public policies and the rationales that substantiate public policy choices (see Schneider & Ingram, 1993).

### **Social Construction of Target Populations**

Schneider and Ingram's (1993) social construction of target populations theory contends that the social construction of specific groups affects the setting of agendas created by policymakers, the behavior of elected legislative figures, and the formulation and incorporation of public policies. Of specific interest to the current study, Schneider and Ingram (1993, 1997) described how the production of public policies that seek to address widely known public problems are of keen interest to politicians because this enhances their opportunity to be reelected. These key motivations within the social constructions of target populations theory provided the foundation to understand the importance of exploring stakeholder opinions of the SSP (2013).

Rationales of policies are critical elements for lawmakers to portray to the intended target populations. When policies are created, certain groups may not agree that the rationale provides a basis for the lawmaker to continue to enact the policy without the agreement of certain groups (Schneider & Ingram, 1993, 1997). The incorporation of contentious policies can be dangerous for administrators because their organizations' ethical cohesion could be damaged (Jun, 2006). Rationales provide a basis for the lawmaker to be seen as supporting certain groups through creating policies that substantiate that target group's moral or ethical values (Schneider & Ingram, 1997).



Finally, the rationale provides policymakers the justification for the tools chosen and the policies' intended goals (Schneider & Ingram, 1993).

The SSP is a policy that requires a strong rationale due to the immense public opposition that quickly gained momentum against policies that place firearms into the hands of people other than SROs upon school campuses. Vondracek (2018) noted that many school administrators were fervently against the incorporation of the SSP in their school districts. The rationale outlined how the program's intent, that of increasing deterrence through the arming of sentinels, was insufficient justification to adopt the policy because many SROs were present in certain school systems and provided the necessary security on public school campuses (Vondracek, 2018).

Schneider and Ingram (1993) surmised that the logical group goals that policies sought to support would not always find congruence among the target populations. Schneider and Ingram also addressed that certain groups, even though the intended policy was aimed to support them, would be unwilling to participate. The various stakeholder groups included in the current study, although all subjected to the SSP, have different goals and seek to influence government in different ways concerning school security. Therefore, this school policy was appropriate for analysis from a political science perspective outlined in the social construction of target populations theory (see Schneider & Ingram, 1993).

### **Social Constructions**

Schneider and Ingram's (1993) initial introduction of the theory outlined four socially constructed groups target populations. These groups are either positively or

negatively constructed and are either strong or weak in political power (Schneider & Ingram, 1993, 1997). These groups consist of advantaged, contenders, dependents, and deviants (Schneider & Ingram, 1993).

Advantaged groups enjoy an exclusive position within the power structure of Schneider and Ingram's theory (1993, 1997). Groups within this category possess the political power to influence lawmakers to produce policies that provide benefits through policy measures and to dissuade elected leaders from creating policies that could place burdens on them (Schneider & Ingram 1993; Schneider et al., 2014). Stakeholders under review in the current study possessed some of the traits of advantaged groups. School teachers and administrators and law enforcement hold positive social constructions generally throughout society and therefore hold the reputational respect due many public servants. Unionization of these groups does not enjoy the same positive social construction. Unions are generally viewed as political institutions with specific goals to achieve with respect to legislative and policy affairs supporting their constituents. Thus without unionization, these groups would likely possess little political power to influence policy in their favor. For the purposes of this research, unionization of these socially constructed groups was considered a separate aspect relative to the review of the SSP within this specific school district. For this reason, teachers, administrators, and law enforcement were placed inside the dependent group category.

The second group that Schneider and Ingram (1993, 1997) included are contenders. This group has the necessary political resources to influence policies, but social opinions of this group are considered generally negative and this group is seen as

selfish, morally questionable, and lacking trustworthiness (Schneider et al., 2014).

Unions and large corporations are examples of groups within this socially constructed category. The unions relevant to this research were school employees, specifically teachers, and law enforcement organizations. Schneider, et al. (2014) noted that although policymakers create policies that seek to burden this group, they often do not come to fruition because alternative means, such as court litigation, challenge these policies and prevent them from coming into effect.

The third group that Schneider and Ingram (1993, 1997) address are dependents. This group does have positive social construction but is relatively weak in political power (Schneider, et al., 2014). Benefits for this group are not as well funded nor collectively organized and subsequently do not possess the political power of advantaged or contender groups. The parental stakeholder group within this research fits within this category. Parents have no collective organization with which to voice their opinions of concerns regarding the SSP (2013), yet they do have a direct interest in the policies success as it is their children that attend the schools included in this study.

The final group addressed by Schneider and Ingram (1993, 1997) are deviants. This group is both negatively socially constructed and has little to no political power. Policies seeking to place burdens and sanctions are the primary focus of lawmakers when enacting policies focused upon this group (Schneider & Ingram, 1993; 1997, Schneider, et al., 2014). Policy makers do gain benefit from enacting burdensome policies on this group by obtaining the broader public's consensus that deviant groups do not deserve public benefits. No groups within this study reside within the deviant group.

Social constructions are key elements to elected officials in highly visible positions of power. Schneider and Ingram (1993 & 1997) state that particular attention by policy makers is paid to the preferences of the public with regards to specific policies and their perceived outcomes. Of keen interest regarding this research proposal in relation to the theory is how social constructions affect public policies that at times deliberately fail to solve very important public problems (Schneider, et al., 2014). The school sentinel program does seek to solve a very complex social problem that incorporates deterrence in school security plans with the intent to prevent future school shootings (Swisher, 2019). Yet as Vondracek (2018) noted that some socially constructed groups stridently contest the policy's perceived deterrence effect and reject the notion that adding armed guards increases school security.

A central tenet of Schneider and Ingram's original theory (1993, 1997), Schneider, et al. (2014) later work, and Jun (2006) all contend that policymakers seek to logically link policy to shared public values. The school sentinel program is, for the purposes of this research, a shared public value since many stakeholder groups within the community are inherently interested in and affected by policies that support school safety. The social constructions between the targeted stakeholder groups in this study seeks to understand how each group considers the effectiveness of the School Sentinel program, where volunteers carry firearms on public school campuses. All literature reviewed maintains this central framework tenet as a basis for inclusion within the study.

## **Theoretical Research**

An early study conducted by Schroedel and Jordan (1998) reviewed how senators voted concerning policies surrounding Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS). The authors sought to review how Schneider and Ingram's (1993) theory provided a basis to review both symbolic and substantive benefits to certain social groups at the center of the AIDS epidemic in the late 1980's and early 1990's. Schroedel and Jordan (1998) concluded that overall, the social construction of targeted populations did support the study's assessment of senatorial voting patterns. However, Schroedel and Jordan also concluded that many groups were the subject of the policies reviewed and that there was no definitive conclusion as to which group prevailed.

Hirshberg (2002) studied the impact of race upon education policy within Alaska public schools. Hirshberg reviewed the relatively low achievement and high drop-out rate of Alaska native children as a central motivation to pursue an understanding as to how state-wide education policies affected these statistics. Specific lawmakers of both legislative chambers were interviewed in the conduct of the research. The social construction of target populations theory found that race was a critical component of this study and political ideology is a fundamental component linked with racial attitudes. Social constructions of race were a secondary theory which the author chose to support the study's goals.

Another study utilizing the social construction of target populations theory is Huddleston's (2006) review of federal legislation supporting Emergency Medical Services for Children (EMSC). The EMSC and Wakefield Acts was legislation being

considered before the Congress in 2006 that sought to appropriate funding for emergency medical services for children. The review of this legislative effort was a tool to inform healthcare workers how to contact their representatives and to vote in favor of both pieces of legislation. Huddleston noted that children were a dependent group and had no political power to influence the proposed policies but that healthcare organizations approving both proposed acts were the driving force in pushing legislators to vote in favor to secure the needed funding. Huddleston noted that Schneider and Ingram's (1993, 1997) theory provided a rationale for policy makers to create policy; to address widely acknowledged public concern.

A state immigration-based study reviewed with Schneider and Ingram's (1993, 1997) social constructions theory outlines Alabama state legislation surrounding immigration and taxation policy. Davis (2014) researched H.B. 56, an Alabama state bill which sought to introduce state policy to reduce illegal immigration. This legislation was in response to the federal government's stagnation in constructing federal immigration legislation. H.B. 56 sought to benefit the Alabama taxpayer and subsequently burdened illegal immigrants already residing within the state of Alabama through various taxation regulations. Davis noted that Schneider and Ingram's (1997) social constructions were created by politics, culture, media, and several other traits that transcend people and groups. This aspect was critical as the various stakeholder groups within this study were the created social constructions necessary to understand the policy's effects.

Pierce et al., (2014), in a review of research applications, noted how this theory seeks to explain public policies that shape the social constructions of targeted populations

through understanding the distribution of power and policy design. The social construction of targeted populations theory (Schneider & Ingram, 1993) has been applied in various ways to provide a basis to explain how populations are served or are burdened by policymakers and public institutions.

The application of the social construction theory is an essential key in evaluating how government agencies decide if and how much to engage the public on the creation of certain policies. Neshkova and Guo (2018) used the social construction of targeted populations theory when conducting an analysis of the degree public participation varied between four state government agencies and public interest groups. The four state government departments studied were environmental protection, transportation, child protective services and corrections. Neshkova and Guo's hypotheses centered upon whether socially constructed group characteristics affected an agency's decision to involve the public in the policy making process.

The Neshkova and Guo (2018) addressed several conclusions which have implications for this study. First, they concluded that government administrators considered the political, fiscal, and cultural aspects of their agencies environment to judge how open their policy making process would be in relation to the targeted population being served. A primary conclusion Neshkova and Guo found was that if targeted populations held sufficient political power the agencies tended to be more open in the policy making process. The opposite was also found to be true. Specifically, Neshkova and Guo found that powerless target populations were often neglected in the

policy making process for these groups did not possess sufficient leverage of power to draw attention from administrators within these agencies.

The four categories of social constructions originally introduced by Schneider and Ingram (1993) contained basic structure to begin an academic application of how and why groups were either powerful or powerless. Kreitzer and Smith (2018) performed a detailed categorization of political target groups using social construction of target population theory. This review showed that by using crowdsourcing of data, a method which includes many participants accomplishing small tasks, led to “highly replicable and accurate” method to determine the social construction of certain groups (p. 772). Further, Kreitzer and Smith noted that many groups border closely between two of Schneider and Ingram’s (1993) original socially constructed categories. Kreitzer and Smith’s (2018) contention is that it is difficult for policy makers to understand predictions of how many socially constructed groups will perceive specific policies.

The above listed research projects employed Schneider and Ingram’s (1993) social construction of target populations theory to understand how social groups affect public policy before and after a policy’s creation. The central tenet of this research vehicle is to understand how stakeholder groups consider the effectiveness of this unique school security program, the SSP. All types of policy areas were reviewed in assessing previous studies. These areas include health care, immigration, and education policies which were based upon the social construction of target populations (Schneider & Ingram, 1993, 1997). Finally, Schneider et al. (2014) addressed how humans make initial decisions with cursory heuristics and only later apply critical thought to both groups and



policies (Sabatier & Weible, 2014). The opinions of stakeholders of the SSP's incorporation since 2016 remain undetermined and the social construction of target populations theory supports the exploration of this unique program's success (or failure) from those directly subjected to its requirements.

### **School Sentinel Program Background**

Policies surrounding school security, specifically those that allow the presence of firearms on public school campuses, are politically contentious both to address and incorporate into school safety plans. The South Dakota sentinel program was created to deter assailants by hardening the security posture of public schools. The South Dakota SSP was signed into law in 2013. The law authorizes school boards to

create, establish, and supervise the arming of school employees, hired security personnel, or volunteers in such a manner.... that will be most likely to secure of enhance the deterrence of physical threat and defense of school, its students, its staff, and members of the public of school premises against violent attack. (South Dakota Legislature, SL 2013, ch 93, § 1, 2019)

The law authorizes school boards operating the program to ensure sentinels are trained, evaluated, and approved by the local law enforcement agency that has jurisdiction for the school system. Sentinels have been approved to operate on school campuses within the school system under review since 2016 and this program continues to operate until the present.

### **Columbine High School Shooting**

On April 20, 1999, two senior students from Columbine High school executed an extensive yearlong plan to commit a school shooting with as many casualties as possible (Erickson, et al., 2001). The perpetrators succeeded in killing 13 people and injuring several fellow students. Their actions and those of first responders were captured on live television, and this focused the nation's attention on this tragedy. Subsequent omnipresent media focus which included details of the perpetrators and to a lesser extent response by first responders, were under intense public scrutiny (Borum, et al., 2010; Jonson, 2017). This tragic incident sparked an immediate contemporary analysis of school safety and sincere interest from primary stakeholders of their respective school security.

The public response to the Columbine school tragedy engendered wide-ranging stakeholder concerns for the safety of school children (Sutter, 2009; Rosenberg, 2020). Borum et al., (2010) and Schildkraut (2014) addressed how the intense and constant national news coverage of school shootings negatively altered public opinion as to the actual level of safety and general security of public schools. A Gallup poll taken shortly after the Columbine shooting showed that 55% of parents thought about the safety of their child or children at school and one-third of parents feared for the safety of their children during the school day (Lyons, 2002) even though most schools provided a relatively safe environment for all children. Yet, Chrusciel et al. (2014), addressed how heavily both police executives and principals (over 95%) favored SROs as the armed component of public-school safety plans. The research also included how these groups

did not believe that arming other school personnel, such as teachers and administrators, was a positive step in preventing mass shootings at public schools (Chrusciel et al., 2014).

The Colorado Commission's extensive report of the Columbine shooting provided several recommendations for schools and first responder organizations, mainly law enforcement agencies, to adopt to assist in preventing future incidents and coordinate cohesive first responder actions (Erickson, et al., 2001). The overarching goal of the commission was two-fold. First the commission sought to incorporate security programs into schools with the intent of identifying students with the proclivity to conduct violence. The second goal was to recommend structural changes to first responder actions to prevent a chaotic response to a school shooting like what was experienced at Columbine. Specific areas of recommendation from the commission's report for law enforcement were to address required equipment and operational training for school shootings to effectively respond to these unique tragedies, improvement of communications between responding department and schools, and to adopt changes to on-site incident command structure and operation.

Commission investigators interviewed several police that responded to the Columbine shooting (Erickson, et al., 2001). Erickson et al. noted a recurring theme which emerged from police interviews; namely, that the response to Columbine "broke the mold" on how police trained and responded to such high-profile incidents. Police that were interviewed noted how the level and type of response police brought to the incident were holistically inadequate and special police forces were not properly trained for this

type of mission. Harper (2000) outlines how police departments began to adapt their training to better respond to active shooter incidents at public schools. Harper outlined that law enforcement agencies began to change tactics and instead of waiting for specialized police units to arrive on-scene, the protocol would be for the first officer to respond to enter the building to locate and confront an active shooter. This tactical law-enforcement change was intended to prevent active shooters from having the time to roam inside a school to reduce the number of casualties.

School administrators were given several specific recommendations to increase school security from the commission report (Erickson, et al., 2001). Primary areas recommended for improvement included school administrators and local law enforcement sharing information concerning potentially violent students, for schools to adopt threat assessment programs and for schools to create and exercise emergency management plans with stakeholder input. A specific note the commission provided was not to recommend schools incorporate physical security measures such as remote locking doors, camera systems, and metal detectors, which could potentially turn schools into prison-like institutions versus establishments of learning.

In addition, various programs to identify potentially violent students began to be adopted by school administrators stemming from the lessons learned from the Columbine shooting. Cheurprakobkit and Bartsch (2005) outlined the most critical components of violence-reducing programs adopted by schools in a study of 215 principals of both middle and high schools in the state of Texas. These critical components included aspects such as having threat assessment programs tailored to the appropriate intervention risk

factor, to have staff and teachers aware of and trained in these available programs, and to include family, peers, and the media in a comprehensive approach to school safety. These critical components would continue to be built upon in future school programs to combat student violence and improve school safety.

### **Sandy Hook Elementary School Shooting**

The nation grew apathetic to the safety of schools post Columbine until the tragedy in Newtown, Connecticut, which renewed the nation's interest with respect to the safety of school children at school. On December 14, 2012, a perpetrator entered the Sandy Hook elementary school and massacred 26 people, 20 of them children in the first grade (Jackson, et al., 2015). The tragedy did not take but a few minutes to execute; however, this was all the time the perpetrator needed to enter the school and subsequent classrooms where most victims had been under lockdown.

Paulson (2012) and Dorn, et al. (2018) contended that school safety protocols were followed, and physical security measures properly incorporated at Sandy Hook. The elementary school had a remote locking front door installed and functioning, yet the perpetrator gained initial access by simply shooting out the glass adjacent to the front door and bypassing this security measure. The law-enforcement response was quick, arriving just four minutes after the 911 call was made (Jackson, et al., 2015). Upon arrival of the police, the perpetrator committed suicide before officers could confront him.

The Sandy Hook commission report (Jackson, et al., 2015) approached school safety and security in much broader terms than did the Columbine report. The report

addressed three basic areas; Safe School Design and Operation, Law Enforcement including significant state and federal firearms legislation and policy recommendations, and comprehensive state mental health system improvements.

The principal portion of the Sandy Hook report (Jackson, et al., 2015) germane to this research is first the Safe School Design and Operation (SSDO), where the commission outlined how state government agencies were to incorporate a holistic effort to construct schools with security measures effective against active shooter threats. The second aspect of the commission's report applicable to this research is the law enforcement emergency response planning and action section where the commission detailed how state agencies to include school administrators are to prepare and respond to many types of emergency situations to include active shooter scenarios.

The overarching goal the commission established was to provide a safe environment for people within school but not at the expense of fortifying schools to such an extent that security measures would create a prison-like environment and inhibit student learning and parent participation (Jackson, et al., 2015). Yet in contrast to this goal, the SSDO section of the commission's report created extensive requirements for schools to adopt to better prepare for and to improve deterrence measures countering active shooter threats. Detailed recommendations for the SSDO focus on physically hardening school buildings both currently built and future construction. These security measures included school administrators' incorporating remote locking doors, camera systems with remote access at each entryway, and forced entry resistant glass in doors.

Many schools throughout the nation began incorporating security of the measures outlined in the Sandy Hook Commission's report (New York State School Boards Association, 2013). The National Center for Education Statistics reported that nearly 90% of all public high schools had incorporated controlled access and security camera systems for the 2015 to 2016 school year (NCES, 2018). Chuck (2017) noted that buzzer systems (security hardware which remotely controls access from a central location) were prominent features that school administrators were more likely to incorporate. However, this is only one aspect of a comprehensive security system necessary to maintain the safe environment sought by all stakeholders in public schools.

The National Institutes of Justice (2016) conducted an extensive study into security technology for K-12 public schools with the goal of understanding current technology used by schools to deter active shooter threats. The researchers studied aspects of physical security within the United States such as access control, alarms and sensors, and surveillance systems. Many physical security systems exist that improve the deterrence schools against active shooter threats; however, no single technology can be relied upon alone as a panacea to deter all threats. The National Institutes of Justice recommended that security systems be complemented with various security measures for schools to create and maintain a comprehensive security posture which is seen as the most effective method to prevent and deter active shooter threats.

Emergency management within the Sandy Hook Commission noted the recommendation of school systems having "local champions" to coordinate recommendations for schools to incorporate with local institutions to plan and exercise

coordinated responses to emergencies (Jackson et al., 2015). Regan (2014) noted, as a public-school psychologist, that schools needed to plan, prepare, and practice their emergency management plans so as not to create a false sense of security regarding active shooter threats. Schools nationwide learned from both the Columbine and Sandy Hook shootings that all stakeholders need to be involved to provide the best school safety environment which could prevent future incidents from occurring.

The Sandy Hook tragedy outlined how school administrators and teachers, local fire and law enforcement agencies, and hospital personnel, needed to exercise emergency management functions to be prepared for various types of scenarios (Dorn et al., 2018). In Mariam County, Florida, the school district conducted an active shooter exercise with all local stakeholder institutions participating (Smithgall, 2013). This exercise was centered upon an active shooter scenario and provided lessons learned for all participating stakeholders that outlined how agencies should response to such incidents. Smithgall noted that lockdown procedures within the school, SRO actions regarding the active shooter, and incident command structure assisted all participants to understand their roles and actions with respect to combating these rare high-profile incidents.

In the post-Sandy Hook school security environment, the enhancement of school security again became a priority for many stakeholders of public schools. The Federal Bureau of Investigations (2014) conducted a study of active shooter incidents in 63 school-related incidents studied and found that 44 (69.8%) ended in 5 min or less, and 23 (36.5%) ended in 2 minutes or less. The Federal Bureau of Investigations study also concluded that the active shooter situation ended once the perpetrator was confronted by



armed personnel. Kirby, et al., (2016) conducted modeling within gun free zones to understand what types of security measures would best defend against active shooters. Their results indicated that response time to counter an active shooter threat was the single most important factor in reducing casualties in all conducted scenarios. The results of the modeling study concluded that if schools had additional armed personnel, other than a single SRO that could confront an armed intruder, reducing response time to confronting active shooters, the rate of casualties would likely be reduced.

School safety measures to combat active shooter scenarios have a wide array of opinions from various stakeholder groups. Ewton (2014) explored both parental and administrative perceptions of school safety in research of a school district in Georgia and found that the threat of a shooting was for principals the number one (1) and for the parent's number two (2) threat to student safety. However, stakeholders appeared hesitant to consider additional armed security beyond SRO presence as a solution to deterring these rare threats. A secondary finding of Ewton's research addressed principal and parental views of two security prevention measures in public schools, emergency plans and drills and arming administrators. Emergency plans and drills were considered the most effective security prevention measures, and armed civilians and armed administrators or teachers were the least effective security measure to deter active shooter threats. Ewton's research provides an understanding of the stakeholder views of what types of security measures are most appropriate to combat an active shooter.

Additionally, Kelly (2016) conducted research that sampled 21 principals in New Jersey suburban public schools concerning school security. When this population was asked

about armed presence on campus a majority gave pause when answering and only 6 of the 21 principals endorsed having armed security on school campus.

### **Marjory Stoneman Douglass High School Shooting**

The events of February 14, 2018 would bring national attention to the effectiveness of contemporary school safety and security measures. At Marjory Stoneman Douglass high school in Parkland, Florida a perpetrator penetrated the school's security measures and killed 17 students and wounded 14 more within a span of approximately 6 minutes (Gualtieri, et al., 2018). The state's commission reported that all casualties emanated from a single unsecured building on the high school's campus that was also geographically close to an unmonitored pedestrian gate that was left open during school hours. The school had an SRO present; n however, this person failed to engage the shooter after the shooter commenced firing or during the 6-minute timeframe within which the perpetrator conducted this tragedy.

Several recommendations were provided throughout the commission's report of the Marjory Stoneman tragedy (Gualtieri, et al., 2018). Establishment, refinement, exercise, and approval of emergency response plans by the state's department of education for active shooter events was a prominent policy feature in the report's recommendation section. Various improvements of physical security measures were also addressed within the commission's report. These recommendations included locking of perimeter entrances and doors to both building and classroom entrances during school hours. The report recommended that the Florida Safe Schools Assessment Tool be made mandatory annually for schools. This Florida Safe Schools Assessment Tool outlined

how schools were to submit to the state department of education a standardized physical security plan and recommendations for improvement. Lastly, the commission recommended that additional school monitors, a cost-prohibitive method of having selective administrators to affect the school's daily physical security measures (such as opening or closing gates at specific times) should be assigned to schools to assist supplementing daily SRO duties (State of Florida, 2019).

The Marjory Stoneman Douglass report (Gualtieri et al., 2018) addressed the fact that threat assessment teams were not fully developed at the school, even though Florida law mandated their creation. Broward County schools had a three-step process which included the following:

1. Learn to recognize warning signs to help prevent violence
2. Train adults to receive information and take reports from students
3. Implement a threat assessment process that included (a) initial response, (b) level one screening, (c) level two in-depth assessment.

The recommendation asserted that these teams were reactive to scenarios of student violence and did not function according to their mandated responsibilities.

In response to the tragedy the State of Florida passed the Marjory Stoneman Douglass Public Safety Act (2018). This law consolidated various school safety responsibilities within a newly created Office of Safe Schools within the Florida Department of Education (2019). This office's responsibilities focused on learning and incorporating lessons learned from schools across the state with successful security programs. The law also created a program called the Coach Aaron Feis Guardian

Program (2018) which allowed for school boards to certify guardians, excluding teachers, to be armed on school campus after training and evaluation requirements were completed (State of Florida Department of Education, 2019). A recent update to the law, signed by the governor on May 8, 2019 (Lemongello, 2019), removed the exemption for arming teachers within the Coach Aaron Feis Guardian Program (2019).

Kamenetz (2018) addressed a petition signed by many experts that called for action to reduce gun violence in schools (Astor et al., 2018). The petition asserted that policy surrounding school safety should focus on preventionary vice reactionary measures (Barakat & Holland, 2018). Kamenetz (2018) concluded from the document that the public health-centric approach was the best solution to the violence, specifically gun-related problems in schools.

### **Columbine, Sandy Hook, and Marjory Stoneman Shootings Themes**

The Marjory Stoneman tragedy is the third school shooting included for review in this study. Recurring themes arise from the review of state commission reports that have affected school safety and security plans nationwide since 1999. As noted by The Federal Bureau of Investigation's (2014) review of active shooter incidents most shootings last only 2 to 5 minutes and this was generally the case for the three shootings reviewed in this study. Physical security measures, such as remote locking doors, door blockers, mass notification systems, and visitor management systems (United States DHS, 2018), are meant to provide obstacles that impede perpetrators from executing a school shooting. The perpetrators of the Columbine tragedy did not face physical obstacles to gain entry to the school (Erickson et al., 2001). However, in both the Sandy Hook and Marjory

Stoneman tragedies (Jackson et al., 2015; Gualtieri et al., 2018) the perpetrators overcame the in-place physical barriers to gain access to internal spaces within the school.

The efficacy of implemented security measures and threat assessment programs that now pervade school safety plans nationwide was questioned by Jonson (2017) and Warnick, et al., (2018). Jonson's contention surrounds whether the hardening of school's without considering the empirical evidence of the implementation of physical security measures is a financially wasteful endeavor and may provide a false sense of security for all school personnel. Jonson's (2017) contention may hold merit as perpetrators have consistently overcome in-place security measures to gain entry into internal school buildings and classrooms. In considering Jonson's (2017) work, Warnick, et al., (2018) suggested that schools should invest more resources to understanding the social environment within schools to detect students with proclivities to conduct violence. The Marjory Stoneman perpetrator would affirm both of their assertions as he was a social pariah who exploited numerous security measures to execute his plan (Gualtieri et al., 2018).

A second theme which transcends the three major school shootings is SRO presence. SRO were present at two of the three school shootings for review. In the Columbine tragedy, the SRO engaged the students from outside the school but did not enter the school to pursue the shooters (Erickson et al., 2001). In the Marjory Stoneman tragedy, there was SRO presence; however, in these cases the perpetrator was not confronted by the SRO on duty and was subsequently conducted the attack unimpeded

(Gualtieri et al., 2018). There was no SRO presence at the Sandy Hook elementary school during the time of the shooting (Jackson et al., 2015). This SRO-based assessment does not mean that SRO armed presence is not a deterrent in schools, but that two of the three major school shootings were conducted despite the SRO's on-campus presence.

A final aspect observed from a review of these school shootings is that once the perpetrators were confronted by armed personnel, specifically law enforcement, each terminated their attack (Erickson, et al., 2001; Jackson et al., 2013; Gualtieri et al., 2018). Barakat & Holland (2018) reported that an SRO in Maryland confronted, fired upon, and killed a perpetrator after he had wounded two students, ending the attempt. Specific to the tragedies under review within this study, both the Columbine and Sandy Hook perpetrators committed suicide once confronted (Erickson et al., 2001; Jackson et al., 2015), and the Marjory Stoneman perpetrator fled the scene and was later apprehended (Gualtieri et al., 2018). In only a few documented cases has it been reported that SROs have terminated a school shooting by confronting perpetrators (Congressional Research Service, 2018, R45251). It is prudent for the purposes of this study to acknowledge that confrontation by an armed person may have successfully terminated an attack by perpetrators.

### **Federal Laws, State Laws, and Regulations**

The National Threat Assessment Guide (NTAC) (2004) created jointly by the U.S. Secret Service and the Department of Education outlined programs for schools to adopt to create a safe school environment. The intent within the threat assessment guide was centered upon schools creating programs that sought to educate school

administrators and teachers to identify behaviors and personal communications where students have the potential to commit violence (U.S. Secret Service & Department of Education, 2004). The threat assessment's action plan and basic framework consisted of taking input from all stakeholders, including parents and local law enforcement, in recommending changes to the established plan.

**Quick and** constant communication between school administrators and local law enforcement was a critical recommendation from the Columbine report (Erickson et al., 2001) and remains a primary goal to both prevent acts from occurring and to enhance a coordinated response effort to crisis events. A previous undersecretary of Education, Martha Kantar (2012), noted in reflection, that a multidisciplinary threat assessment approach was the most effective method to combat external campus threats. The U.S. Department of Education (2006), in continuing emergency management planning post-Columbine, provided a synopsis of an incident at a middle school that necessitated the staff locking the school down and notifying first responders and the school district. The need for assistance in dealing with a perpetrator that was a student at the school arose and the multidisciplinary effort was effective in mitigating the threat in this occasion. The response to the incident highlighted recurring recommendations that schools in general need to have more effective and immediate communication both between all actors on the school campus and with local first responder agencies.

The creation, review, and practice of school evacuation plans remains an essential component to combating active shooter incidents by school administrators (Erickson, et al., 2001; Ashby & General Accounting Office [GAO], 2007). Active crisis planning and

coordination between schools and police and fire departments, are critical to creating an environment of responsive order from a chaotic incident. The U.S. Department of Education (2006) illustrated, from a middle school active shooter incident, that creating an incident command system (ICS) plan and regularly exercising this plan, including first responder participation, is essential for preparing for an emergency active shooter situation (U. S. Department of Education, 2006).

To assist in increasing communication and coordination between schools and local law enforcement agencies school administrators began entering into Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) (Community Oriented Policing Service [COPS], 2014) agreements with local law enforcement agencies. Counts, et al., (2018) in a national review of SRO's, recommended that school boards enter into these agreements with local law enforcement to involve all parties in a comprehensive plan to increase school safety and coordinate quick and orderly response efforts to active shooter scenarios. The primary purposes of these MOU agreements, outlined by the Community Oriented Policing Service (COPS, 2014), were to recommend to schools to incorporate four specific areas of responsibility. They are to specify the responsibilities of the SRO, delineated roles for all respective parties in cases of emergency response, outlined operational responsibilities of the incident response plan, and established information-sharing parameters in accordance with the 1974 Family Education and Rights Privacy Act (COPS, 2014).

The input from various stakeholders within the school community remain essential in creating and incorporating programs into the school environment with the



specific intent to enhance public school security and prevent further tragedies. Research conducted by Lenhardt and Willert (2002) outlined the opinions of stakeholder groups and how each party perceived their part of the responsibility in making schools a safer environment for students. Conclusions of Lenhardt and Willert's research illustrated how diligent stakeholder groups must be to overcome the obstacles that security measures create to enhance school safety.

Klotz (2016) noted that when schools enter into MOAs (Keys & Pappas, 2013) with local law-enforcement and other first responder organizations that school security increased since these collective plans delineated how each participant should respond and communicate during various security situations that included active shooter scenarios. These plans are an essential component to a school's security plan since they delineate responsibilities of first responders, SROs, and how school personnel are to contact, inform, and react to first responder presence. Established MOA's assist in assigning responsibilities but still need to be exercised so that all participating actors understand their roles and responsibilities. The GAO reported that a majority of schools, 98% rural and 99% urban schools, were reported to have conducted training on intruder/hostage situations (Ashby & GAO, 2007). However, fewer than half of schools evaluated reported involving local stakeholders in the creation or review of emergency plans. Schools found it difficult, even with established MOAs, to coordinate training with local stakeholders at specific times and places due to competing responsibilities.

The Department of Education additionally provided a rubric that assists state and local governments in creating and evaluating MOUs and respective laws and policies

between local stakeholder institutions. This rubric, called the Safe School-based Enforcement through Collaboration, Understanding, & Respect (COPS, 2019) provides guidance in areas such as evaluating agreements to ensure they meet constitutional and civil rights requirements and to hire and continually train quality SROs to serve on school campuses. The creation or review of MOUs primarily seeks to improve collaborative efforts in outlining responsibilities for SROs, while preventing unnecessary interaction for students with the juvenile justice system.

School administrative efforts to create programs that enhance school safety by providing students the ability to anonymously alert administrators concerning potentially violent students have been ongoing since the Columbine shooting in 1999. The Columbine Report (Erickson et al., 2001) noted that many students had knowledge that something was alarming concerning the behavior of the perpetrators but did not say anything for fear of reprisal. U.S. Secret Service and Department of Education (2002) points out that in 81% of violent incidents in schools another student had knowledge of the incident prior to it occurring. Programs, such as Colorado's Safe2Tell program (2019), which are active in many states, provide an anonymous method for students to alert authorities of potential violent acts. Kanter (2012), a previous undersecretary of Education, explained that an anonymous caller led authorities to an individual prepared to commit an attack on a community college in California where she was the college president, saving many lives by allowing law-enforcement to intervene prior to the perpetrator acting on their intentions. Providing students the opportunity to anonymously alert authorities is a key component to preventing attacks before they occur.

In response to the Columbine tragedy the U.S. Secret Service, in coordination with the Department of Education, conducted a review of school shootings to better understand how these types of events could be prevented. The Safe School Initiative (U.S. Secret Service & Department of Education, 2002) extensively reviewed over 37 shootings that contained various recommendations to improve school security with the specific objective of obtaining information prior to an attack occurring. The report outlined ten (10) key findings that identified strategies to improve the security of schools from external threats. These key findings included the fact that prior to most incidents other students had knowledge of the impending attack and that most incidents were prevented by other means than law enforcement intervention.

This study's review of various risk factors prevalent in violent incidents at public schools provided a fact-based analytical approach of common elements identifying students capable of planning and executing a violent school attack (U.S. Secret Service & U.S. Department of Education, 2002). The researchers within these departments concluded that a comprehensive threat assessment program was the best combative tool for schools to adopt to prevent mass shootings prior to their execution and this examination led to the Threat Assessment Tool published by both the U.S. Secret Service and the Department of Education (2004) as guidance for schools to incorporate into school safety plans.

The Threat Assessment Program (U.S. Secret Service & Department of Education, 2004) sought to create a program aimed at providing those with protective responsibilities the tools necessary to identify and intervene regarding students planning

for or with the intention of conducting violence at school. The program recommended that schools adopt systematic approaches to create climates of safety, learn to manage threats, and to create and exercise action plans. A Gallup poll taken a few years after Columbine noted that 47% of parents of middle students and 32% of parents of high school students feared for the safety of their children (Lyons, 2002), leading to the quick growth of school safety measures within many schools. Overall, the Threat Assessment Program's goal (U.S. Secret Service & Department of Education, 2004) was to provide schools a framework to measure risk and make decisions of potential incidents and subsequently to provide substantiation to stakeholders of the level of security within public schools.

As schools began to implement Threat Assessment programs (U.S. Secret Service & Department of Education, 2004), a study conducted by Cheurprakobkit and Bartsch (2005) explored security measures employed by middle and high schools in Texas and examined critical components common to many schools with effective safety programs that were based on Dusenbury et al. (1997) nine critical violence prevention measures. The results indicated that school administrators implemented security programs with common critical elements but often failed to scientifically evaluate the program to determine which elements to continue and which elements to terminate (Cheurprakobkit & Bartsch, 2005). In essence, the study addressed how schools generally needed to continue to grow their security programs to develop the threat assessment recommendations promulgated from the federal government.

Early post-Columbine research tended to exclude parental participation as many considered this to be predominantly the responsibility of school administrators in coordination with local law enforcement. Parental responsibility or involvement in school safety was sparingly mentioned in the Threat Assessment (U.S. Secret Service & Department of Education, 2004) and Lenhardt and Willert (2002) noted that most school security measures made it more difficult for parents to participate in the process. A Pew poll taken one year after the Columbine tragedy noted that 85% of those polled agreed that parents have the responsibility for their children's actions and only 9% stated the responsibility rested at the school (Pew Research, 2000).

Society considered very differently, wholly inadequate, the effectiveness of current school safety measures in most schools (Jonson, 2017). Blad (2018), in assessing a 2018 Phi Delta Kappa (PDK) poll of 515 parents, noted that parents heavily favored armed police, mental health services, and metal detectors as school security measures; however, no mention of parental responsibility was included within the polling.

The consequences of both law enforcement and school administrator actions on security have resulted in schools becoming difficult to physically penetrate, particularly for students and frequent visitors. Berger (2002) and Sutter (2009) both noted that in response to too many high-profile shootings, that many schools had become like prisons due to the incorporation of many types of hardened security mechanisms. The type of physical security mechanism incorporated depends on the perceived level of security. Lindstrom Johnson et al. (2018) found, after surveying over 53,000 students in the state of Maryland, that external physical security measures, such as cameras and SRO

presence, led to students feeling they were in a more secure environment. However, Lindstrom Johnson et al. noted that internal cameras and SRO presence within the school led students to feel as if they were suspected of being a perpetrator and this led to a feeling of insecurity. School administrators must weigh having sufficient security and promoting an open environment for parents to interact with their children.

The post-Marjory Stoneman school tragedy environment prompted federal government agencies to continue to review and provide schools the tools to assist in improving security and creating programs that improved prevention measures to deter targeted violence. The Department of Education began by creating a commission on school safety which was sent to the president in December 2018. The final report on school safety extensively outlined various strategies for schools to adopt to mitigate violence associated with active shooter scenarios. The summary of the Department of Education's school safety report focused on three primary areas: prevention, protection and mitigation, and response and recovery (Federal Commission on School Safety, 2018). Chapter 19 outlined specific mitigation strategies for active shooter scenarios for school to consider. This included school hardening, community planning, identification and reporting of suspicious behavior, training and exercises, communication systems and protocols, and threat assessment teams.

The Threat Assessment Model was reviewed and updated by the National Threat Assessment Center (2018), in coordination with the DHS, to continue to assist schools with an operational guide to prevent targeted violence. The NTAC report stressed that there exists no profile of a student with a proclivity to execute a violent act. Threat

Assessment Teams should be prepared to identify a large spectrum of behaviors that could lead any student to commit violence.

Many themes resident in the first threat assessment for schools were revisited with the most recent government threat assessment review (Federal Commission on School Safety, 2018). Greater detail concerning what schools should be doing to mitigate active shooter threats were included in the revised document. Recommendations to schools of the establishment of threat assessment teams, development and implementation of emergency response plans, investigative themes such as weapons access, strange individual interests, and capacity to, and planning of a school shooting are discussed in detail within the model (National Threat Assessment Center, 2018).

The U.S. DHS (2018) also reviewed school safety programs and published a guide which informed schools on programs focused upon preventing and protecting students and faculty against gun violence from active shooter scenarios. The document centered on a “Hometown Security” strategy with a methodology of CPTR-connect, plan, train, report. The authors of the DHS document understood the limitations that physical barriers presented in preventing the next school shooting and focused their effort upon outreach programs that sought to identify and intervene in the case of students with the propensity to commit an act of violence.

### **School Resource Officers**

SRO presence has been a key aspect of school security plans for many decades and became more prominent in the post-Columbine school environment (Congressional Research Service, 2018). The National Association of School Resource Officers

considers the responsibilities of SRO to include their roles as educator (teaching children about law enforcement through social interaction), informal counselor, and law enforcers (NASRO, 2020). The law enforcer is the aspect focused upon within this literature review. As school shootings have continued to occur since Columbine, lawmakers in every state have sought to ensure that SRO presence on school campuses as the only resident armed enforcement (Council of State Governments Justice Center, 2014).

In the context of deterring school shooting, there remains doubt as to the effectiveness of the deterrence SROs provide against armed intruders. Very few school shootings have been prevented by SRO's and active shooter incidents are over by the time law enforcement arrive (Congressional Research Service, 2018; Cox & Rich, 2018). The SRO's presence acts as a deterrent to perpetrators as schools are no longer "gun free" zones where no resistance will be encountered until law enforcement arrives on scene. However, administrators depend on the presence of SROs as the immediate armed response to external threats, as they are the only armed presence on school campuses.

Even though the effect on deterrence of SRO presence may be debatable, stakeholders view their presence as necessary for school safety. Chrusciel, et al. (2014), surveyed law enforcement executives and school principals in South Carolina and found that both populations overwhelmingly agreed to SRO presence in schools as a necessary deterrent to school shootings. The researchers also found that about 95% of both populations agreed that SROs improved school safety; however only about half of those surveyed agreed that the purpose of SRO presence on school campuses was to prevent school shootings.



With the primary responsibilities of SROs being to educate, informally counsel, and enforce the law (NARSO, 2013), on addition to the overwhelming belief that SROs improve school safety, primary stakeholder groups should be working to overcome obstacles that inhibit SRO presence in schools. However, the financial costs of placing SROs in every school is a considerable factor for some school districts. Hill (2013) noted that placing one armed SRO in every school in the United States could cost between \$9.9 to \$12.8 billion annually. The cost estimate for 100% SRO presence increased when school size was factored into the estimation. For schools with larger student populations that would require additional SRO presence, Hill estimated the annual cost range between \$19.2 and \$22.6 billion, depending on the annual salary of the SRO. This second figure Hill provided included School Resource Guards at a lower annual salary cost as a supplement to an SRO at schools with larger student populations.

The Department of Education's Center for Education Statistics reported that for the 2014 to 2015 school year that approximately 47% of public high schools have a full time SRO and 42% had part time SRO presence (NCES, 2019). This percentage has increased abruptly after the Sandy Hook tragedy (NCES, 2019) due to pressure brought by stakeholders. The presence of SROs is a net positive for school safety for every school that has one on duty, and for this reason many schools rely on SRO presence in terms of the human element on school properties as the primary defense against external threats (Jonson, 2017).

Research has demonstrated that SROs in school have negative consequences for some students. Counts, et al., (2018) conducted a national review of SROs in public

schools and referenced Mallet (2016), who found a significant increase in the referral of minority students to the juvenile justice system. Thureau and Wald (2019) outlined that with the pressure brought on by the occurrence and intense media coverage of school shootings often state governments often react hastily and focus financial resources upon security factors that are expensive and ineffective. Huseman (2015) reported that researchers did not agree that SRO presence in schools keep children safe due to more immediate exposure to the juvenile justice system. With this collective data in consideration, it is plausible that armed sentinels avoid the negative effects of SRO presence since they do not have arrest authority while still contributing to the deterrence effect this school policy seeks to improve.

Secondly, Anderson (2018) found after a seven-year review of the state-wide SRO program for middle schools, which evaluated 110 districts and 471 middle schools in the state of North Carolina, that increased SRO presence did not reduce reported infractions at schools. Anderson did not assert that SRO presence further deterred active shooters but did recommended a multifaceted approach to school safety which is similar to that outlined in the DHS (2018) “K-12 School Security, A Guide for Preventing and Protecting Against Gun Violence” policy for public schools.

### **Arming Teachers and Administrators**

One final area of school safety under review is the controversial policy of arming teachers and/or administrators to supplement school security efforts. Ujifusa (2012) indicated that after the Sandy Hook tragedy several prominent elected officials supported the policy of arming teachers and/or administrators to deter school shootings. President

Trump, only days after the Marjory Stoneman shooting, recommended that arming teachers could assist in preventing mass shootings at schools by adding an additional layer of deterrence (Holpuch, 2018; Smith, 2018). The president's recommendation met fierce opposition from a few groups, including the American Federation of Teachers (Downey, 2018) and the National Association of School Resource Officers (Canady, 2018).

Various states have already enacted policies that allows school boards to approve teachers to carry firearms in schools (Crime Prevention Research Center, 2018). Dwyer (2019) outlined research from the Giffords Law Center (2019) which indicated that nine states have laws which allowed for the arming of teachers on school campuses, the state of Florida being the latest to adopt a law allowing for school districts to approve teachers to be armed. The Coach Aaron Feis Guardian program (2018, 2019), which initially allowed for school districts to approve guardians to serve as armed guards on school campuses, has now included teachers within the state's latest version of the law.

Reaction time to confront an active shooter can have great effect upon the actions of the assailant. Shah (2013) noted that many educators clearly understood that the short time it takes for law enforcement to arrive was the most crucial time to protect the students for which they are responsible. Anderson G. (2018) outlined how the scenario of the Sandy Hook shooting could have been thwarted if an educator had possessed both a carry concealed license and firearm to combat the threat posed by the perpetrator. Shah (2013) noted that various educators considered it possible to engage an active shooter to protect the students in their classroom. Scherer (2012) encapsulates the basis of the

debate for arming teachers and administrators by addressing that many of them feel that having the ability to meet an armed threat with an armed response will deter perpetrators from conducting these shootings (Scherer, 2012). Texas has allowed for the arming of teachers since 2013 (Killin-Guadarrama, 2018) and many school districts have programs currently operating. The Texas Association of School Boards (2018) has comprehensive guidance for school to consider before creating policies that arm school employees.

When evaluating the actions of the perpetrators in this and other tragedies, Arnold (2015) asserted that schools which are gun free zones present a resistance free environment. Suter (2018) referenced Dietz research that found that armed presence on school campus could reduce casualties in an active shooter situation by 70% (Anklem, et al., 2014). Suter (2018) further addressed the issue of time with respect to active shooter scenarios. Average law enforcement response time is approximately 10 minutes (Suter, 2018) and yet most active shooter scenarios are over within 2 to 4 minutes (Federal Bureau of Investigations, 2014). Proponents of arming teachers assert that having educators respond to these incidents will either deter a perpetrator from conducting an attack or reduce casualties of those attacks that do occur.

The policy of arming educators to confront an armed intruder as a supplementary security measure to prevent or hinder perpetrator actions is still an unproven method that does not have full or majority support of stakeholders within many school communities (Rajan & Branas, 2018). Lemieux's (2014) research concluded that current academic literature did not support the deterrence success of the policy of arming teachers as a means of reducing deaths or injuries from mass shootings. However, Anklem et al.

(2014) scenario-based research of school security measures did not support Lemieux's (2014) conclusion. Their research concluded that comprehensive security measures, including the presence of armed teachers and concealed carry holders, increased the probability of stopping a mass shooter from conducting their attack or reduced casualties of an attack (Anklem, et al., 2014).

Law enforcement officers have a unique understanding of the deterrence armed presence provides. A poll by PoliceOne surveyed over 15,000 police officers concerning the effectiveness of carry conceal holders on reducing gun violence (Avery, 2013). The poll cited that over 86% of police officers polled agreed that casualties would have been reduced or avoided if legally armed citizens were present (PoliceOne, 2013). In reviewing the Marjory Stoneman Douglass shooting Wood (2018) recognized that a secondary layer of armed defense, beyond SRO presence, could be "force multipliers" with respect to deterrence effects when faced with an armed intruder situation on school campuses with multiple buildings.

Opponents to the policy of arming educators contend that having educators carrying weapons brings numerous dangers and liabilities that negate the possible positive effects of this policy. Those opposed remain adamant that additional firearms resident in chaotic scenarios has not been proven to reduce violence (Brocklin, 2013; Rajan & Branas, 2018; Trump, 2019). Further opponents address the civil liabilities resident with arming school personnel. Conti (2015) and Weatherby (2015) noted the wide-ranging civil liabilities that school districts assume when approving school personnel to be armed. Finally, opponents to arming educators contend that no empirical

studies exist which outline the added benefits of having teachers armed and that greater understanding is needed before allowing teachers and administrators to bring concealed weapons onto school campuses (Minshew, 2018; Rajan & Branas, 2018). Katsiyannis, et al., (2018) cited Limeux (2015) who reviewed 73 mass shootings, including school shootings, between 1983 and 2012. In Limeux's review, only one case occurred where an unarmed bystander prevented an attack. This aspect of the research led to Limeux's conclusion that additional firearms in the hands of teachers, was unlikely to prevent an attack from occurring.

Assessing the financial cost of arming educators is a factor to incorporating these types of policies. Weiler, Cornelius, and Skousen (2018) found that arming educators came with a financial cost that ranged between \$61,000 and \$93,000 for 12 schools. This cost is yet another burden that many school districts may find difficult to support since school budgets will not be increased to account for these costs. Bump (2018) addressed the financial costs of firearms training for the nation's 3.6 million teachers. Bump calculated that if one-fifth of the nation's teachers (just over 70,00) underwent firearms training, the total cost would exceed \$71 million at an individual cost of \$100. This addresses a single factor in the totality of financial costs for arming teachers on school campuses and this cost would vary from state to state.

Administrator opinions have heavily influenced the debate of arming teachers. Chrusciel et al., (2014) studied law enforcement and public-school principals' opinions on the effectiveness of school safety measures, specifically that of SROs and armed school employees. They found that of the 154 law enforcement officers and 487 public

school principals surveyed, 88% and 93% respectively, disagreed that arming educators would prevent school shootings (Chrusciel et al., 2014). Kelly (2016) found similar results in a study of the opinions of suburban public-school principals in Paterson, New Jersey of the policy of arming educators. Of the 21 principals surveyed, 15 favored armed security, such as SROs, and six did not want any armed presence on campus (Kelly, 2016). Weiler, Cornelius, and Skousen (2018) surveyed superintendents in rural Colorado and found hesitation within this community to allow educators to carry concealed weapons during school hours. One specific superintendent within the study commented “there are teachers that I barely trust with students, let alone guns” (Weiler, Cornelius, & Skousen, 2018, p. 55). This statement encapsulates the difficulties administrators face in adopting policies to arm their teachers.

Understanding the opinions of educators regarding weapons in schools can have a profound effect upon incorporation of these controversial policies. Brenen (2018) noted in a national survey of 497 U.S. teachers, that 73% opposed carrying weapons in schools. This same survey revealed that 58% of the polled population considered more firearms created a less safe environment for school children (Brenen, 2018). Furthermore, Newkirk (2018) argued that arming teachers would violate the spirit of the second amendment since arming teachers empowers the state over the individual. Additionally, a National Education Association poll revealed that 74% of 1,000 teachers polled did not see arming teachers as an effective policy to prevent gun violence in schools (Walker, 2018).

Parents, depending on the timeframe of polling, have mixed opinions with reference to accepting that armed educators provide a greater deterrence to school shootings. A Pew poll, taken just after the Marjory Stoneman Douglass tragedy found that 55% of those polled narrowly opposed the policy of allowing for armed educators to supplement school security (Horowitz, 2018). Yet a Rasmussen poll (2018) showed that 49% of parents with elementary and middle school aged children favored allowing educators and school staff to be armed on campus. There exists an opinion-based disparity between what parents feel could increase school safety and what teachers and administrators view as the best security policy to adopt.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

The central focus of this review was to explore the opinions of stakeholder groups including parents, teachers, administrators, and law enforcement within a specific county in a mid-western state regarding the SSP (2013). The adoption of school security policies that seek to increase deterrence against active shooters by allowing armed personnel in addition to SRO's and educators on school campuses have yet to be explored on a wide scale throughout the United States. The SSP (2013) disrupts this trend and presents the gap in the literature this research seeks to fill. By exploring these stakeholder opinions of this unique school security policy could potentially assist the empowerment of socially constructed groups in conveying their opinions to elected and educational leaders.

Three high profile school shootings, federal and state laws and programs, as well as SRO presence and arming teachers were areas addressed by this literature review. Addressing security improvements to deter active shooter scenarios remains a central



security goal for administrators and lawmakers; however, some proposed policies remain politically contentious. The DHS (2018) outlined in a guide focusing on protecting K-12 schools from gun violence that security measures, as comprehensive as they have become, are simply unable to prevent every school shooting from occurring. The steady increase over the past few decades in various types of security measures, such as SRO presence, physical security measures (remote locking doors for example), threat assessment programs, and emergency response plans, provides a wide range of security measures through which school administrators and elected officials have sought to improve security for schools nationwide.

Parents seem at times distant from the policies schools incorporate to improve security. Payton, et al., (2017) in a survey of 282 parents of a secondary school students concluded that parents appeared to have a very limited knowledge of the most effective school safety measures. Yet Cuellar and Theriot (2015), Mowen (2015), and Mowen and Freng (2018) concluded that parental and community involvement influences school safety strategies in public schools. The Texas Association of School Boards (2018) in their policy to arm teachers recommended that schools incorporate community input into their policies so that all are informed and contribute to the established school safety plan. This series of research supports how public officials can accept community input concerning school security policies from positively constructed target populations, specifically parents, as outlined in the research framework (Schneider & Ingram, 1993).

School officials within a specific school district in a midwestern state have incorporated the SSP and have operated the program for several years. As the SSP (2013)

was being publicly discussed by the school board it was noted that few parents knew or seemed to be concerned about the policy's implementation (Bennett, 2016).

Subsequently, the state's law does not require school districts to make public whether schools have armed sentinels present during the school day (Conlon, 2019). The gap in the academic literature includes a lack of exploration of stakeholder opinions of the SSP (2013) within a specific school district in a mid-western state.

### Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this study was to explore and document the opinions of major stakeholder groups including parents, teachers, administrators, and local police officers regarding the perceived security effectiveness of the SSP (2013). This unique school security program allows volunteers, once screened and trained, to act as armed security for public schools. In conducting this qualitative study, I sought to elicit the views or perceptions of stakeholders regarding a security program that places armed guards on K–12 public school campuses during the school day. Understanding stakeholder opinions of this unique program may provide insight into whether armed guards who are not SROs have broad support from the groups that are subject to SSP requirements.

#### **Research Design and Rationale**

In Chapter 3, I explain how I collected and evaluated the data. The established research question for this study was as follows: What are the opinions of community stakeholders, such as parents, teachers, administrators, and local police officers, regarding the effectiveness of the School Sentinel Program (2013)? Many school security programs have been created and implemented with the focus of deterring school shootings from occurring or reducing a perpetrator's access to sensitive areas on school grounds to minimize potential victims. However, school security programs that seek to allow individuals (non-SROs) with firearms on campus have been politically sensitive and have been met with significant opposition upon implementation (Blad et al., 2018). The SSP goes beyond what most schools nationwide have incorporated into school security programs. Gaining knowledge of stakeholder opinions of this program may assist

lawmakers in understanding whether this policy is favorable with socially constructed dependent groups outlined as stakeholders (see Schneider & Ingram, 1993).

### **Role of the Researcher**

I approached the data collection effort from the position of responsive interviewer. The responsive interviewer position provides the opportunity to go beyond the interview question to obtain a deeper meaning of the interview material (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Also, I was the instrument by which data were collected and analyzed. The program under evaluation, the SSP (2013), was operating in a school district in the southeast portion of a Midwest U.S. state. I had no established connections with this program or the geographic location where this program operates. I had no relationship, either personal or professional, with any organization or person in any stakeholder group that was affiliated, either directly or indirectly, with the school policy under review. Finally, I was responsible for the protection of participants and for ethically producing the findings.

Researchers must recognize and guard against personal and professional factors that have the potential to influence portions of their research. Ravitch and Carl (2016) stressed that positionality and social location of researchers are central components to a researcher's identity and their influence on the research process. As a former military officer, I understood that my opinions of policies regarding firearms should not be injected into the research process to prevent any undue influence on participants being interviewed or data being analyzed. Second, I am a father of school-age children, and understand that I had personal opinions regarding the effectiveness of various school

security programs was essential to removing potential personal biases that may have arisen during the research process. Acknowledging both the positionality and social locations assisted in mitigating potential biases that could have affected the creation of data collection instruments, injected undue influence on participants during the interview process, or influenced the analysis of the collected data .

### **Methodology**

Parents, teachers, administrators, and local police officers groups directly affected by the program under review served as the target population for this qualitative case study. Group characteristic purposeful sampling was the method that was used to identify and select participants for this study (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). A central tenet of group characteristic purposeful sampling is to illuminate important group patterns from the selected research population (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). This central tenet was the best sampling strategy to answer the research question from participant interviews of the four stakeholder groups. The primary criteria for the sampling strategy required participants to be able to provide specific information concerning the school security program (see Patton, 2015; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The variation in the sampling method from within each stakeholder group was intended to provide a wide assessment of stakeholder options of the SSP (2013).

To identify and select participants for each stakeholder subgroup, I sent two separate requests for candidates to the school board and the local sheriff's office. These letters requested a list of potential candidates to interview for the data collection effort. If sufficient participants did not emerge from these local institutions, secondary efforts to

acquire additional educational candidates would have included sending petitions to the education association and the association of school boards of the state where the school district resides. If initial efforts to acquire sufficient participants from the secondary organizations did not yield participants, a second request would have been sent to the same state educational organizations to request additional candidates.

To acquire additional law enforcement candidates, secondary petitions would be sent to the NASRO (2020) and, if necessary, the sheriff's association of the Midwest state where the program was operating. If initial efforts to interview sufficient participants were not successful, a second request would have been sent to educational and law enforcement agencies to request a list of additional potential candidates. A tertiary effort to recruit potential candidates would have been to send invitations to specific target population pages on social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter. Volunteers notified on social media sites would have been screened to ensure they possessed the necessary experience and were within one of the stakeholder groups.

Criteria for participant selection for each stakeholder subgroup were outlined within each specific request to ensure potential participants had the necessary experience and knowledge of the SSP (2013). Each stakeholder subgroup had specific requirements for inclusion in the study. For the parental subgroup, criteria for participant selection included having at least one child attending one of the schools within the school system operating the program under review. The number of parents desired to be interviewed was expected to provide sufficient data to obtain a broad set of opinions of the SSP

(2013), including parents who may have been uninformed of the parameters of the program (see Payton et al., 2017).

To ensure a broad parental population group, I intended to recruit a minimum of two to three parents of school-age children from either the elementary or middle schools within the sampling population. For the high school, four to five parental participants were desired to be in the sampling population. More parental interviews were desired from parents with high school children because participants would have had more experience with the school system due to parents having school-age children for more than 7 years. A total of six to eight participants was required to produce sufficient data to satisfy the study's goals. If the efforts to contact the superintendent of schools did not result in sufficient eligible parental participants, a secondary effort of sending a request letter to the South Dakota Parent-Teacher Association (2019) to request candidates to be interviewed would have occurred.

Criteria for the teacher stakeholder subgroup included having a minimum of 3 years teaching in the Tri-Valley school system. This requirement ensured that teachers would have had sufficient exposure to the SSP for the school where they were employed. A second criteria was two to four teachers from either the elementary or middle schools to represent the opinions of educators at this level of instruction. For the high school, I desired to have three to six candidates to participate from the largest school in the district. The target number of participants from the teacher subgroup was intended to be between five and 10.

The administrator subgroup had the smallest population of all subgroups. This was due to the school system having only three schools in the district. The school system's superintendent, both school principals (there is only one principal for both elementary and middle schools), and both assistant principals were desired participants for the administrator group. The minimum number of participants desired from this group for interview was five.

This group of individuals possessed significant responsibility with respect to the security policies operated at the schools within the district and were highly desired candidates for inclusion in the study. Data from an educational supervisory perspective could have provided the rationale that led the school to adopt and operate the SSP (2013). If insufficient participants come forward to be interviewed, this stakeholder subgroup could have been eliminated from the data collection effort. This was not a desired result but was a realistic possibility because the individuals in this group are closely connected as professionals.

The law enforcement stakeholder subgroup was unique because I did not know how many officers had experience with or were knowledgeable about the SSP (2013). The study required a minimum of three to five officers to be interviewed to support the study's broad data analysis effort. The primary criterion for candidates from this subgroup was participants who were currently serving or had served as SROs in the school district under review. A secondary criterion for candidates from this stakeholder subgroup was officers who had operational knowledge of the SSP (2013) but who may have not served as SROs at the schools under review.



The procedures for contacting potential candidates included sending initial letters of cooperation (see Appendix A) to the superintendent of the school district and the local law enforcement agency of the county where the SSP (2013) was currently operating as an introduction to the study. These letters requested an initial acceptance of providing email addresses of potential candidates from each stakeholder group to be interviewed. The first letter of cooperation was sent to the superintendent of the Tri-Valley school system. This letter requested the superintendent to provide points of contact from the parent, teacher, and administrator stakeholder groups. The second letter was sent to the Minnehaha County sheriff's office requesting to provide SRO candidates for participation.

Each stakeholder group's unique position contributed to the wide array of opinions for data analysis of the SSP (2013). Participants were chosen based on their social (parents) or professional (teachers, administrators, and law enforcement) relationship to the SSP. I anticipated that five to eight interviews of participants from each stakeholder group would be sufficient to analyze the wide-ranging opinions of the entire group. The proposed sample population of the stakeholder categories was a minimum of 20 participants. A total of 21 to 28 participants was desired for the optimum data collection effort. If data saturation had been attained within any stakeholder subgroup, no further interviews would have been conducted. Variations in the number of participants within each group were expected and may have prevented data saturation from occurring within the entire pool of participants.

The primary method of conducting interviews was via video conferencing using Zoom, ClickMeeting, or Microsoft Teams software. These software applications allow flexible methods of conducting interviews via cell phone or computer. All interviews conducted via video conferencing were audio recorded using a multifunction voice recorder. If participants did not desire to be recorded, the interview was terminated. The reason for choosing video conferencing as the primary method was due to the geographical distance between me and the participants.

The interview duration was expected not to exceed 1 hour, and no more than four interviews were conducted on any given day. During all interviews, I took observational field notes to observe the reactions of people as they were being interviewed. These field notes were included as supplemental data for analysis (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Participants were informed at the beginning of the interview that they would be able to stop the interview at any time if they felt uncomfortable participating in the study. If a participant felt uncomfortable providing information, I would stop the recording and terminate the interview. The participant would be reminded that their personal information would remain confidential and that no information they had provided would be included in the data collection effort.

If the primary method of conducting video interviews did not result in sufficient participants from any stakeholder subgroup, then a secondary method of conducting in-person interviews would be undertaken. Selected participants for in-person interviews would be scheduled in a week when I was able to travel to the location where participants reside. All social distancing protocols for in-person interviews would be followed if the

secondary method of data collection was exercised. Prior to arriving, I would schedule participants to arrive at an office space, such as a private room at a local public library, to conduct these interviews. All in-person interviews would be audio recorded using a multifunction voice recorder. The same introductory method used for video interviewing would be used for in-person interviews.

### **Instrumentation**

The data collection method to support this study was participant interviews. The interviews were semistructured (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016) in that basic interview questions, which I produced, would guide the interview process while providing the flexibility to ask appropriate follow-up questions necessary to gather the rich data necessary for the study's data collection efforts. The interview questions were given to researchers with public policy backgrounds at Walden University to provide comments and recommendations. I sought my chair's guidance in recruiting professors to review and provide recommendations for the interview protocol (see Appendix E). Professors were given 5 working days to review and return recommendations.

Providing the interview questions to professors promoted research validity within the interview process. In the introduction of the interview, each participant was asked to sign a consent form emphasizing the confidentiality of the participant, the confidentiality of all data provided, and the participant's right to terminate the interview at any time for any reason. Follow-up questions were presented to participants as needed. At the conclusion of each interview, participants were reminded of the confidentiality of all information provided.

All interviews of participants were audio recorded using an electronic recording device to ensure all data are captured and maintained for analysis. Having semi-structured interview questions established for each stakeholder sub-group provided wide ranging experiences and opinions to answer the research question. If the pre-established number of participants does not produce sufficient data for analysis, additional candidates for interviews from the parental and teacher sub-groups would have been chosen to complement the first iteration of data gathering. These sub-groups contained the largest number of possible candidates for data collection contained in this study. Thus, it was desired that both the parental and teacher sub-groups supplement the first iteration of data collection if more data is needed for analysis.

Ravitch and Carl (2016) address content validity by noting how researchers can “affirm...that findings are faithful to participants’ experiences” (p. 186). To ensure content validity was achieved I audio recorded each interview to ensure all experiences are captured for data analysis. Further, participant responses to each interview question were recorded and transcribed. Written transcriptions were provided to participants via electronic mail to ensure answers were reviewed by each participant. Participants were given four working days to review and submit corrections to their transcript. This method of providing information regarding participant experiences and opinions ensured their interview answers were correct and complete and ensured content validity was achieved for the study’s data collection and analysis efforts.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

Data collected from participants were generated from recording participant answers with an audio voice recorder to prescribed interview questions which sought to obtain the opinions of stakeholders of the SSP. This participant review method assisted me in matching collected data to a specific corresponding interview question.

Transcription of data occurred shortly after the conduct of the interview. A continuous iterative process was used to transcribe all collected data. All data obtained from participant interviews was transcribed using transcription software. Once the transcription of a specific interview had been completed, a copy was provided to the interviewee for a period of three to four days for review and verification. After the interviewee provided their approval the transcribed data coding of the data began.

The inductive coding process was the primary approach to coding for the data analysis portion of this study. The intent of the inductive coding data analysis process is to remain as close to the collected data as possible by using participant's words as data segments vice researcher produced phrases (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Further a continuous iterative process was used to code data as approved interview transcription were completed. This entailed analyzing data from the inception of collection until the final data had been obtained and analyzed. To meet a priori goals of the data analysis effort the following provisional codes were established:

- Theory: Social Constructions of Targeted Populations
- Administrator Code: Deterrence – Policy Implementation
- Teacher Code: Safety – Benefit or Burden

- Parental Code: Inclusion – Benefit or Burden
- Law Enforcement Code: Security – Implementation Structure

Socially constructed populations outlined within the study as stakeholder groups independently contributed to the assessment of the SSP's (2013) security objectives. Thus, each groups opinions of the SSP had an effect upon establishing provisional coding for this study.

Initial coding was be conducted to separate the data into segments of individual codes and to establish a set of codes from which to continue to the data analyzation effort (see Saldaña, 2016). Once emergent themes had been drawn from initial coding, the basis for the second and subsequent coding efforts were evaluation coding to establish constructs from which to develop findings (see Saldaña, 2016). This method of coding was the best coding method to evaluate program effectiveness and assesses judgements of the accomplishments of policies (see Patton, 2015). NVivo or equivalent qualitative data analysis software was used to analyze data gathered from all participant interviews. Discrepant cases, where transcription of recorded interviews could not be completely transcribed, were discarded, and removed from the data analysis efforts.

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

#### **Credibility**

Credibility for the research was established by ensuring triangulation of the data collection effort. Triangulation is the method by which researchers examine data at varying times, places, and with different individuals (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Various stakeholder groups provided a broad set of data sources which produced within-methods

(methodological) triangulation (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016) data to analyze. The second aspect of triangulating data was participant verification. I will conducted data collection triangulation with two participant verification methods. To ensure participant opinions to interview questions were captured correctly, I repeated the essence of answers with the interviewee from researcher notes. This gave an opportunity for the participant to verify or add to their response during the interview. The second data collection triangulation method I used was after all participant interviews had been completed and answers were transcribed, I provided an electronic copy of the transcribed interview to each participant to review. This gave participants the opportunity to verify the entirety of their responses of the security program under review.

### **Transferability**

Transferability was established by obtaining the thick, rich descriptions through the conduct of individual interviews of participants when they provided their experiences and opinions of the SSP (2013). Variations in the participant selection pool, having a mixture of stakeholders from within the established sub-groups, further supported the establishment of external validity for the research effort as this produced the descriptive, context relevant (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016) data from those subjected to the program.

### **Dependability**

Consistency and stability of the collection of data over time are primary indicators of strong dependability within research (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). A strategy for establishing dependability for this study was by presenting to participants across all stakeholder sub-groups a set of generic interview questions which sought to explore their

experiences and opinions of the SSP (2013). By asking the same questions to all participants established consistency within the data collection effort which directly explored the research question. A second strategy to improve the dependability of the study was that I will maintained an audit trail of all researcher notes taken during participant interviews. This has the potential to assist future researchers seeking to explore similar stakeholder opinions of school security programs by providing reference of my findings for each individual interview.

### **Confirmability**

During the conduct of interviews confirmability was primarily achieved through the creation of structured interview questions which did not lead participants into certain opinions that may contradict their experiences related to this specific school security program. These structured questions were scrutinized to ensure researcher neutrality with regards to the experiences and opinions of participants. Additionally, at the beginning of each page of researcher notes, I had hand-written statements reminding me to remain neutral and pursue only participant experiences and opinions and to refrain from guiding participants into any specific conclusion. During the data analysis effort constant and consistent reminders, such as notes within professional journal entries of any potential bias, were displayed daily before any work begins to ensure reflexivity (Ravitch & Carl, 2016) remains a central tenet of the data analysis effort.

### **Ethical Procedures**

As per Walden University requirements, Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval is required before any data collection efforts begin. For this study data



collection included the contact of agencies and organizations to obtain contact information of potential candidates to interview as well as permission to conduct interviews of chosen participants. As per Walden University guidelines during the University Research Reviewer (URR) phase I completed Form A (Description of Data and Partner Sites) to begin the IRB approval process. No person, agency or organization was be contacted, nor any interview conducted until IRB approval was obtained. On November 12, 2020, Walden's IRB granted me permission to conduct this research and provided the approval number 11-13-20-0636882

In the IRB section of the Center for Research Quality within the Walden website ethical red flag concerns were addressed for students seeking to research sensitive topic areas (Walden University, 2020). Specifically of ethical concern related to this research vehicle were questions seeking the opinions of employees regarding a potentially controversial school security policy. Publication of these opinions could have potentially lead to damaging effects upon participants professional careers. Therefore, ensuring both anonymity of participants and complete confidentiality of the information they provided were essential components to the ethical procedures of my study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). In the introduction and conclusion of each interview participants were assured that their personal information and all data they provided would remain both confidential and anonymous. Candidates that choose to participate provided written consent of their voluntary participation prior to the interview.

During the introduction of the interview participants were informed that they were able to stop the process at any time if they felt uncomfortable discussing any portion of

the SSP. Interviews would be terminated in any case where the participant declined to provide written consent. If any participant felt they required counseling for emotional stress, services will have been offered to participants that required this type of assistance. The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) (2019) would have provided necessary service if needed. The national phone number to this institution is (800) 950-6264 and the state specific phone number is (800) 273-8255. The address to the local affiliate is 1601 East 69th Street, Suite 210, Sioux Falls, South Dakota, 57108. All this information was provided to all participants upon request.

Secure storage of data complemented the ethical assurances provided to participants regarding their personal information and experiences and opinions they provided for the study's data collection efforts. All recorded data has been maintained electronically in an encrypted SpiderOak (2019) account where the I alone will have access and all data will be destroyed in accordance with Walden's regulations (5 years from the conduct of the interview).

### **Summary**

School security policies involving firearms are very politically sensitive issues that garner immediate and immense public attention. Arming school personnel, such as educators, are fiercely debated policies throughout all communities within the United States. The SSP (2013), approved in a mid-western state, is unique in that this policy allows school districts to approve armed sentinels (non-educational volunteers) to be on duty as a supplement to SRO security presence on public school campuses. This study sought to explore the opinions of primary stakeholders (parents, teachers, administrators,

and local law-enforcement) of the SSP (2013). Data collection was achieved by conducting interviews of the stakeholder groups and subsequently evaluating this data to understand trends drawn from each participant's interview. Exploring this program provided insight into the effectiveness of the SSP (2013) from those subjected to this policy and assisted leaders and policymakers seeking additional security policy options for other public-school districts.

## Chapter 4: Results

Parents place trust and confidence in school leadership to incorporate security programs that provide a safe environment for their children. When school shootings occur, stakeholder attention becomes focused on the types and effectiveness of school security programs. Comprehensive security programs, such as security cameras, remote locking doors, emergency lockdown drills, and the presence of SROs, are the most common and effective security features incorporated into public schools (DHS, 2018). School leadership continues to seek the adoption of additional security measures to improve response time and increase deterrence. Opinions of primary stakeholders are an important consideration for school administrators to contemplate when implementing security programs that incorporate firearms into current security plans.

The primary goal for the current study was to obtain an understanding of the opinions of stakeholders subjected to a school security program in which armed sentinels were on campus throughout the school day. For this research project, both iterative and summative data analysis methods (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016) were used to answer the research question: What are the opinions of community stakeholders, such as parents, teachers, administrators, and local police officers, regarding the effectiveness of the School Sentinel Program (2013)? Understanding stakeholder opinions of school security policies has the potential to provide insight into a program's effectiveness in the eyes of those subjected to it, which could provide local elected leaders with an understanding of the views of their constituency.

Purposeful sampling was the primary method to obtain selected participants who met the criteria for this study. Data collection occurred through semistructured internet interviews that provided an in-depth understanding of how the sentinel program was established and the safety and security rationale for its implementation and continued operation. The three strengths of internet interviews, as described by Rubin and Rubin (2016), are protection from criticism or judgment, privacy for the participant, and the difficulty for the participant and interviewer to create any type of relationship. This chapter contains an overview of the codes and themes that emerged from the semistructured internet interviews, which were conducted to provide an understanding of stakeholders' opinions of the SSP (2013). Other sections in this chapter address evidence of trustworthiness and findings of the study.

A total of seven participants were interviewed for this study. Five participants who were associated with the school system under review were interviewed, and all were from the administrator group. Participant 6 was an SRO in a southern state. Participant 7 was a parent whose child attended a public elementary school in a separate school district in the same Midwestern state of the school system under review.

### **Demographics**

I gathered professional demographic information from the seven participants who were primarily drawn from the administrator group. The participant group consisted of two women and five men, and all seven participants were college educated. A total of five school administrators, one female and four male, participated in interviews regarding the incorporation and continued operation of the SSP (2013). Of the five participants

interviewed from the administrator group, three were professional educators. Of the three who were educators, each had more than 10 years of professional experience. Of the two participants who were not professional educators, one possessed a teaching certificate but did not become a professional educator and worked in the private sector. The final participant had no professional educational experience and worked in the private sector.

All participants within the administrator group were asked a series of introductory questions addressing their professional experience, including whether they had children attending the school under review. The intent for this question was to understand whether participants may have had a personal stake in the SSP's operation. Four of the administrative participants had children who were attending or had attended the school under review. One participant did not have school-age children. Four of the five administrative participants were employed at the school under review during the implementation of the SSP in 2016. One administrative participant was employed at a neighboring school during the time the SSP was being debated and implemented. Finally, all five administrative participants were born and raised in the school district where they were employed, which may explain the commonality of the responses from this stakeholder group.

One SRO from a southern state was interviewed for this research. The reason for this was the law enforcement agency that provides services to the school district under review declined to participate in this research. This SRO participant was provided a scenario of the operational details of the SSP, as well as geographic information regarding the size and generic location of the school district under review. This scenario

provided the basis for the participant to understand the environment in which the SSP was being operated, and from this vantage point the participant provided responses to the interview questions for the law enforcement group.

The SRO participant was a man who had been a sworn law enforcement officer for more than 10 years. The SRO participant received SRO training from the state law enforcement agency where he resides and is employed. The participant was serving as an SRO for an urban middle school and had held this position for more than 5 years. Additionally, the participant was a father of a middle school child. The participant did not serve as the SRO at his child's school. During the interview, the participant provided responses to the interview questions regarding the possibility of an SSP being operated at the school where he works as the SRO. The participant also provided responses in the capacity of a parent addressing the possibility of an SSP being incorporated at the school where his child attends. Most responses provided were in the capacity of an SRO.

The participant from the parent stakeholder group from another school district in the state participated in the research. This individual was the mother of a fourth-grade student who attended elementary school in a rural location. The participant also served as a substitute teacher for 1 year at mainly the high school level. This participant no longer serves as a substitute teacher. The separation of this participant's responses from the teacher and parent perspectives was initiated through prompts, depending on the question. The participant provided responses to interview questions mainly as a parent because this was her principal mindset regarding the SSP. Only a few of the interview questions presented were answered in the capacity of a teacher.

The school leadership of the school under review requested that no participants from either the teacher or parental stakeholder groups participate in the research. Their reasoning was that current safety and security environment of their school and students could potentially be interrupted if details was provided concerning the current operation of the SSP. School leadership's requirement regarding the exclusion of data from the teacher and parent stakeholder groups was honored.

The school district under review is in a rural area of a Midwest U.S. state. There are approximately 160 employees supporting all public school grades of kindergarten through Grade 12 with approximately 1,000 students in attendance. The school district has a five-member elected school board, a superintendent, and a single principal for each public school (elementary, middle, and high schools). All students and faculty from each of the three schools (K–12) are housed in a single building.

### **Data Collection**

Semistructured internet interviews were conducted and recorded to collect data from seven participants. The interviews lasted between 30 and 60 minutes for all participants. I hosted these virtual interviews from an office space in my home, and participants chose their location from where they were interviewed. Four participants interviewed from their personal residences, and three chose to use their professional office as an interview location.

All data were recorded using two methods. The primary method of recording was the recording feature within the Zoom online application. These recordings were recorded as video (mp4) files and maintained within the SpiderOakOne application on my personal



laptop computer and on a password-protected external hard drive. The second method of recording was a multifunction voice recorder. These recordings were maintained as audio (mp3) files on my personal laptop computer within the SpiderOakOne application and on a password-protected external hard drive.

Participants from only one stakeholder group from the school district under review were interviewed. Although local law enforcement was invited to provide candidates for participation in this research, the leadership declined to participate. Second, the parental and teacher stakeholder groups were not contacted for inclusion in the study. Although initially these groups were part of the intended data collection effort, the administrative group requested that these stakeholder groups not be contacted so as to avoid interfering with the current security environment established at the school district and to prevent external actors from negatively influencing current stakeholder opinions of the effectiveness of the SSP (2013). The most important stakeholder group to be interviewed was the administrator stakeholder group. The administrator group's participation was central to providing insight into the rationale to implement and operate the SSP. After consulting with school leadership and considering ethical concerns surrounding the potential to interrupt the current school security environment regarding the SSP, the decision to honor the administrative group's condition to curtail the data collection effort and refrain from pursuing participants from the parent and teacher stakeholder groups was upheld. Third, all participants from the administrator group provided input regarding community support, including parental and teacher sentiment regarding the debate, implementation, and continued operation of the SSP. Therefore, the

research question was only partially answered because only one of four stakeholder groups from the school district under review participated in the data collection effort.

### **Data Analysis**

The inductive method of data analysis was the primary method used to analyze collected data to answer the research question: What are the opinions of community stakeholders, such as parents, teachers, administrators, and local police officers, regarding the effectiveness of the School Sentinel Program (2013)? The inductive data analysis approach is centered on remaining as close to the data as possible through a bottom-up and an in vivo approach (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). This research project was constructed as a qualitative case study of a specific school district that incorporated and continues to operate an SSP (2013). Patton (2015) noted that case studies are holistic and context sensitive and draw from a wide range of collected data. For the current study, the data collection effort included participant interviews, documentary review, and contextual information addressing internal and external factors surrounding incorporation and continued operation of the SSP.

Max Qualitative Data Analysis (MaxQDA) software was used to transcribe all conducted interviews supporting the primary data collection effort for this research project. Open coding of all collected data was also accomplished with the assistance of the MaxQDA software. MaxQDA assisted in my effort to draw themes from the data after the transcription and coding efforts were completed. Each transcribed interview was read numerous times to ensure that I was familiar with all aspects of the participant's

opinions regarding the SSP (2013). During the data analysis effort, primary, secondary, and in vivo codes were created from participant interviews.

An iterative data analysis process was applied to all collected data for this study. For data analysis of participant interviews, the process began with open coding to summarize segments of data collected from transcribed interviews. The coding process then transitioned to axial coding of all transcriptions with the goal of establishing coding categories from the initial open coding process. Contextual factors, such as external influences of SSP incorporation, were a primary reason axial coding was pursued after the initial open coding effort (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Saldaña (2016) outlined how evaluative coding seeks to assign judgments to programs or policies where merit or worth is produced from transcribed data. This core tenet of the evaluative coding method was central to answering the research question addressing stakeholder opinions of the SSP.

### **Level 1 Coding**

For the Level 1 coding process, seven interviews were transcribed and imported into MaxQDA for coding and analysis. Second, my field notes of the interviews were also imported into MaxQDA for coding and analysis. The initial review of all documents was accomplished by using open coding and a line-by-line method of reading all data to form preliminary categories of codes. These first-level codes were generated considering the research question and interview questions posed to all participants. Codes were assigned directly from common words and phrases within each participant's answers to the interview questions.

An example of how first-level codes were created was by examining all participant answers to the specific interview question of how they believed the presence of the SSP improved school safety. All participants mentioned improving school safety, more specifically school security, as the sole basis for having an SSP on campus. With all participants responding in this manner, school safety and school security became the first set of codes drawn from the collected data. From this methodology, 20 first-level codes were established during the first phase of data analysis. These first-level codes included the following with the frequency of occurrence in parenthesis after each code: Policy Implementation (65), School Shooting Reviews (54), Positive Community Support (51), Deterrence (50), Sentinel Program Operation (49), Perception vs. Reality (46), Security Infrastructure (37), Coordination (36), Armed Sentinel (35), Police Response Time (32), Firearm (31), Rural Location (28), School Security (22), Policy Advocacy (20), SRO Presence (20), Emergency Response (18), Administrator Collective Opinion (13), Gun Culture (10), School Safety (8), and Stakeholder Apathy (5).

### **Level 2 (Evaluative) Coding**

The second review of all transcripts produced secondary codes that were central in contributing specific details (Saldaña, 2016) regarding the establishment and continued operation of a sentinel program (2013). Thirteen secondary codes were produced during the second review of all interview transcriptions and researcher notes. These include: training (32), psychological evaluations (9), Parental trust in the school (6), Ethnic/Cultural Animosity (5), Crazy Determined (3), Perpetrators Extensively Plan Their Actions (3), situational Awareness (3), School Financial Resources (3), Student

Poverty (2), “Being a sentinel is not a position you can force on anyone” (Participant five, administrative group), “The mere fact that there is another gun is on campus” (Participant six, SRO group), “It just takes one kid that is a mastermind” (Participant four, Administrative group), Sentinel Mental Health (3).

Evaluative coding was used for the final iteration of data analysis. Saldaña (2016) outlines that the central purpose for using evaluative coding is to recognize patterns, interpretations of their significance, and make final judgements of the results. Saldaña outlines that evaluative coding assigns judgements of merit, worth, or significance to programs or policies. The conclusion of the data analysis effort generated 20 first level and 13 second level. No third level codes were generated from any participant interview transcription or researcher notes.

Participants 2, 4, 5, & 6 outlined training for the sentinel, the SRO, and external law enforcement as essential to the success of this security program. The SRO participant expounded on this theme by outlining how training for emergency response scenarios was generally inadequate for school personnel in general. Further this participant outlined how emergency response training would be exceptionally important since another individual could potentially respond in tandem with the SRO. Specifically, participant’s 2, 4, and 5 outlined that “gun culture’ produced an awareness by may stakeholders and students engaged in outdoor activities, such as hunting, from an early age. This culture created an understanding that firearms are tools to be respected and that those tasked with the responsibility of emergency response in school required proper training and preparation to improve school security.

## Developing Themes

After a thorough review of all interview transcripts, researcher notes, and a detailed coding effort, several themes emerged from the data. Saldana (2016) noted that themes are outcomes of the data coding and reflection effort. Table 1 shows the four themes that emerged from the coding effort, associated definitions, codes with the number of aggregate references in parenthesis:

**Table 1**

### *Emergent Themes, Definitions, Level 1 Codes, and Level 2 Codes*

Theme	Definition	Level 1 code	Level 2 code
Policy Legitimacy	The justification for implementing and operating the sentinel program.	Policy Implementation (65), Positive Community Support (51), Sentinel Program Operation (49), Perception vs. Reality (46), Armed Sentinel (35), Police Response Time (32), Rural Location (28)	“Crazy Determined” (Participant #4)
Sentinel Mental Health	The mental condition of a sentinel related to the responsibilities of the position and the potential stresses after an active shooter incident has occurred.	Firearm (31), School Safety (8)	Psychological Evaluation (9), School Financial Resources (3), Student Poverty (2), “Being a Sentinel is not a position you can force on anyone” (Participant #5), Sentinel Mental Health (3)
Comprehensive Training for Sentinel, SRO, and Local Law Enforcement	The combined training of all active components of all school armed personnel.	Coordination (36), Armed Sentinel (35)	Training (32), Ethnic/Cultural Animosity (5), “The mere fact that another firearm is on campus” (Participant #6)
Deterrence	Physical measures in place to prevent malicious activity from occurring.	Deterrence (50), Security Infrastructure (37), School Shooting Reviews (54), School Security (22), Policy Advocacy (20), Emergency Response (18), Gun Culture (10), Stakeholder Apathy (5)	“Perpetrators extensively plan their actions” (Participant # 5), Situational Awareness (3), “It just takes one kid that is a mastermind” (Participant #7)

The first and primary theme of 'policy legitimacy' outlines leadership's rationale for considering, implementing, and continued operation of the sentinel program. Every participant that was interviewed considered that police response time as the number one factor to consider when supporting a sentinel program within their school, whether parent, SRO, or administrator. All administrative participants that were interviewed stated that this was the primary basis for considering and implementing the sentinel program within the school.

Specifically participant 5 noted that the local sheriff's office informed school leadership that once notified, local law enforcement would average a nine or 10 minutes to arrive on scene after being notified. The rural location of the school district under review is the primary factor which explains the local law enforcement's lengthy response time. Participant four noted that the school where he taught previously, which was about 40 minutes from the school under review, had a police station one block from the school. This geographic proximity supported a response time of less than one minute and subsequently the school leadership has not considered implementing a sentinel program.

Participant 6, the SRO from a southern state, noted specifically that for the school where he is an SRO, police response time from two separate county law enforcement agencies for security type responses would be within minutes, that is under one or two minutes. The law enforcement response time is the rationale participant 6 used to justify his opinion that an SSP type program was not necessary in the school where he is employed. Participant 6 concluded that he would not recommend to his school

principal implementing an SSP type security program based on the quick police response time.

Participant 7, the parental stakeholder, noted that a sentinel program was not necessary at her son's school. Her reason was based on two factors. The first was the law enforcement presence during mornings when the school began and afternoons when school the school day was ending. The second reason was her assumption regarding the police response time to her son's school. The participant outlined that police response would be less than one or two minutes due to the geographic proximity of the local law enforcement office. Participant 7 concluded that police response time was the number one reason why she would not support a sentinel program at her child's school. However, when asked if police response time were nine or 10 minutes in duration, her perspective changed to being supportive of the incorporation of a sentinel program if the school leadership provided a detailed plan as to how the sentinel program was to operate within the school.

Policy support is another important aspect to the leadership's consideration and implementation of the sentinel program. Each administrative participant outlined how an overwhelming majority of parents and teachers supported supplementing school security by operating an SSP. Participants outlined specific operational details, such as the location of the firearm(s) the sentinel(s) possessed, were of keen interest to parental and teacher stakeholders. Once administrators explained to a number of stakeholders that the firearm(s) assigned to sentinel(s) would be kept in a locked box and only accessed in the



event of an emergency response scenario. After understanding this key operational aspect, many stakeholders became supportive of the policy.

Schneider and Ingram (1993) contended the central tenet of the theory of social construction of target populations sought to demonstrate how social constructions influence policy tools and rationales for their implementation. Specifically for this theme, stakeholder support outlined how the social constructions within the school had great influence upon the program's rationale for implementation and continued operation. Popular support by all stakeholders within the school, the interest in understanding the requirements resident within the SSP's operation, coupled with both SRO and local law enforcements contribution to the overall school security program were all essential components of the SSP's legitimacy as a supplement to the over-arching school safety program. Participant 3 directly outlined that without the school's SRO supporting the implementation of the program, the pursuit to implement the sentinel program would never have begun. Many stakeholders placed great trust and confidence within the school's leadership and their SRO to implement the program in a safe and secure manner so the SSP could become a positive complement to the school's security program.

The second theme that arose from the data analysis is that participants were concerned regarding the mental health of the sentinel. Participants noted the mental health needs of a sentinel both before and after an emergency response scenario was a key component of the program's stakeholder support. All stakeholders considered the active shooter as the emergency response scenario when commenting on the mental health of the sentinel. Participants 6 (SRO), and 7 (parental) noted that they preferred,

during the regular course of a sentinel(s) duties, that sentinels be provided regular assessments, such as annual, mental health screenings as a part of a sentinels continued approval to operate. Participant 7 noted specifically that being a sentinel was not a responsibility she could bear as a teacher and understood the stress the responsibility of being a sentinel carried. Participant 7 also stated that being a sentinel is a position that could not be forced upon any single individual.

The second basis of this theme was focused on the mental health of a sentinel who had to react to an emergency response. Participants 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 outlined sincere concern regarding the mental health of a sentinel having to confront and possible use deadly force upon a perpetrator. These six participants stressed the need for support post emergency response to assist a sentinel in a great time of need.

The third theme which arose from the data was training. There are many aspects to the training that participants addressed in their interviews. The first aspect was a concern over the training of the individual sentinel(s). Participants 2, 3, and 5 outlined the two weeks of initial required training as a only a necessary beginning to becoming a sentinel. All participants stressed that continuous annual training centered on providing sentinels with the skills necessary to be and remain effective in emergency response reactions. Further maintaining an individual sentinel's security response skills was essential in maintaining the school's security. The SRO and parental participants outlined concern for continued training during times when students were not present and school was not in session. Finally, the SRO candidate's number one concern was training of all aspects previously mentioned and further included training with local law enforcement

for emergency response scenarios. The SRO participant stressed “training, training, training” when contemplating having to respond to a security situation during the school day with another firearm present on campus in the hands of a sentinel.

The fourth and final theme that emerged from the data analysis effort was deterrence. Different from the previous established themes, participants considered this theme upon the basis of the perpetrator and their intended actions. Participants 1, 2, 3, and 5 supported the sentinel program’s facet of deterrence. Perpetrators would likely choose a more vulnerable target or not conduct an attack at all due to the possibility that they could be confronted upon conducting an attack. Participants 4, 6, and 7 did not think a SSP created deterrence since many active shooters planned in extensive detail their actions and would not care if confronted. Participant 4 commented that it was difficult to stop ‘crazy determined’ and this is how many participants framed the preparations of an active shooter perpetrator and subsequently applied their rationale to the operation of an SSP.

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

#### **Credibility**

A central goal of any research was to ensure that all data reflected as close to reality as possible. Triangulation was the primary method used to achieve credibility. Ravitch and Carl (2016) addressed a central component of triangulation is collecting and analyzing various data sources at different times and places from different participants. By collecting and analyzing various data sources, such as a review of the state law, local school policy, news articles, researcher notes, and interviewing key leadership personnel

both before and after the SSP's implementation provided the wide array of data that was collected for this study.

Various forms of member checking have long been established as an essential component for research to achieve and improve research credibility (see Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Ravitch and Carl (2016) also wrote that during participant interviews validation can informally occur. Two methods of member checking were used to improve the credibility within this research. The first method was to clarify, in more contextual detail, answers to interview questions that could contribute to their broad opinions of the SSP. Secondly, all interviews were transcribed shortly after being conducted (within one or two days) and subsequently returned to the participant for review and, if needed, clarification. Two of the five administrative participants chose to return their transcriptions and the remaining three chose to accept the transcription as presented. Both the SRO and parental participants chose to accept the transcription as presented.

### **Transferability**

The original intent to establish transferability outlined in the proposal was to obtain thick rich descriptions of four stakeholder group opinions of the sentinel program via in-depth participant interviews. Due to local constraints at the school under review, only one stakeholder group could be interviewed for the data collection effort. However, transferability was still achieved even though only one stakeholder group participated. Transferability was accomplished by participants providing extensive historical and contextual data, to include coordination with entities outside of the school district, of the implementation of the SSP. Secondly opinions of stakeholder groups were provided via

the administrative group's interview responses. Administrative participants possessed, primarily via public hearings during implementation of the SSP, extensive knowledge of the opinions of other stakeholder group opinions within the school district. These two factors combined provide the detailed description and contextual basis necessary to obtain transferability (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

### **Dependability**

Consistency and stability were methods outlined in the proposal to achieve research dependability. Specifically, the data collection method to achieve consistency was to present to all participants a generic set of interview questions exploring their opinions of the SSP (2013). This overlapping method addressed by Shenton (2004) was achieved as all participants were asked the same basic set of questions throughout the interview. Each participant was asked secondary and tertiary questions, seeking contextual data, depending on their professional position and experience with the SSP's implementation within the school district. Secondly the stability component of dependability was achieved by maintaining researcher notes of each interview conducted for all participants. These notes were presented to participants, along with their interview transcription, to ensure my summation of the interview was clear and accurate.

### **Confirmability**

The primary tenet of confirmability is to mediate, to the fullest extent possible, the bias and prejudice of the researcher through a structured reflexive processes (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). During the conduct of all interviews a protocol sheet was created which contained the structured interview questions to ensure participants were not led

into specific conclusions regarding the program under review. Additionally, all secondary and tertiary questions that were presented to each participant were dependent upon their position during the SSP's implementation and current operation. The intent was to obtain historical and contextual data for analysis. I also have maintained researcher notes that was used in each participant interview which provided reminders to remain impartial during all data collection processes and I reviewed these reflexive notifications daily.

### **Data Analysis Results**

The central focus of case study research is to provide an in-depth understanding of a single case under review. This includes taking the reader into the experiences and situation of a program's life as well as providing a holistic contextualized review of the case under study (see Patton, 2015). A central component of data collection efforts within case studies is to draw from several data sources, casting a wide collection net to understand all aspects of the case under study. Ravitch & Carl (2016) and Patton (2015) outlined that collection efforts draw from data sources such as direct observations, interviews, and documents, news articles, and context information. The interview questions for the respondents sought to obtain information concerning the implementation and operation of the SSP, internal and external influences that affected implementation considerations, stakeholder opinions of the SSP, and the opinion of the participants as to how this does or does not improve school security.

I created interview questions beginning with a goal to seek knowledge of implementation details participants possessed regarding the SSP. All administrative participants were intimately aware of all details of the implementation of the SSP with

one exception, participant four who was not employed by the school during implementation. However, this specific participant did provide knowledge regarding implementation unique to the study since this participant was employed at another school and reviewed the SSP from a school in close geographical proximity to the school district under review.

Participants 2, 3, and 5 were intricately aware of all aspects of the SSP's implementation at the school under study which includes the state law by which this program was authorized (School Sentinel Policy, 2013). The experience of these individuals resulted in extensive data regarding implementation and operation of the sentinel program. Administrative participants 1 and 4 were aware of details of the program but their professional positions were not central to implementing the program.

In considering implementation of the SSP (2013) school leadership publicly commented that a specific vulnerability remained without exercising every security option available to their means. All five administrative participants commented that the singular purpose of incorporating the sentinel program was to ensure every security measure possible was incorporated into the school's security plan to deter or neutralize the rare occasion of active shooter scenarios. Further participants 2, 3, 4, and 5 remembered when school leadership began considering implementing the SSP. One simple question remained central to implantation rationale; how to deter and, if necessary, to combat an active shooter on the school's campus? This program's incorporation and operation specifically has been to complement other school security measures, such as SRO presence, remote locking door, security cameras, and remote

shut-down buttons throughout the school to maintain a safe school environment.

Additional contextual considerations for the SSP's implementation, such as police response and geographic location, will be outlined in further detail below.

### **Implementation**

Implementation of the SSP required steadfast acceptance of key school leadership for this program to succeed in the eyes of stakeholders both within the school and from the community writ large. Participant 3 noted that the SSP would not have been considered if key members, specifically the School Resource Officer (SRO), local sheriff, and school board members, were not completely supportive its implementation.

All five administrative participants addressed several specific security aspects which brought about the SSP's consideration. Principle of these considerations were participant's 1, 2, 3, & 5 outlined how police response time coupled with the remote rural location necessitated further security protocols to ensure the safety of all personnel in the event a perpetrator infiltrated the school. Further the remote rural location was addressed by all five administrative participants. Participants 2, 3, and 5 noted specifically that outside the school were only fields of corn and no other buildings within approximately five miles.

Due to the remote rural location of the school police response time became a direct concern with the previously incorporated security protocols. All five administrative participants commented that law enforcement outside of the SRO would take several minutes to arrive after being called. Specifically, participant five noted that county law enforcement stated that it would take approximately nine minutes to arrive on scene after



being called. Participant 5 also outlined that if law enforcement had to respond from the central office response time would take between 15 and 20 minutes.

Participants two, three, and five outlined how, during school leadership considering SSP implementation, state law enforcement officials briefed school leadership on a specific attempted school shooting in the state. The incarcerated perpetrator addressed in this instance was noted by the same participants to have provided explicit details of the plan that was created to conduct a school shooting to state law enforcement officials. These details, while not having been made public, weighed heavily on school leadership to find ways to increase school security to deter such potential attacks. Participant 5 noted that schools in general practice emergency procedures quarterly to ensure familiarity with established security protocols. Further perpetrators spend weeks planning specific details to execute an event. Participant 4 outlined how ‘crazy determined’, indicating the extensive preparation of many perpetrators, would be hard to combat without additional deterrence beyond previous school security measures. This security conundrum, how to protect the school against the most ardent prepared perpetrator, reflects how school leadership justified the incorporation of the SSP within the school district.

Participants 2, 3, and 5 commented that a key operational aspect of the SSP’s deterrence centered upon not knowing who, how many, nor where sentinels would be residing within the school. Participant 5 also commented the concern this person had when the SRO could not be present during the school day. Participant 5 stated that security of the school first centered upon the SRO’s presence and how would a

perpetrator be confronted at the school with this individual being absent. The SSP filled this critical security vulnerability resident at the school.

All five participants outlined how the security basis for the consideration of the sentinel program's incorporation was rooted in assessing these essential components: the remote rural location of the school, lengthy law enforcement response time, how to combat a perpetrator that had extensively prepared, and then incorporate unknown security structures to create a deterrence for perpetrators. After school leadership made the decision to implement the program, participant's 2, 3, and 5 understood that specific preparations needed to be completed to ensure the program's incorporation were complete and that stakeholders were properly informed as to how the SSP would operate within the school.

Participants 1, 2, 3, and 5 outlined various preparations that were essential to begin incorporating the SSP into the school system. The first was coordination with local law enforcement. School leadership worked with the local law enforcement to ensure responsibilities and plans of action for all parties were delineated in responding to emergency situations. Second, preliminary coordination between the school's legal counsel and insurance company were necessary to ensure the sentinel program received support before the SSP was publicly presented to stakeholders. Participant 3 commented that if the school's insurance company had refused to cover the SSP, the program would have never been implemented.

Preparing stakeholders, such as teachers and parents, were also necessary considerations for school leadership of the program's impending incorporation. This

encompassed outlining a program, to include how it was to be operated, before it was presented to assure stakeholder groups of the safety resident within the program in the manner in which it was intended to be operated. The state's sentinel law (2013) allowed for the arming of school personnel or volunteers from outside the school, once screened, and trained, to become a part of the school's security apparatus. How best to operate the program, based upon coordination with law enforcement, with the SRO on the school campus was the central preparatory concern.

### **Program Purpose**

The purpose the research was to understand the opinions of participants regarding how the presence of sentinels improves school safety. All five administrative participants responded that having a sentinel or sentinels that have access to a firearm in emergencies which, in their opinion, increases the deterrence against active shooter scenarios. Participants were quick to respond that deterrence prevented tragedies before individuals began planning such attacks. Participant 4 outlined that the true purpose of having a sentinel or sentinels was to protect from the 'crazy determined' perpetrator. Participant 5 addressed this aspect regarding the sentinel program. This participant stated that these types of perpetrators conducted extensive preparation in anticipation of conducting such attacks and that schools needed to have a security means to combat this critical vulnerability, especially when law enforcement response times were lengthy. Participant 5 concluded this question by stating that emergency response plans must cover for every vulnerability, especially for the first nine to 10 minutes until the arrival of law enforcement.

## **Stakeholder Input**

The third interview question brought to participants was ‘what are your specific concerns regarding the presence of armed sentinels on school campus?’ All participants knew which individual(s) were the actual sentinel or sentinels. Each had a clear understanding of the details of operation of the SSP within the school to include the stored location of the firearm and how this individual(s) was directed to react in emergency situations. Additionally, all participants, as individuals within school leadership positions, had a clear understanding of the initial and recurring training and evaluation requirements necessary for a volunteer to become a sentinel. Knowing these details, all 5 administrative participants had no specific concerns regarding the presence of armed sentinels.

Participants 2, 4, and 5 expressed specific concerns related to a sentinel(s) actions in the case of an emergency. Participant 2 outlined that in most instances the perpetrators of school shootings were themselves students. The participant commented if the sentinel(s) could in fact fire upon a perpetrator knowing they were likely a child and possibly a student from the school. Participants 3 and 4 outlined their concern of the mental health of sentinel(s) if they in fact did have to use deadly force upon a perpetrator. Participants outlined that the entirety of the school’s security system, to include the sentinel program, provided the best deterrence possible to prevent any future event.

Regarding the fourth interview question of ‘what aspects do you believe improve school security?’ All five administrative participants supported the additional emergency response component of the sentinel program for the specific purpose of deterring external

threats. The remaining security features, such as remote locking doors, video cameras, emergency buttons, coordination with local law enforcement, and a near constant SRO presence were incorporated to prevent or react to an emergency response situation.

The final question to participants was an open question. Specifically, all participants were asked what was left out of the conversation. Participant 1 added that with the training the sentinel(s) received coupled with the fact that the participant had personally and professionally known the sentinel(s) for some time, that there was no concern that another trained person outside of the SRO had access to a firearm. Participants 2, 3, and 5 outlined how the school's process of accepting the application of a sentinel was a very extensive process that only allowed the most qualified and trusted of individuals to become a sentinel within the school system.

Participants 2, 3, and 5 also outlined that the media's conduct made it very difficult to properly inform stakeholders of operational details of the SSP. Once details of the program were accurately conveyed to stakeholders, participants noted that an overwhelming majority of both parents and teachers approved of the program's incorporation. All participants noted that the SSP operated without question, that is teacher and parental stakeholders have generally accepted the SSPs operation in their school. All school leadership participants noted that no parents or teachers have made any public or private comments concerning the program's operation since its implementation. Participant's 3 and 5 both stated that the program operates in the shadows and without media attention it has become a 'let sleeping dogs lie' mentality among stakeholders.

Participant 3 noted that external pressure from peers in the education field commented to this participant privately that the program should not be incorporated. The sentiment from educational peers from other schools commented that incorporating the SSP brought attention from their stakeholders regarding their own school's security program. The attention from peers was generally negative and questions from their stakeholders unwanted. Participant 3 commented that the sentinel state law provided flexibility to schools throughout the state to incorporate aspects of the SSP according to the security situation at each school. Participant 4 noted that at a previous school where the participant worked that the sentinel program was not needed due to the extremely close geographical proximity of the local law enforcement relative to the school. This proximity supported a very quick response time and school leadership did not believe they required any form of the SSP.

### **SRO-Specific Results**

The SRO candidate, participant 6, provided unique security opinions due to his experience and current responsibilities as an SRO at an urban middle school where a majority of students were minorities. When asked if he would support aspects of an SSP within the middle school where he is employed, his answer was no. Based primarily on police response time he stated he could not support the incorporation of an SSP. However, when asked as a parent if he would support an SSP where his daughter attends middle school he stated, with some hesitancy, yes. Again, the primary basis for his tacit support of an SSP at his daughter's school two fold. First was understanding the rural location of the school where his daughter attended. Second was the police response time

to this institution. The participant did not state how long police response time was to his daughter's school. Although he tacitly supported the potential incorporation of an SSP due to the police response time being lengthy, he predicated his support on knowing details of such a program if presented by school leadership.

### **Parental/Teacher-Specific Results**

The final interview was that of a mother of an elementary school student. This individual had served as a substitute teacher for one year and did have above average knowledge of several nationally known school shootings which stemmed from her graduate education in psychology. At the beginning of the interview, after being explained the details of the SSP and the environment by which the school under review operated, she was initially against an SSP at the school her son attends. As the interview proceeded the participant began to consider accepting, but not advocating for, an SSP if police response time was in the nine to 10 minute range. This seemed to be the central factor to the program's acceptance in the participant's opinion.

Second, participant 7 outlined great distrust in her son's school leadership, specifically the elected local school board, which stemmed from a number of issues regarding the application of funding of teachers and librarians. The participant stated, "I don't trust our school board, they are corrupt, and they suck." This comment outlined, regardless of what policies the school leadership sought to implement, how stakeholder's have immediate skepticism due to the sincere distrust of the intentions of school leadership.

Finally, this participant provided a unique view upon the very tense social atmosphere which exists in her son's school and, in general, in society writ large. The participant noted that many native Americans from nearby reservations are bussed into the school from nearby reservations. Participant 7 outlined a hypothetical example of how a reaction by a sentinel during a security scenario could potentially inflame racial tensions at her son's school and local community. She stated that if a sentinel had reacted and shot perpetrator of native American descent, that the native American community's reaction to such an event could potentially lead to local violence, regardless of the circumstances. This example of the tensions resident within local communities would likely serve as a barrier to an SSPs incorporation in other schools as the racial makeup of many school personnel and students is out of the control of local school administrators.

### **Summary**

In conducting this study, I sought to answer one central research question: What are the opinions of community stakeholders, such as parents, teachers, administrators, and local police officers, regarding the effectiveness of the School Sentinel Program (2013)? Participants were asked to provide their responses to various aspects of the sentinel program that supplements SRO presence with a trained and approved armed sentinel. Interview questions included asking participants of details regarding the implementation and operation of the SSP and how stakeholders view its effectiveness. Additionally, participants were asked about their knowledge of prolific school shootings



with the intent of gaining an understanding of participant's depth of knowledge regarding these tragic events.

The establishment and operation of the SSP within the school of the administrative participants was generally accepted as a positive complement to the entire security program within the school. The administrative stakeholder group considered the presence of a sentinel a necessary deterrence component of the school's security program. Administrative participants were briefed by a state law enforcement agency regarding potential attacks against schools. School leadership considered a number of factors regarding the security vulnerabilities of the school and felt the need to incorporate every aspect of security programs that were available and allowed under state law. Participants understood that the consequences of resisting the incorporation of any security program which could increase the deterrence and positively supplement their school's safety program could potentially lead to the school being unable to respond effectively in an emergency response situation.

The SRO and parental candidates outlined how a sentinel could potentially preclude a perpetrator's actions during an emergency response scenario. After considering various aspects of a sentinel type program on their school's campus, both accepted the potential contribution to a school's overall security, especially with factor of law enforcement response time averaging nine to 10 minutes. Additionally, both participants also desired to be innately familiar with operational details of the SSP. Knowledge of operation details assisted in accepting the program within their school and around their children.

The state law creating the SSP (Sentinel Program, 2013) allows school districts to screen and train employees or volunteers to operate as armed security on campus. During the incorporation of the SSP in the school district under study, participant 2, 3, and 5 noted the keen interest that many stakeholders voiced, both publicly and privately, regarding the location of the firearm under the sentinel's responsibility. Many stakeholders were of the perception that the sentinel would be carrying a firearm on their person on campus during the school day. However, the program operated in an entirely different manner in that the sentinel's firearm would be and currently is maintained in a locked safe accessible only by qualified sentinels in emergency situations. This singular stakeholder concern addressed by participants outlined how stakeholder perceptions of operational details of the SSP were not necessarily in conjunction with reality as to how the program was intended to be operated.

Administrative participants outlined how stakeholder input and acceptance was essential to the SSP's successful implementation. Further this participant group outlined how significant effort was focused upon educating the school's stakeholder groups of the details of the sentinel program's operation. This group understood clearly that if stakeholders were educated as to how the program was to be operated that the overwhelming majority would support its incorporation. Administrative participants also understood that if operational details of the SSP among stakeholders remained nebulous, many would be ambivalent regarding its incorporation. These aspects regarding popular stakeholder support for the SSP demonstrated how public officials are heavily influenced

by social constructions, in this case parental and teacher stakeholders within the school, and how these aspects affect policy tools (Schneider & Ingram, 1993).

The relationship between school leadership and parents was a key aspect to the acceptance of the SSP. All participants employed by the school under review responded that stakeholders overwhelmingly approved of the SSPs incorporation. Participant 7, the parental stakeholder, commented that she could be supportive of such a program if school leadership presented details of the program's operation to stakeholders and held a vote by parents on the program's acceptance. Participant 7 also outlined how trust in school leadership was essential for stakeholder approval. Without consideration of this key factor any security program involving firearms would meet extensive resistance, and likely disapproval, by stakeholders since this stakeholder group would be reluctant to believe that school leadership had the safety of school children in the community's best interest.

Several key results have been presented to answer if, and how stakeholders view an SSP. I presented this research as a case study that sought to understand how stakeholders viewed the SSP in their school. Initially the assumption existed that volunteers, those not associated with the school, had been approved to be sentinels on school campus. After interviewing school leadership this assumption has been found false. School administrative leadership erected a detailed policy regarding the selection and subsequent approval of potential candidates to become sentinels within their school district. After careful review of all collected data of all participants, and after participants

considered key factors of the SSP's implementation and primary operational details, stakeholders did approve of the incorporation of the SSP.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

The central intent of this research project was to explore and document the opinions of stakeholders regarding an SSP (2013) through the theoretical lens of social construction of target populations. Understanding stakeholders' opinions regarding the rationale for the implementation, operation, and perceived effectiveness of the SSP was key to understanding the program's popular support. My particular focus was on obtaining opinions of administrators of the school district under review because this stakeholder group was essential in implementing and operating the SSP.

This qualitative case study was conducted to obtain an understanding of each stakeholder group's unique opinions of the SSP (2013). This design was used to provide the holistic understanding of the program through the eyes of those subjected to it, specifically parents, teachers, administrators, and local law enforcement. Studies addressing opinions of school security programs involving firearms mainly focused on law enforcement or school leadership, such as principals, superintendents, and teachers. Parental opinions of these programs were generally not addressed in the academic literature.

Data collection from all participants indicated positive opinions of an SSP when certain conditions were met. Administrative stakeholders, as the most informed group regarding the program's implementation and operation, described this program as filling a gap in the security structure of public schools that local law enforcement had been unable to fill in a timely manner. For parent and teacher stakeholders, certain conditions were necessary for these groups to approve the establishment and operation of an SSP

within their public school. These conditions included how and where the firearm for any sentinel would be maintained throughout the school day; when law enforcement response time would be more than 1 or 2 minutes; and extensive, continuous, and combined training for sentinels, SROs, and local law enforcement included in the program.

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

The findings of the study extended knowledge of school security programs through exploration of how stakeholders perceive the effectiveness of an SSP incorporated in public schools. Stakeholders from the school district under review were overwhelmingly supportive of having a sentinel on public school campus if specific conditions were met. The conditions central to stakeholder concerns were the response time from external law enforcement due to the rural location of the school and the location of the firearm during the school day. Additionally, residents in the school district had an overall positive gun culture, such as hunting traditions, many stakeholders perceived that having a sentinel was a positive component of the school's security program.

Each stakeholder group had unique views as to how an SSP complemented current school security measures. Administrative stakeholders tended to outline how having a sentinel on campus assisted in deterring or precluding the rare active shooter incident. The law enforcement stakeholder outlined that a sentinel program could assist certain schools that met certain conditions, primarily centered on external law enforcement response, and further emphasized the need for comprehensive individual and institutional training for the program to remain an effective component of a school's

security program. Finally, the one participant who represented the parent stakeholder group, and to a lesser extent the teacher stakeholder group, reported that training standards and lengthy external law enforcement response time were primary factors to accepting the incorporation of a sentinel program in her child's school. Additionally, this participant noted that parental trust in school leadership was a necessary component of incorporating a sentinel program and that positive support from most parents could be obtained if school leadership provided a rationale and operational details of the program.

Participants 2, 3, and 5 outlined how tendentious the media's conduct had become regarding the implementation of the sentinel program. Operational details of the way the sentinel program would be operating to stakeholders became difficult to communicate even after numerous after-hours public hearings held by school administrative personnel. Further, Participant 3 explained how a media company was hired to assist in publishing accurate information concerning critical details of the sentinel program's operation to stakeholders to ensure the sentinel program's safe operation and rationale for implementation.

The contention between the school leadership seeking to implement the sentinel program in contrast to local media's efforts to influence socially constructed dependent stakeholders demonstrated how public officials are sensitive to pressure from professionals, in this case from the media, to produce effective public policies that seek to solve or mitigate widely known public problems (see Schneider & Ingram, 1993). School leadership and the media, two socially constructed advantaged groups in contention over the implementation of this policy, sought to legitimize their policy rationale to influence

the parent and teacher stakeholders within the school according to the values they deemed beneficial with respect to the sentinel program. The social construction of target populations theory supported the data analysis portion of the research.

Second, a primary tenet within the social construction theory is that policymakers seek logically to link public policy with shared public values. Many of the administrative participants, being categorized as a socially constructed advantaged group, outlined how the flexibility within the state law allowed school leadership to tailor the sentinel program's (South Dakota Legislature, 2013) operation to eliminate a critical vulnerability and maximize safety within their school's security program. Administrative participants outlined how the overwhelming majority of parent and teacher stakeholders, as socially constructed dependent groups, during implementation approved of the sentinel program once details of the operation were clearly outlined. The most important detail of operation for stakeholders was that the firearms of the sentinel(s) were to be kept in a lock box vice being carried on their person. This aspect outlined how the SSP, and its intent, aligned with the shared public values of parent and teacher stakeholders regarding the security programs available to schools that seek to implement them.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The central focus of the data collection effort of this case study was to obtain a wide range of opinions of the SSP. In Chapter 3, I outlined how each of the four stakeholder groups held unique views of the SSP's perceived effectiveness and that participation from each group was essential in exploring opinions of every group subjected to the SSP. However, recruiting participants from each stakeholder group could



not be achieved. Obstacles that could not be overcome prevented participation from each group from the school district under review.

The primary limitation of this study was the small sample size of stakeholders who participated from the school system under review. The study was limited to key administrative stakeholders and two external interviews, one from the law enforcement group and one from the parent group. The administrative group's participation was essential to obtain knowledge of the SSP's implementation rationale and current operational parameters. No parent, teacher, or law enforcement stakeholders from the school district under review participated in the study. Administrative leadership participated on the condition that parent and teacher stakeholder groups would not be contacted for inclusion in the study. The reason for this stems from administrative leadership's goal of maintaining the current climate regarding the security programs at their school. Administrative leadership's request was honored, and no parents or teachers were contacted to participate.

A second limitation in the data collection effort was that the law enforcement agency that assigns the SRO to the school declined to participate in this study. SRO responses of the sentinel program were to complement the study's data collection by exploring opinions of those with the most security experience related to the SSP. Further, I sought to collect data regarding how this school policy complemented both current school security measure and external law enforcement response, coordination, and training. Although one SRO from a southern state was interviewed regarding his opinions

of an SSP, a future study concentrating on law enforcement opinions of an SSP would add to school security literature.

### **Recommendations**

Exploring the opinions of major stakeholders of the SSP from a single school district was the central goal of this research. Due to local constraints within the school system under review, only one of the stakeholder groups was able to be included in the data collection effort. School administrative leadership was essential in the data collection effort because this group possessed the most knowledge and experience regarding details of implementation and current operation of the sentinel program.

However, the findings and limitations from the current study indicated several areas for future research. Based on my review, there is a lack of literature addressing contributions of parent and teacher stakeholder groups regarding an SSP. Additional qualitative research is needed to explore and document the opinions of the other stakeholder groups. Future researchers could explore parent and teacher opinions at a rural and suburban school where an SSP is currently in operation.

A second limitation of this study was that the SRO stakeholder group from the area of the school under review declined to participate in the study. Only one SRO from another state was interviewed. Therefore, the opportunity exists for future researchers to explore the opinions of SROs from rural, suburban, and urban schools that have an SSP operating in their jurisdictions.

Finally, a quantitative approach has the potential to contribute to the scholarly literature through canvassing a large pool of stakeholders regarding their opinions of an

SSP. Qualitative research provides an in-depth understanding of a chosen phenomenon.

To provide a generalizable assessment, researchers could create a questionnaire that allows for hundreds of stakeholders from larger suburban schools to provide their opinions anonymously of a sentinel security program.

## **Implications**

### **Implication for Social Change**

The results of this study indicated in-depth perspectives of stakeholders in a school where a sentinel program has been operating since 2016. Increasing the security of schools by considering and implementing an SSP is social change that provides flexibility to administrators to adapt and increase a school's security to mitigate threats. DHS (2018) noted that the challenges and particularities regarding sentinel security programs should not prevent administrators from considering their implementation. Administrators should consider, with stakeholder input, all available security measures, including sentinel programs, that are prudent for their respective schools.

Second, the inclusion of parents into the consideration and implementation of a school's security programs is positive social change that would have a significant impact on an administrator's actions regarding school safety. Administrators' incorporation of sentinel security programs requires a collaborative effort of all stakeholders within the school to ensure a successful program. Increasing school safety through the incorporation of sentinel programs and keeping parents and teachers informed of how students are being protected at school constitutes positive social changes that every school administrator should seek to implement.

Security programs in which firearms are placed in the hands of personnel other than SROs are contentious public policies. The results of the current study indicated how most of the opposition to the incorporation of these types of school security programs comes from external actors who are not directly associated with the school. Much of the public criticism these actors pursue is closely related to the larger political gun control debate that affects every state and municipal policy involving firearms. The public criticism from these external actors creates reluctance among stakeholders to participate in research seeking to explore opinions of school security programs. Researchers should be aware of the sincere hesitancy of school leadership to share their opinions or to allow access to school personnel, such as teachers, to explore their opinions of these types of school security programs due to the negative public influence that is anticipated from these external actors in relation to conducting a qualitative study.

### **Theoretical Implications**

Public administrators often rely on antiquated management theories to address complex contemporary public issues, often without public engagement. Jun (2006) noted that public administrators must find creative ways to focus on dialectical social process to alter the administrative structure and processes and engineer policies that solve complex public policy problems. Deliberative democracy emphasizes stakeholder participation through contested dialogue that provides legitimacy to contested public policies (Jun, 2006).

In a recent study of H4 visa holders, Moon (2021) addressed how antiquated federal immigration policy established in 1990 requires reform. Moon explained that H4

visa holders, which are visas granted to the family members of H1B visas for professional work in the United States, are predominately of Asian descent. This visa category does not allow visa holders to obtain a social security number and prevents them from income-generating work. Moon concluded that current federal immigration policy remains harmful to women of Asian descent who are in the United States under H4 visas by suppressing their ability to work to support their families and contribute to their community. Additionally, Moon concluded that this policy promotes systematic inequity and social injustice on a specific social construction, Asian migrant women, through punitive immigration policies that perpetuate this group's dependent and deviant target population category. Moon noted that this immigration policy serves special vice common public interests addressed in the social construction of target populations theory and is in need of reform.

The rationale for the establishment of public policies is a key element drawn from the social construction of target populations theory (see Schneider & Ingram, 1993) that is highlighted within this research. Schneider and Ingram noted that burdens placed upon positively constructed powerless groups are legitimized as efficient policies which seek to protect the individual or a specific group from harm. The SSP's rationale, outlined by all participants, was to enhance the school's security program through a deterrence measure to prevent the most serious of emergency scenarios and thereby protecting the students and faculty within the school.

## Conclusion

School shootings are rare events that have devastating effects for parents, schools, and their respective communities and often times for the nation as a whole. DHS (2018) notes three aspects central to school security that administrators need to continuously consider regarding their school's security program. The first aspect is that an SSP may not be right for every school as location, infrastructure, student population, and available resources are but a few aspects for administrators to consider regarding implementing an SSP. Second, that the refinement and improvement of security programs must be continuous to mitigate the threat posed by perpetrators. Finally, that the obstacles to implementing an SSP, to include external pressures, should not dissuade administrators from considering their implementation. Knowing these factors, it is incumbent upon all school administrators to seek the best available school safety programs, while considering core stakeholder opinions, to increase the overall security and deterrence of schools to prevent and mitigate potential threats.

This study was based upon one central research question: What are the opinions of community stakeholders, such as parents, teachers, administrators, and local police officers, regarding the effectiveness of the school sentinel program (2013)? Several participant interviews were conducted to gain the in-depth knowledge of the opinions of those that implemented the sentinel program and those subjected to it. Administrative participants that implemented the program did so to ensure that all available security policies at their disposal were implemented to heighten the effectiveness of their school's security program to combat future potential threats. All administrative participants noted

the overwhelming support, both at public meetings during implementation and currently during operation, from parental and teacher stakeholders of the SSP.

Subsequently, the parental and SRO participants outlined support for the incorporation of a sentinel type program in their own child's school after a thorough understanding of the operational details and training requirements were presented to them by administrators before implementation. Although the parental and SRO participants did not possess detailed knowledge of prolific school shootings, such as Sandy Hook or Marjory Stoneman, they did have knowledge of their own child's school security program and on this basis made judgements as to their support in implementing an SSP in their respective school districts.

Incorporating school security programs which place firearms in the hands of personnel other than the SRO have the potential to positively complement current school security programs and possibly deter or preclude a perpetrator's actions within a school (Anklem, et al., 2014). Results from this study outlined how preparations to implement the SSP were detailed and intricate and support for the program's operation from all stakeholders was necessary to the program's continued operational success. Incorporating such programs does not come without risk or consequence to those seeking their implementation. One administrative participant outlined how peers from other schools within the state questioned the decision to support the implementation of the SSP. These school administrative peers did not want their stakeholders to question current school security programs in their own schools nor did they want to assume the risk that accompanies this program.

Secondly one administrative participant outlined how the program currently mitigates risk through several factors. Principally these factors include firearms training for sentinel(s) and the SRO, collaborated training with first responders, and that sentinel(s) do not carry a firearm on their person during the school day but only have access to one in case of an emergency response situation. Most importantly three administrative participants outlined that the consequences of not having all available security programs operating in the school in the rare event of a school shooting are consequences school leadership should inherently and absolutely be unwilling to accept.



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## Appendix A: Letter of Cooperation Mid-Western School District

Dear School Superintendent,

My name is John Beraud and I am a doctoral student at Walden University's College of Social Sciences. I am presently working on my dissertation on school security programs. The purpose of my study is to explore stakeholder opinions of the School Sentinel program within the school district.

I am seeking your initial cooperation for the school system to participate in the study. Your approval at this point would constitute in the near future agreeing to provide point of contact information, such as electronic mail addresses, for volunteers to be participants and subsequently be interviewed for this study. Participant groups for this study would constitute parents, teachers, and administrators from within your school district.

I respectfully request your consideration to provide initial cooperation. If you have any questions or require additional information, please feel free to call me at (XXX) XXX-XXXX or e-mail me at my university e-mail address. You may also contact my Dissertation Chair advisor, Dr. Clarence Williamson at Walden University through his email (university e-mail address) or his phone number at (XXX) XXX-XXXX.

Sincerely,

John Beraud

## Appendix B: Letter of Cooperation County Sheriff's Office

Dear Sheriff,

My name is John Beraud and I am a doctoral student at Walden University's College of Social Sciences. I am presently working on my dissertation on school security programs. The purpose of my study is to explore stakeholder opinions of the School Sentinel program within the local school district.

I am seeking your initial cooperation to, in the near future, provide a list of potential participants for this study. Potential participants from your office would need to have experience serving as School Resource Officers at one of the Tri-Valley schools within your county. Your approval at this point would constitute agreeing to provide point of contact information, such as electronic mail addresses, for volunteers to be participants and subsequently interviewed for this study.

I respectfully request your consideration and subsequent agreement to provide only initial cooperation. If you have any questions or require additional information, please feel free to call me at (XXX) XXX-XXXX or e-mail me at my university e-mail address. You may also contact my Dissertation Chair advisor, Dr. Clarence Williamson at Walden University through his email (university e-mail address) or his phone number at (XXX) XXX-XXXX.

Sincerely,

John Beraud



## Appendix C: Sample Recruitment Letter School District

Dear School Superintendent,

My name is John Beraud and I am a doctoral student at Walden University's College of Social Sciences. I am presently working on my dissertation on school security programs.

My research is of a qualitative design which would require conducting interviews of parents of children attending schools within your district, teachers, and administrative staff. Since I live remotely from your geographical area the primary means of conducting interviews would be via the internet. A secondary method of traveling to the area to conduct face-to-face interviews can be arranged if insufficient internet interviews are obtained. Each interview will take approximately 30 minutes, with a possible follow-up interview on a future date based on the amount of data collected.

Interview questions, both primary and secondary, are reviewed and approved by my University's Institutional Review Board. Each participant will receive an informed consent letter explaining the research and the parameters of the study. All participants will be informed that this study is voluntary, and the participants may withdraw at any time during the conduct of the interview.

Participation in this study is completely anonymous and information provided will remain confidential. No information taken or recorded will be able to identify a participant to their interview answers. All of the participant's data will be safely stored in an encrypted SpyderOak account that I will maintain.

The purpose of this study is to explore stakeholder opinions of the School Sentinel program which has been operating in a specific school district.

If permission is granted to conduct the study with the school district personnel and/or parents of school children, I will submit information to Walden University's Institutional Review Board for approval.

I respectfully request your consideration to honor my request. If you have any questions please feel free to call me anytime at (XXX) XXX-XXXX or e-mail me at my university e-mail address. You may also contact my Dissertation Chair advisor, Dr. Clarence Williamson at Walden University through his email (university e-mail address) or his phone number at (XXX) XXX-XXXX.

Sincerely,

John Beraud

## Appendix D: Sample Recruitment Letter Local Sheriff's Office

Dear Sheriff,

My name is John Beraud and I am a doctoral student at Walden University's College of Social Sciences. I am presently working on my dissertation on school security programs.

My research is of a qualitative design which would require conducting interviews of School Resource Officers (SRO) that have experience with duty at one of the schools between 2016 and the present. Since I live remotely from your geographical area the primary means of conducting interviews would be via the internet. A secondary method of traveling to the area to conduct face-to-face interviews can be arranged if insufficient internet interviews are obtained. Each interview will take approximately 30 minutes, with a possible follow-up interview on a future date based on the amount of data collected.

Interview questions, both primary and secondary, are reviewed and approved by my University's Institutional Review Board. Each participant will receive an informed consent letter explaining the research and the parameters of the study. All participants will be informed that this study is voluntary, and the participants may withdraw at any time during the conduct of the interview.

Participation in this study is completely anonymous and all information provided will remain confidential. No information taken or recorded will be able to identify a participant to their interview answers. All of the participant's data will be safely stored in an encrypted SpyderOak account that I will maintain.

The purpose of this study is to explore stakeholder opinions of the School Sentinel program which has been operating in a specific school district.

If permission is granted to conduct the study with SROs from the Minnehaha County Sheriff's Office, I will submit information to Walden University's Institutional Review Board for approval.

I respectfully request your consideration to honor my request. If you have any questions please feel free to call me anytime at (XXX) XXX-XXXX or e-mail me at my university e-mail address. You may also contact my Dissertation Chair advisor, Dr. Clarence Williamson at Walden University through his email (university e-mail address) or his phone number at (XXX) XXX-XXXX.

Sincerely,

John Beraud

## Appendix E: Interview Protocol

Research Question: What are the opinions of community stakeholders, such as parents, teachers, administrators, and local police officers, regarding the effectiveness of the School Sentinel Program (2013)?

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Main Question</b>	<b>Group(s)</b>
Knowledge	Were you aware of and did you agree or disagree to the incorporation of the SSP (2013) within the school system in 2016? Why did you agree to disagree to the SSP's incorporation?	Parents, Teachers, Administrators
Knowledge	What program requirements or operational aspects are you currently aware concerning the School Sentinel program?	Parents, Teachers, Administrators
Opinion	How do you believe the presence of Sentinels improves school safety of public schools within the school system?	Parents, Teachers, Administrators
Feeling	How do you feel about having armed sentinels posted on public school campuses?	Parents, Teachers, Administrators
Feeling	What are your specific concerns regarding the presence of armed sentinels on school campuses?	Parents, Teachers, Administrators
<b>Theme</b>	<b>Supplemental/Follow-Up Question</b>	<b>Group(s)</b>
Opinion	How do you believe the presence of sentinels on school campuses impacts your child's (children) ability to learn while in school?	Parents
Opinion	What do you think of the decision of school administrators to implement and operate the SSP (2013) in your child's/children's school?	Parents
Opinion	What do you think of the decision of school administrators to implement and operate the SSP (2013) in the school district?	Teachers
Opinion	How does the presence of an armed sentinel affect your ability to perform your duties as a teacher?	Teachers
Opinion	As an administrator how do you feel about posting armed sentinels on your school's campus?	Administrator
Knowledge	What aspects of the SSP (2013) do you believe improve school security? Why?	Administrator
Knowledge or Opinion	What type of challenges exist with the presence of both armed sentinels and SRO's on school campuses?	Law Enforcement
Feeling/Opinion	Do you believe that having additional armed personnel detracts or enhances current SRO presence and overall school security on school campuses? Why or why not?	Law Enforcement