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Teachers' Perceptions of School Violence: A Case Study

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Jessica Anderson

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2016

Abstract

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by

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Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

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School violence has gained attention in recent years with the rise of aggressive behavior in schools across the United States. With increased understanding of this problem, school district administrators might implement prevention strategies or assess current school violence policies and programs. Using the conceptual framework of general strain theory, a case study was conducted in an urban school district in the northeastern United States that was experiencing increased student violence. The purpose of this case study was to explore teachers' perceptions of school violence to increase the understanding of the problem at the study site. All certified teachers in the study district were invited to participate. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with 12 teachers in 9 elementary schools. After compiling, disassembling, reassembling, and coding the data, various themes emerged. The findings from the interviews revealed a need for district-wide consistency to address school violence, professional development to train staff on violence related issues and mandates, and a program to combat as well as prevent the existence of violence in the school climate. A recommendation is that the school district adopts the School Wide Positive Behavior Intervention Supports to provide a framework of consistent management of student behavior and professional development practices within a district-wide violence prevention program. The study contributes to positive social change by increasing the understanding of school violence at the study site and providing the recommended program designed to improve school climate, student learning, and social behavior through a tier leveled system designed to reach all levels of school violence.

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Administrator Leadership for Teaching and Learning

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Section 1: The Problem

Introduction

U.S. public schools are requiring school safety initiatives due to the growing number of school violence incidents. In addition, the United States Department of Education, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and various State Departments of Education are focused on school climate reform to create safer, more supportive, and more civil K-12 schools (Thapa, Cohen, Guffey, & Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2013); therefore, understanding teachers' perceptions of school violence is needed. School violence can include various forms of aggression. There are a range of school safety initiatives focused on decreasing all forms of school violence in youth. The National Center for Children Exposed to Violence (2006) was created by the United States Department of Justice to reduce violence incidents and the impact on children and families, increase public awareness, and support professionals to combat the occurrence of violence. The CDC (2013) explained that school violence can interfere with academic learning time and negatively impact students, the school climate, and the broader community. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention stated that

School violence is youth violence that occurs on school property, on the way to or from school or school-sponsored events, or during a school-sponsored event.

Violence is the intentional use of physical force or power, against another person, group, or community, with the behavior likely to cause physical or psychological harm. (para. 2 & 3)

The idea of integrating school safety initiatives into schools began with the occurrence of school shootings and the increase of negative student behavior like

bullying. As a result of media attention and growing public interest in keeping schools safe, the issue of school violence became a national topic. Grant programs to support school climate improvement efforts such as Safe and Supportive Schools (S3) are available through the United States Department of Education for schools to focus on school improvement and bullying prevention (Thapa et al., 2013). In addition, all states are required to create and implement school safety initiatives. Educators need to be aware of school safety mandates at their state and district level because failure to recognize mandated safety components could cause ineffective implementation. A failure to implement school violence prevention strategies could allow negative student behaviors to perpetuate. An in-depth understanding of teachers' perceptions of school violence is crucial to ensure that teachers meet the challenge of implementing school safety mandates.

Scholars have focused on the causes and effects of school violence; yet, little is known of teachers' perceptions on this topic. In this study, I examined teachers' perceptions of school violence in hopes that it will shed light on implementing preventive strategies and combatting violent student behaviors. In this first section of the study, the problem of the project study is analyzed in regards to its significance and evidence of its existence at the local and professional level. I discuss the implications of this study, as well as a research question that was developed that aligned with the purpose and problem. Also, I conducted a review of literature on this topic.

Definition of the Problem

In many schools districts across the United States, violence exists in the school environment. School districts are addressing the issue of school violence by creating and

implementing various school safety initiatives. However, school violence, such as violent physical and emotional acts of harassment, intimidation, and bullying still exists in many schools. This problem impacts all students in the studied district in New Jersey as well as their families and community. Allowing school violence, from violent crime to low levels of aggression, may undermine safety and security perceptions and, therefore, result in a less productive learning environment (Burdick-Will, 2013).

There are many possible factors contributing to school violence, among which are bullying behaviors that result in aggression and/or acts of violence. Bullying in a school can contribute to the existence of violence in schools (Hurford et al., 2010). Rose, Monda-Amaya, and Espelage (2011) explained that there is a link between extended periods of victimization and acts of school violence. Schools need to address violence by identifying the possible causes as well as the effectiveness of proactive and reactive strategies.

This study will contribute to the body of knowledge needed to address school violence by allowing the educators in the school district in this study the opportunity to understand the teachers' perceptions regarding school violence to inform instruction of school safety methods and meet state requirements. This study could also assist the school district in evaluating their current efforts in school safety strategies and addressing the challenges of their violence prevention efforts. Understanding teachers' perceptions of their role in addressing school violence could assist the local school in planning and implementing new or existing school safety initiatives.

Rationale

Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level

School violence exists in many school districts across the United States, including a school district located in the southeastern section of New Jersey. This urban school district was comprised of nine elementary schools and one high school. The population consisted of African American, Hispanic American, and Asian American students who walk to their neighborhood school and take buses to the high school. This school district self-reported 123 incidents to the State of New Jersey that include violence, vandalism, weapons, offenses, substance offenses, and harassment, intimidation, and bullying in the 2011-12 school year (New Jersey Department Of Education, 2014). During the school year of 2012-13, this district had 148 incidents and ranked 19 out of 566 municipalities to have the greatest number of violence-related incidences within New Jersey (Press of Atlantic City, 2013). This district had metal detectors in the high school only; however, the local newspaper brought attention to the issue of placing metal detectors in all elementary schools after a 13-year-old student was shot and killed, while another was wounded immediately after school near school grounds by another student (Press of Atlantic City, 2014). Thus, these data support the presence of violence in this school district.

In the State of New Jersey, the Department of Law & Public Safety and the Department of Education created a model agreement in 1988 for local law enforcement agencies and education officials due to the existence of negative student behaviors. The New Jersey Department of Education (2011) revised this agreement to include current school violence and stated that

Recent events in New Jersey and throughout the nation have made clear that while schools are generally safe places for students and staff members, a wide

range of offenses are occasionally committed on school grounds, including on school buses or at school-sponsored functions. These offenses against persons or property may involve the actual or threatened infliction of bodily injury, the unlawful use or possession of firearms or other dangerous weapons, arson or fire-setting activities, sexual assault and criminal sexual contact, bias crimes, illegal gambling, vandalism, and theft. (p. 2)

According to a 2011 national sample of Grades 9-12, the CDC (2011) indicated that 20.1% of youth, specifically 22.0% of females and 18.2% of males, reported being bullied on school property. Electronically bullying was reported in the year preceding the survey that included e-mail, chat, websites, and texting with 16.2% incidents, specifically 22.1% of females and 10.8% of males (CDC, 2011). In the state of New Jersey, the commissioner of education indicated that there were 12,024 incidents of harassment, intimidation, and bullying (HIB) in the 2011-2012 report compared to 3,412 incidents reported in 2010-2011 (NJDOE, 2012). These data can be further broken down in categories of 8,252 incidents of violence, 1,924 incidents of vandalism, 1,125 incidents of weapons, and 3,482 incidents of substance possession (NJDOE, 2012). Bradshaw, Debnam, Koth, and Leaf (2008) stated, "The increased pressure on schools to create safer learning environments for students has led many school districts to implement programs to improve student achievement and school climate" (p. 145). The occurrence of negative student behavior prompted the need for awareness on this issue.

The State of New Jersey is aware of the existence of violence in schools and is addressing this problem with violence-related resources available on their Department of Education website for parents, students, and school employees. Since 2003, the state of

New Jersey designated the week of the third Monday in October as School Violence Awareness Week and required schools to organize activities to prevent school violence, including discussions on conflict resolution and issues of student diversity and tolerance (NJDOE, 2013). In accordance with this requirement, districts need to provide programs for school employees to recognize the warning signs of school violence and to instruct them on recommended conduct during an incident as well as invite law enforcement to share discussions with teaching staff. The state of New Jersey requires that every year the first week of October be a Week of Respect in which schools focus on preventing harassment, intimidation, and bullying (NJDOE, 2014).

Evidence of the Problem from the Professional Literature

The topic of school violence is evident in professional literature. The majority of research surrounding school violence focuses on peer-to-peer relationships. Researchers have explored student risk factors associated with school violence and the factors that shape a student's risk to bullying victimization (Popp, 2012). Wynne and Joo (2011) found that school victimization can be predicted by individual, family, and school characteristics. Other researchers addressed the risk factors associated with students exhibiting behavior problems that can lead to school violence behaviors (Harrison, Vannest, Davis, & Reynolds, 2012; Simpson, Peterson, & Smith, 2011).

Scholars have also examined the effects and strategies that can be used to decrease the occurrence of school violence. For instance, a continuous exposure to peer violent victimization can lead to delinquency (Jackson et al., 2013). Peguero (2011) found that Black and Latino students who are victimized at school are at a higher risk for dropping out. To combat the negative effects of school violence, schools are relying on

violence prevention research to identify effective strategies. Johnson, Burke, and Gielen (2011) found that an effective violence prevention strategy includes schools working on the relationship between students and school personnel. Other researchers have analyzed violence prevention programs, such as Fight-Free Schools and Promoting Responsibility through Education and Prevention (PREP), to combat the existence of school violence (Fahsl & Luce, 2012; Sale, Weil, & Kryah, 2012).

School climate is also associated with school violence. School climate has an impact on school violence and prevention (Booren, Handy, & Power, 2011; Hurford et al., 2010). The social cohesion of schools within a school's climate reduces violent victimization risks (Zaykowski & Gunter, 2012). Other school-related factors like school climate affect students' reporting of school violent crimes (Watkins & Maume, 2011). Burdick (2013) used the data gained from school climate surveys to analyze the effects of violent crimes on academic achievement, finding that violent crimes have a negative effect on test scores.

Definitions

Character: Psychological characteristics that an individual uses to enable him or her to act as a moral agent (Seider, Novick, & Gomez, 2013). The term character is multilayered due to the fact that U.S. society can deem a person's morals, behavior, actions, personality, feelings, and so on, having good or bad character.

Character education: Character education refers to teaching the topic directly or indirectly in a school environment. *Character education* includes any deliberate approach by which school personnel help children and youth become caring, principled, and responsible (Curren & Kotzee, 2014).

Harassment, intimidation, bullying (HIB): The definition of bullying, and the statistics used to determine HIB. The New Jersey Department of Education (2011) defined harassment, intimidation, and bullying as

A definition of harassment, intimidation, or bullying that at a minimum includes any gesture, any written, verbal or physical act, or any electronic communication, whether it be a single incident or a series of incidents, that is reasonably perceived as being motivated either by any actual or perceived characteristic, such as race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, or a mental, physical or sensory disability, or by any other distinguishing characteristic, that takes place on the property of the institution of higher education or at any function sponsored by the institution of higher education, that substantially disrupts or interferes with the orderly operation of the institution or the rights of other students and that:

- (a) a reasonable person should know, under the circumstances, will have the effect of physically or emotionally harming a student or damaging the student's property, or placing a student in reasonable fear of physical or emotional harm to his person or damage to his property;
- (b) has the effect of insulting or demeaning any student or group of students; or
- (c) creates a hostile educational environment for the student by interfering with a student's education or by severely or pervasively causing physical or emotional harm to the student. (p.16)

School violence: School violence is youth violence that occurs on school property, on the way to or from school or school-sponsored events, or during a school-sponsored

event. Violence is the intentional use of physical force or power, against another person, group, or community with the behavior likely to cause physical or psychological harm (CDC, 2013).

Significance

This study will add to the research in the field of education by providing insight into teachers' perceptions of school violence. This study could be significant in various ways to practitioners, participants, the school district, students, society, and me. It promotes the awareness of school violence and prevention strategies for school districts and educators. It is crucial that research be devoted to understanding how teachers perceive their district's school violence programs and policies as well as legislation so teachers can implement it effectively. Teachers' perceptions can also be used to evaluate the district's current safety initiatives in order to create new safety policies and/or increase the effectiveness of existing ones. This could include violence prevention programs, implementation of safety strategies, issues of bullying and acts of violence, HIB reporting, student attendance, dropout rates, and student achievement. This study may promote social change and development by positively impacting students through effective school safety strategies that may lead to an increase in student achievement due to a more positive school climate. This study may prompt the stakeholders of various school districts to provide professional development training for educators to advance the idea and components of school violence prevention. Addressing school safety professional development may allow teachers to make more of a positive impact on the social and emotional development of their students.

Guiding/Research Question

The following research question was posed to align with the research problem and purpose:

1. What are teachers' perceptions of school violence in a school district in the northeast United States?

One general, open-ended research question was created to allow flexibility as to what might emerge from the data while focusing on the problem of the study (Creswell, 2009).

Review of the Literature

School violence has received national attention at federal, state, and local levels due to governmental mandating of school safety initiatives and the creation of antibullying legislation. Violence in schools can take many forms, and for the purpose of this study, violence was verbal/emotional and physical abuses of one type or another. In relationship to the verbal/emotional aspects of school violence, name calling, being shunned, or not included are common forms of this type of abuse. For physical manifestations of school violence, a student might encounter bullying, physical fighting, gang violence, assault, and even shootings.

The ERIC and SAGE education databases were used to find sources for literature review. Using keywords as *school violence*, *school safety initiatives and implementation*, *importance of safety in schools*, *bullying*, *bullying prevention programs*, and *social control theory* revealed hundreds of articles written over the past decade. This academic research, gathered from peer-reviewed journals, covers aspects associated with school violence.

One way in which to analyze school violence is through the use of the general strain theory (James, Brunch, & Clay-Warner, 2014; Moon & Morash, 2012). According to general strain theory (GST), students are more likely to engage in school violence if they feel that they are experiencing unfair treatment (James et al., 2014). This theory can be used in a broad context; yet, “relationships in which others are not treating the individual as he or she would like to be treated” (Agnew, 2001, p. 320) is the most critical component to the integrity of this theory. The literature on school violence is analyzed through the lens of this theory and organized according to school climate (Boore et al., 2011; Cohen. Pickeral, & McCloskey, 2009; Hurford et al., 2010). School climate includes safety, support, acceptance of differences and diversity, and the institutional environment as a whole. These four climates (or conditions) create the framework in which a number of stresses, found within the GST, can be assessed.

General Strain Theory

Many surveys have been used to assess the causes of violence in schools. The School Crime Supplement to the National Crime Victimization Survey has been used to examine parent and student perceptions. James, Bunch, and Clay-Warner (2014) used this survey to measure students’ perceptions of being treated unfairly by teachers, with the likelihood that those students will become involved in school violence. Lacoé (2014) relied on parent, student, and teacher surveys, typically given by the cities, to measure student engagement, school environment, and safety in schools. Research has been conducted surrounding school violence as it relates to peer relationships and student risk factors associated with school violence. School victimization can be predicted by a combination of individual, family, and school characteristics (Wynne & Joo, 2011).

Nevertheless, much of the research can be housed under the umbrella of the GST (James et al., 2014).

According to the GST, negative emotions, such as anger and depression, influence violent behavior in schools (Moon & Morash, 2012). This is in part focused on students' perceptions surrounding fair treatment by teachers and how that plays a role in delinquent behavior (James et al., 2014). While GST has not been used to investigate the role that teachers play in the lives of students, this is one aspect of GST that is being analyzed. GST can also be used to examine "conditioning factors such as a youth's relationship to parents, problem-solving ability, self-control, association with delinquent peers, and coping skills" (Moon & Morash, 2012, p. 888), all of which play a role in determining the causes of school violence. The validity of GST has been authenticated through a number of studies (James et al., 2014) as is a useful tool with which to analyze school climate.

School Climate

School climate is often used as an indicator to predict violence or peer victimization in the school environment, and it can be used to investigate areas of strain within the student population (Booren et al., 2011; Hurford et al., 2010). School violence is measured in various ways in educational research. Using teacher, student, and/or parent surveys is one method for assessing school climate. School climate can be used to isolate and categorize violent school behavior and bullying. There are certain predictors that can play a role in measuring school violence. Moon (2012) established that a predictor of violent, property, and status delinquency is a youths' history of criminal victimization. For instance, a student might be participating in stealing because his or her property was stolen, or a student could be abusing drugs due to negative feelings of being bullied. In

addition, Agnich and Miyazaki (2013) found that schools with higher levels of violence reported resource shortages suggesting that the lack of resources could prevent principals from implementing effective social control programs to prevent violence and also explain a possible link between economic lack and violence.

While there are a number of factors that are used to determine school climate, the one most salient to this study is that of Cohen's, Pickeral's and McCloskey's (2009) work in this arena. Cohen et al. indicated four main areas with which to understand the varying climates that affect the behavior of students: the climate of safety, the climate of support, the climate of acceptance of differences and diversity, and the climate of the institutional environment. All four of these areas can be used to point out some of the contributing factors that lead students to engage in violent behavior at school. Through the analysis of these four individual school climates, GST can be better understood.

General Strain Theory and School Climate

GST and school climate can be useful for defining the varying factors that can determine and predict school violence. Through GST, negative emotions such as anger and depression can be linked back to the four school climate factors (safety, support, acceptance of differences and diversity, and institutional environment) that fuel these emotions. In a climate that is not safe, students physically hurt one another through pushing, hitting, punching, kicking, and such. This definition also includes being emotionally safe as well. When students are insulted, teased, harassed, excluded, or verbally abused in any other way, this constitutes an unsafe school climate (Cohen et al., 2009). According to the GST, this as a considerable strain (Cronbach's $\alpha = .86$) based on work adapted from Kim, Koh, and Leventhal (2005). Jacobson et al. (2011) claimed that

students who feel unsafe are more likely to engage in other at risk behaviors. In addition, Yin and Gottfredson (2014) found that an unsafe school environment and student fear for his or her safety can lead to increase gang participation. Feeling unsafe at school is also linked to adolescent dating violence. Earnest and Brady (2014) explained that feeling unsafe at school is associated with dating violence victimization.

The climate of support is often dictated by students feeling that they are being listened to and that they will be helped to learn from their mistakes, rather than be punished, and that there exists a general concern for their well-being (Cohen et al., 2009). In a school environment, when students believe they are being treated unfairly through school rules or in treatment from teachers, violence is more prevalent (James et al., 2014). James et al. (2014) stated, “Students who perceive that rules are unfair are more likely to bring a weapon to school than are students who believe rules are fair” (p. 4). Support from adults in the promotion of fair rules and treatment from teachers decreases instances of violent behavior (James et al., 2014). The GST provides information on the degree to which family conflict (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .65$) and the emotional punishment of teachers (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .84$) adds further strain (James et al., 2014). Feeling unheard and unsupported through school rules, teacher treatment, or in the household environment all add strain that adds promotes school violence.

In U.S. society, discrimination continues based on gender, race, culture, and other factors as well exists (Cohen et al., 2009). According to the GST, there racial discrimination exists (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .78$), and this adds strain to even the most nonviolent student (James et al., 2014). Being the subject of name calling, jeering, and

general mistreatment-based on gender, race, culture, and a host of other differences-will be reflected through retaliation.

A climate factor in an institutional environment can take place on varying levels. On an emotional level, students may react differently based on their general feeling of being somewhere they belong. The student should also feel as though their family members are welcome as well (Cohen et al., 2009). On a physical level, if the school is clean and orderly, there are adequate resources, and there is a general appeal to the facilities, students will feel better about the institutional environment (Cohen et al., 2009). Student violence is also linked to the neighborhood in which the school resides. According to James et al. the “extent of vandalism, abandoned houses, burglaries, rundown and poorly kept buildings, and assaults and muggings within the respondent’s neighborhood” (p. 2). Willits, Broidy, and Denman (2013) also emphasized the importance of safety at schools so violence does not create a negative feedback loop between school and the neighborhood.

Using the GST and school climate is instrumental in analyzing violence in schools. The negative emotions of anger and depression, experienced by students and discussed in GST, can be further analyzed through the role that school climate factors play. The four school climate factors (safety, support, acceptance of differences and diversity, and institutional environment) that fuel these negative emotions can be assessed, and perhaps corrected, in a more efficient manner.

Legislation

While no overarching federal law has been instituted to prohibit school violence, steps have been taken to address school violence. In 1994, the implementation of Safe

Schools Act allocated federal funds to improve security and decrease crime behavior at high crime rate schools (Theriot & Orme, 2014), and this has shown moderate success. Nevertheless, the enactment of law and policy is mostly observed at the state level. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2011), steps are being taken to lessen the bullying of students (this includes cyberbullying) at the state and local level (United States Department of Education, 2011). While each state assesses bullying differently, and may do so through the use of one law or policy or through multiple laws and policies, legislation in this area is taking place. Yet, as with most issues involving legislation, more research is needed.

Implications

The scope of this study included nine elementary schools in one school district. The number of participants was limited to that locale. Due to this small sample size, the results cannot be generalized to other teachers or to other schools in various districts across the United States. Also, this case study had limited time and resources because it is funded through Walden University and myself. Other limitations included researcher bias, which was addressed with member checking. In addition, it was assumed that the school district and the participants were cooperative in this study.

There are delimitations within this study due to the extent of research within the topic of school violence and safety. For instance, this study could have been explored from many different views but it was limited to the perceptions of certified teachers only. This study was intended to provide information to the stakeholders within the district in order to develop school safety initiatives and policies. Although there were many different aspects within school violence to study, I only sought to expose the teachers'

perceptions of school violence. I did not seek to answer the effectiveness of the school safety initiatives within this district's setting or any other research topics within this area.

Summary

In the review of literature, I discussed and analyzed the implications of school violence in schools. It is important to gain an understanding of teachers' perceptions related to school violence to combat and prevent bullying, foster meaningful relationships between students, increase moral decision making, and promote positive social change. Gaining knowledge and understanding of school violence in schools may help the local community and society because students will have the ability to be productive citizens in the world. In Section 2, I will detail the research method that was used in this study.

Section 2: The Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative, case study was to explore teachers' perceptions of school violence in a school district in the northeast United States. School violence was the central phenomenon in this study because violence existed in the school environment. It was necessary that teachers understand their role in identifying, preventing, and combatting school violence because implementing the district's safety initiatives will include the direct teaching, using, and/or reporting acts of violence. Thus, the research gained from teachers' perceptions could be used to develop school safety initiatives in this district.

Setting and Sample

For this study, a qualitative case study was used in order to answer the research question. As the researcher, I conducted a qualitative case study in a school district in the northeast United States on teachers' perceptions of school violence. There were nine elementary schools and one high school in the district. This district was an urban city; but, it did not receive a lot of state aid money due to the amount of tax money collected from the businesses in the city.

After approval from University Research Review (URR) and the Institutional Review Board (IRB), I gained permission to begin my study by contacting the superintendent of the district in which this study was conducted (Appendix B). After obtaining permission from the principals at the various studied schools (Appendix C), I sent an e-mail to all of the certified teachers within the school district explaining the study and asking for participants (Appendix D). Purposeful sampling was used to select

participants because there was only a limited amount of participants in this district that volunteered to participate. The total number of participants interviewed in the study was 12. The participants were selected based on their response and acceptance to the study, at which time they were informed of their rights as a human subject and they signed the consent letter (Appendix D). The number of participants who I interviewed was dependent upon reaching saturation of the information collected. I stopped interviewing participants at the point the data being collected became redundant and/or all sources were exhausted regarding the topic. Saturation of the data usually occurs with 10 to 15 participants being interviewed (Creswell, 2012).

As the researcher in this study, I did not have any supervisory role over the participants because I was a peer teacher at one of the elementary schools in the district. As a fellow teacher in the same school district, I reminded the participants that this interview would not affect our relationship in any aspect. In addition, participants were told about their rights as a human subject to withdraw from the study at any time and that their identity would remain confidential. I disseminated the results with the participants, along with the school district upon the completion and approval of my study.

Instrumentation

I chose a qualitative case study because it provided insight into a specific issue that had a bounded system of only the perceptions of certified teachers within a particular school district (Creswell, 2012). This approach was deemed effective because there was a clear connection between the problem and the research question. The problem addressed in this study was the existence of school violence in a school district. Thus, in the

research question, I focused on the teachers' perceptions of school violence within this school district in the northeast United States.

The research topic in this case study was the teachers' perceptions of school violence. The unit of analysis was the teacher as a participant within the school district in the northeast United States. This study was bounded because it was limited to a certain number of participants' perceptions of school violence and not all teachers' perceptions. In addition, I investigated this research topic at only one school district instead of all the schools in the county, state, or nation.

Data Collection

The method of data collection in this study was one-on-one interviews. The interviews consisted of open-ended, semi structured interview questions (see appendix E). The purpose of interview questions was to collect data that would bring to light the teachers' perceptions of school violence. The interview questions were used as a guide to seek information from the participant that were focused on the research question but also allowed the participant the opportunity to expand on his or her thoughts and/or add any additional information that he or she deemed pertinent. According to Hancock and Algozzine (2006), an interview protocol was followed by asking appropriate questions and recording answers on an audio tape as well as in hand-written notes. The interviews lasted between 45-60 minutes per participants in order to gain ample information regarding the research question. Furthermore, the interviews were conducted in a quiet location within the school. This data were organized in order to keep track of information because the data needed to be secured, confidential, and systemically handled to analyze the responses.

Data Analysis Results

Analysis of the data and interpretation procedures was applied to the participants' interviews. Data analysis was systematic because it was based on the literature in the field of educational research and on the research problem. Therefore, it was an ongoing and lengthy process because it required reflection of the data and concurrent gathering of the data while making interpretations. As raw data were collected in the form of interviews, they were simultaneously being organized for analysis. After data collection, the data were coded by hand instead of using a computer program. This process included highlighting each participant's interview transcriptions into major categories and then analyzing those categories to find associated concepts. Table 1 provides the results of the open coding analysis of the participants. Once this coding process concluded, I identified patterns that led to the emergence of various themes. While reviewing the data and interpreting the meaning of these themes, interrelated themes were evident.

Table 1

Major Categories of Teachers' Perceptions of School Violence

Major categories	Associated concepts
Major/Minor Violence Problem	Misbehavior, constant disciplining, disrespectfulness, not paying attention, impacting student achievement.
Lack of Consistency	Clear expectations, consistent consequences, unified discipline policy, district wide referral protocol.
Non-existence of Violence Prevention Program	Classroom management, behavior modification strategies, implementation of district wide violence prevention program.
Professional Development	Yearly training, annual briefing on laws and policies.

In the data analysis, I found themes that were directly related to school violence. One theme that emerged from the data that addressed the problem of this study was that schools in the district had either a major or minor school violence issue. Some participants felt that their school had a major or minor school violence issue while other schools in the district might have had a different level of school violence. Regardless of the severity of the school violence that existed in the participant's school, the participants claimed that school violence negatively impacted student achievement; therefore, the district needed to adopt policies to address its existence and a program to prevent it. Teachers felt concerned that the district did not have policies and programs in place because school violence affects student achievement. One participant even referenced that "it only takes one (student) to ruin a class." The behavior of one student can

negatively impact an entire class and ruin the dynamics of the learning environment. A misbehaving student who is not responsive to the teacher's and/or school's rules would benefit from a program designed to target negative student behavior beyond normal classroom management.

One of the themes that emerged was the lack of consistency in dealing with school violence, which supported the need of a unified discipline policy for the district. Teachers expressed concern that the district had no consistent policies for students living in an urban school district that had a large transient population between the district schools. Teachers felt that consistency was vital when dealing with students because students need clear expectations and consequences. Therefore, students should experience the same expectations and know the behavioral consequences will be the same from all schools, regardless of whether they moved to a different neighborhood school. In addition, teachers thought that consistency was important for addressing school violence regardless if the teacher felt that his or her school had a major or minor discipline problem. According to the respondents, there was a need for a district wide program that would address violence and other negative student behavior so students would receive consistent consequences in the district.

Another theme that emerged from the data was the nonexistence of a violence prevention program. Participants explained that they used various strategies and skills to combat violence in their classroom based on student behavior from year to year. Participants either said they were not aware of a district violence prevention program or they did not think the district had a current program. All teachers felt that the district should adopt and implement a violence prevention program to address HIB even if school

violence was not a major problem in their school. Teachers felt that a violence prevention program could only help students by combatting bullying, promoting a more positive school climate, and could increase student attendance and achievement.

Teachers were troubled that they were not knowledgeable on the national, state, and local laws regarding HIB; the district's school violence policies; and the district's existing, or lack thereof, violence prevention program. This led to the emergence of the theme of professional development. Teachers felt that the district should choose professional development topics that were more pertinent to their everyday challenges like the behavior associated with school violence. Participants expressed a desire to have an annual professional development on national, state, and district policies concerning school violence so they would be able to adopt these policies in an effective manner. In addition, teachers wanted an annual professional development on the district's violence prevention program. Three participants linked this need for a violence prevention program back to not having consistency in the district implying that the district did not have a unified program to address school violence with a prevention program. According to the participants, there was a need for the district to adopt a violence prevention program that teachers would be trained on and could effectively implement with support from the district.

As the data were being analyzed and interpreted, they were simultaneously being validated for accuracy using member checking so the participant was able to check the accuracy of the findings. This technique was used during the interview process by restating and summarizing the participants' responses to allow the participant to

determine accuracy of the information exchanged. In addition, my committee chair served as an external auditor to review the different aspects of my research.

Assumptions and Limitations

There were various assumptions associated with this study that were assumed to be true but not verified. It was assumed that I would interpret the tonality of the participants' interview answers to add to the analytical interpretation of the research. Also, it was assumed that the school atmosphere of each school within the district was consistent, which will allow for generalization of the results of the study to the general population within the district.

There were limitations in this study that were beyond my control as the researcher. Some participants may or may not have wished to participate in the study who had or had not experienced school violence based on their years of teaching in this district and/or school, thus limiting the possibilities of generalization. In addition, participants may have felt uncomfortable disclosing the existence of school violence and/or simply had difficulty recalling and remembering school violence.

Conclusion

Due to the lack of understanding of teachers' perceptions on school violence in a school district in the northeast United States, a case study was conducted. This qualitative case study added to the research of teachers' perceptions of school violence. Data were collected via semi structured interviews. In the data analysis through the coding process, I found themes that were examined as the findings in this study. As a result of the data collected in this study, a project was designed to meet the needs of the district. The goals

and intentions of this project were created from data collection and are described in Section 3.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

In this section, I will describe the research project on the issue of school violence. According to the various themes that emerged from the data analysis in Section 2, there was a need for a unified violence prevention program across the district. In addition, there was a need to create professional development training for teachers to become aware of the national and state laws, as well as the district's policies regarding student violence. Thus, a research project in the form of a policy recommendation was created in response to the analyzed data. This policy recommendation project included the district's existing problem and a summary of the findings of this study. In addition, the project included evidence from current literature and the research findings to outline policy recommendations for the school district in this study.

Implementing this project could impact social change by positively impacting students, teachers, administrators, and the community through decreasing school violence by adopting a violence prevention program such as School Wide Behavior Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS). The teachers' perceptions regarding school violence influenced the creation of this project so that the needs of students, teachers, administrators, and the community could be addressed in regards to school violence. The analysis of the teachers' perceptions may allow school districts the ability to understand how school safety initiatives can be developed and implemented into learning. Thus, administrators, teachers, and the community will understand their role in incorporating violence prevention strategies and well-being into students' education.

Rationale

The project genre chosen in this study was a policy recommendation because it fits the needs of my case study. A policy recommendation includes identifying and researching an existing problem, summarizing the findings of that research, presenting evidence to support current literature and research, and outlining recommendations to address the research problem. A policy recommendation was made in response to the problem of school violence at this district. I found that there was a lack of consistent policies to address the school violence across the entire district; therefore, the district needed a unified policy. In addition, I found that the staff needed clarification and professional development on school violence policies, as well as recommendations for a violence prevention program because one did not exist in this school district.

Review of the Literature

The focus of this literature review is on the issue of school violence as it pertains to preventing and combatting its existence in the school climate. According to Espelage (2015), “School violence and bullying are two public health concerns with consequences for youth in and out of school, for families, students, and community members” (p. 4). Over the years, K-12 education has dealt with academic challenges. These challenges are being addressed. Yet, it was not until the Columbine shootings in 1999 that educators shifted their attention to violence in schools. There are just as many dedicated researchers who are concerned with violence, disruption, and safety in school as there are those who are concerned with academics.

In this literature review, I will examine three areas that will have a lasting impact on the school environment. The first point of information that will be explored is safety in school. However, race has led to many school administrators to wonder how to foster an

environment where all students feel safe. Therefore, research has been performed on how safe children feel based on their race. Another aspect of this review is on classroom management. Teachers are not always prepared for the realities of the classroom; therefore, programs have been implemented to support teachers who are facing challenges with their students. Finally, I discuss how to prevent youth violence in school environments.

Race and School Safety

Some juveniles in school do not feel safe based on their race. Lacoé (2014) discussed how school safety is an issue for children and explored how race plays into this dynamic. Lacoé surmised that safety and race is not explored as it relates to school children. There are school safety gaps when it comes to children and race in school. Racial and ethnic inequality is a part of the reason for this issue. Black students reported that they feel less safe in school in comparison to their White and Asian counterparts (Lacoé, 2014). For White, Hispanic and Asian students, there is less research significance in how they feel when it comes to safety in school. Lacoé stated that the issue of safety and race needs to be explored in more depth in order to present solutions that will make students feel safer in school based on their race and ethnicity.

Theriot and Ormet (2014) also discussed African American students and safety. According to Theriot and Ormet, African American students felt less safe in schools compared to other races of students. Even the President Obama decided that the implementation of school resource officers (SRO) in school was part of the solution to the problem (Theriot & Ormet, 2014). The role of the SRO was to bridge gaps between children feeling protected in schools and those who do not. However, Theriot and Ormet

explained that African American students may have less of a feeling of safety due to the negative connotation that the term officer has in the African American community.

However, they found that over 61% of students felt safer with the presence of the SROs in the learning environment (Theriot & Ormet, 2014).

Classroom Management

Managing disruptive behavior in a classroom is a challenge for some teachers.

There many interventions on how to best manage behavior in a class. SWPBIS has been one of the ways that teachers handle behavior crises in the classroom (Farmer, Reinke, & Brooks, 2014). SWPBIS has been an intervention method for the past 2 decades.

SWPBIS has made a significant impact on reducing disruptive behaviors in the classroom. It has also been an effective tool for teachers in their quest to manage classroom problems with students. This intervention strategy has sparked research into other tier models that can improve behavior problems in classrooms (Farmer et al., 2014).

There are three components to SWPBIS that help teachers to facilitate and monitor problem behavior. One of the components is the inclusion of school-wide rules to ensure consistency in reinforcing expectations of the school and not just the classroom. Another component is the collaboration of teachers, staff, and administrators in enforcing the rules and expectations. The third component is the teaching of positive reinforcement. This technique has proven to work in many situations (Farmer et al., 2014). Other educational organizations want to use this method as a foundation. All of the benefits of this method would motivate schools to implement it in their classrooms.

Gest, Madill, Zadzora, Miller and Rodkin (2014) also explored the issue of classroom management. Gest et al. focused on teachers from 54 classrooms and

classroom dynamics like behavior issues. Gest et al. examined teacher-student interaction, community building in schools, and other dynamics that impact the way students behave. In regards to behavioral dynamics, the teachers were observed by researchers in how they promoted prosocial behavior among aggressive students (Gest, et al., 2014). This study took on an interesting perspective in how teachers viewed behavior dynamics. According to Gest et al., most teachers suggested that the aggressive, mean behaviors of students were more notable than the students' social statuses. They believed that their role was to help them with aggression in the classroom and that students should deal with their own friendship and social status issues.

Other researchers continue to make classroom management a priority. Even with all of the effective strategies for classroom management, school officials have come to the realization that the methods will not work for everyone. Therefore, researchers are trying to find ways to reach the students who still have considerable behavior problems in the classroom. Reinke et al. (2014) believe that professional development sessions and other programs geared towards teacher training need to elevate their sessions and help teachers deal with complexities in the classroom. Their focus is on universal strategies for classroom management. One of the components that reiterate universal classroom management is behavior support. Offering behavior support for students have shown to decrease disruptive behavior (Reinke, 2014). The researchers also believe that teachers should be supported through coaching (Reinke et al., 2014). Both of these strategies have shown positive impact on disruptive behavior in the classroom.

Youth Violence Prevention

Classroom disruption can be a combination of different paradigms that are not always associated with violence. However, youth violence is a distraction in school, and researchers are trying to find ways to curb violent incidents. When youth get involved in serious crimes, the outcomes are inclined to have imminent implications (Fagan and Catalano, 2012). Youth are also more inclined to become violent than adults. The onset of violence includes a school environment (Fagan and Catalano, 2012). This research provided information on “what works” when curbing this kind of behavior. Research shows that children are more likely to become violent during their middle to late adolescent years. This would suggest that middle school is where it starts (Fagan and Catalano, 2012). There are precursors to violent behavior, and experts have adapted what is called a science prevention method. The point of this intervention is to propose that if violence is a developmental behavior, then there are ways to prevent the trajectory of it developing to the point where it is harder to abstain from (Fagan and Catalano, 2012).

Another way to prevent youth violence in schools is the use of resiliency (Phillips, Turner, and Holt, 2014). This research uses a sample of 307 school principals in observing how school resiliency can be a solution to less violence in schools. The study surmised that schools are more reactive than proactive in using resiliency as an intervention (Phillips, Turner, and Holt, 2014). Resiliency research is fairly new at the organizational level, but has been part of discussions at the individual level. This is due to it not being systematically understood. Resiliency focuses on withstanding the pressure of vulnerable environments. Resiliency is not considered an ideal intervention due to individual classrooms. However, researchers find that there is hope in organizational

resiliency and exploring how schools are becoming more proactive in their position on violence (Phillips, Turner, and Holt, 2014).

Consequently, it is disconcerting that there is not a lot of research conducted on the security measures from security in school and their impact on reducing violence (Servoss, 2014). Servoss (2014) decided to analyze the impact that increased security has on youth violence in school. There were two questions addressed in the research, “What are the characteristics of students served in high-security schools relative to those served in low-security schools? What is the relationship between school security and student misbehavior” (Servoss, 2014)? The findings concluded that most of these schools serve underperforming schools, which is a significant factor. However, more importantly race played a factor in this study and showed that African American students demonstrated more violent behavior in high security schools. Further research suggests looking at other reasons as to why this dynamic occurs. Nonetheless, the bigger issue is that high security does not always equate to less violence and better behavior.

Madfis (2014) also took into consideration different ways of reducing youth violence in schools. His research focused on rampage attacks like Columbine and similar incidents since 1999. In the study teachers, administrators, and police officers were interviewed. Amid this kind of violence is a code of silence that students engage in. The goal to avert this kind of violence is to break the code of silence. If students know about any acts of violence that will happen, school officials want to create environments where the students trust that there would be no repercussions from breaking the code. A lot of students do not come forward and the ones who do, report in order to protect themselves and not others (Madfis, 2014). Researchers believe that this code needs to be penetrated.

Unfortunately, this is still a topic that needs further research to filter how to handle this situation. Researchers call it a daunting task (Madfis, 2014). However, what has been done is the categorizing of students who are in situations where they honored the code. Profiling these students is a start to understanding why they respond the way they do (Madfis, 2014). Overall, youth violence on this level may take a bit more time to tackle, but the research is promising.

Conclusion

This study provided an exploration of evidence that focused on three dynamics that are plaguing schools. Ultimately it is up to the educational community to find ways that will foster learning environments that are conducive to the safety of students. As most of the researchers suggested, there is still so much research to do on violence and disruptive students as a whole. This literature review does prove that research is being performed in order to rectify these issues. While more needs to be done, this is a promising starting point.

Project Description

The project developed from the research collected and analyzed is a policy recommendation. The implementation and details of the actual project into the researched school district will be outlined and described in Appendix A. Based on the themes that emerged from the data analysis, the recommendation will be to implement a school-wide positive behavior intervention support (SWPBIS) program that will address the problem of school violence in this district. SWPBIS is a framework designed to use evidence-based interventions to meet students' social and emotional needs through the use of reinforcement-based and proactive approaches (Collins, Hawkins, & Nabors, 2016).

Adopting this type of program in the studied district will suffice the need for a district wide violence prevention program as well as promote consistency since all schools in this district will be using the same framework. In addition, staff will be trained and receive professional development on implementing this program which will satisfy another need that the data revealed.

The responsibility of students involved in this project will demand their participation as well as the normal expectations involved with their behavior in a school day. Responsibility also lies on the school district to provide staff the professional development training necessary to be updated on the laws and policies of school safety and violence as well as the violence prevention program. Staff also has the responsibility of putting forth their best effort and cooperation in accepting a unified violence prevention program and policies. This would entail the staff's motivation to acknowledge, learn, and implement the goals and procedures of the program and policies. This would require the support of all parties involved because collaboration is always the key to success with any program especially one that involves making a positive impact in a student's life.

On the other hand, the cooperation of administrators and staff in the district is a potential barrier. Any stakeholders including board members, administrators, and/or staff could show resistance in adopting any new programs and policies due to the nature of change itself or the unwillingness to learn something new or hesitation to devote money, time, or effort to embrace a new program and policies. Therefore the proposal for implementation would be immediate or at the stakeholder's discretion which might be prolonged if starting a new program would be more beneficial at the start of a new school

year. In addition, a timeline would also be at the stakeholder's discretion because professional development days would have to be planned throughout the course of the school year.

Project Evaluation

The evaluation method that will be used in this project will be a summative method because it will be an outcome-based evaluation. This method will be focused on achieving the project's goals. A survey will be utilized to assess the expected outcomes of the project. This survey will be given to the entire staff in the school district and will be a school climate survey. The survey will seek to determine if the goals of the project were reached and if the overall school climate has improved. A school climate survey is already administered to the staff in this district and the data can be analyzed by administrators in the district and at specific schools. This school climate survey is given to staff yearly via email. Once the data is collected annually, it can be analyzed by the administrators and/or the researcher to determine if the goals of the project were achieved. This will give the stakeholders and the researcher an opportunity to gauge the effectiveness of the project.

In addition, the researcher can analyze the data in the HIB reports that are compiled by the school district and submitted to the state. These reports detail the number of occurrences from each school in the district that had a harassment, intimidation, and/or bullying incident. This can be another evaluation tool that can analyze the success of the project. These reports are submitted yearly and the data can be analyzed to see if the frequency of violence has decreased since the onset of the violence prevention program.

Project Implications

This research project could have an abundant amount of social change implications. First and foremost, this study will promote social change and development because it is addressing the needs of the students in this school district. After a problem was identified in this school district, research was conducted to positively impact students through effective violence prevention strategies. These strategies could in turn lead to an increase in student achievement due to a more positive school climate. Upon implementation, this study should also prompt the stakeholders of various school districts to provide professional development training for educators to advance the idea and components of school violence prevention. Addressing school safety professional development may allow teachers to make more of a positive impact on the social and emotional development of their students.

The importance of the project could be further advantageous to local stakeholders and the larger context. Local stakeholders that include administrators, school board members, the community, etc. could see a decline in violent acts in school that would positively affect the community as a whole since acts of violence in school would not spill over into the community after school ends. A decline in school violence could also increase student attendance since students would be safer in schools and which would in turn have a positive effect on student achievement. If student achievement increases in a school district, report card grades, state mandated tests, and overall student knowledge could increase which would raise property values in the community. In addition, neighboring communities could utilize the recommended policy to address school violence in their own district.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Introduction

In this section, I will give an in-depth analysis of the research process by reflecting upon the progression of this paper and offer conclusions to further develop future studies. I will reflect on the project's strengths and limitations and present a policy recommendation, as well as a discussion of alternative approaches to conducting research in this topic. I will discuss the importance of the work conducted throughout this study and the conclusions learned from the reflective analysis of the researcher as a scholar, practitioner, and project developer. This reflection will also include implications, applications, and directions for future research that will lead to various conclusions within the scope of school violence.

Project Strengths, Limitations, and Recommendations

School violence affects many schools in the United States, including the district involved in this research. Therefore, I collected and analyzed data from the participants to determine their perceptions on school violence. Once these data were analyzed, a researched-based program of SWPBIS was chosen for this school district to address school violence. As a result, the policy recommendation was research-based and data-driven. This framework was designed to help students reach success in academics, life skills, and social skills by training staff on effective and efficient strategies that will minimize classroom disruptions and decrease school violence. Horner, Sugai, and Lewis (2015) explained that SWPBIS is founded on data-based decision making and research-based practices in regard to school-wide and classroom management behavior.

A strength of the policy recommendation is that every child can benefit from having a positive school atmosphere in which to learn and feel comfortable. Cumming (2016) stated, “The PBIS framework includes a broad range of strategies intended to build a positive environment for all students” (p. 1). Teachers will feel empowered and confident to deliver behavior interventions that are district-approved and designed to meet the needs of their students. Having faculty dedicated to fostering a warm and nurturing situation will encourage social skills and develop a better learning environment. In addition, the recommended policy will allow the district to set forth a consistent program to address school violence amongst all schools. Farmer, Reinke, & Brooks (2014) stated, “SWPBIS provides a framework to promote both consistency and collaboration across teachers, administrators, and related services personnel” (p. 67). Having a consistent program for teachers to use to prevent and combat school violence will address the concerns brought to light in the data analysis. This policy recommendation is designed to use the data analysis results to address the problem.

Limitations include the willingness of the school district to devote the resources to gain the input from the students, teachers, administrators, and parents to develop a unified approach to combat school violence. Even though researchers have supported the value of opinions in developing a solution to a problem, the stakeholders in the district may not support this research. The district may not value the opinions of the faculty and students in addressing this issue. The stakeholders could use their own opinions and archived data of violent incidences to create a solution. On the other hand, the stakeholders in the district may value the input of their staff and students, but not be able to allocate the funds to purchase a survey questionnaire from a research company. This also may create

legal issues of surveying students due to their protected rights as participants under the age of 18. Developing the district's own questionnaire may not be an option either if stakeholders want to use a valid and reliable questionnaire. In addition, time could impede gathering data if the district does not have a staff member who can devote time to collect data or if a program needs to be implemented in response to a mandate or incident.

Another limitation is the cooperation of the teachers and administrators to ensure that school discipline policies are adopted and implemented. This includes the collaboration of the teachers and administrators to work together with the same mindset so behavior is addressed consistently. The enthusiasm of the faculty across the entire district to understand and correctly implement the prevention and intervention recommendations are vital to its success. This includes the enthusiasm of the faculty who may not agree with the district's choice of programs. Teachers and administrators may limit the success of a chosen program by expressing their negative opinions about it to students, which could affect the integrity of the program and the respect students may develop towards following a program. Without the cooperation and collaboration of all faculty in the district to consistently implement the chosen behavior programs, decreasing school violence will not be achievable.

Most researchers have presented alternative approaches to address the problems and solutions surrounding a topic. I could have chosen a mixed-methods study instead of a qualitative case study to address the problem of school violence. This would have entailed using archived data from a questionnaire such as an Olweus survey and/or a

school climate report in order to gain access to more participants and allow the results to be more generalized to represent the population.

Another approach to the problem of school violence could have been to analyze the issue of bullying to zone in on the particular behavior within school violence. In addition, I could have focused on one school rather than the district as a whole. This approach may have concluded varying results because of the different variables that pertain to each school. Also, the age of students could be addressed through an alternative approach due to the nature of elementary and high school differences amongst students in regard to school violence.

Reflective Scholarship and Project Analysis

As a researcher, reflecting on all aspects of the project is vital and will allow conclusions to develop about the learning process in its entirety. My learning was enhanced by reading, analyzing, and synthesizing the information contained in peer-reviewed articles that were used to write literature reviews. This allowed me the opportunity to gain knowledge on this topic to broaden the scope of understanding. This study has given me a better understanding of the various aspects surrounding school violence, the negative effects from school violence, and the potential positive impact from combatting violence.

Personal learning and growth also occurred during the research and development of the project. As a scholar, practitioner, and project developer, I learned the skill of patience. Patience is a virtue that educators need to employ and promote to their students through modeling and teaching. The key to continuing and enduring this 5-year journey

of dissertation writing was not only patience but perseverance to stay focused on the goal of completion even in the midst of lack of time and stress.

As a scholar, the importance of life-long learning cannot be emphasized enough. Although the desire to never stop learning is vital, this research has solidified the importance of always being a scholar. Learning and having a dedication to the process of learning, irrelevant to the topic at hand, is an essential mindset in life. Being a scholar and life-long learner will inspire students through modeling to become scholars and become more dedicated to their learning.

As a practitioner, staying focused on the consistency in the field of education is valuable. Educators know the importance of consistent policies, routines, schedules, and expectations in regards to student learning and development. This research study confirmed the positive impact of the need for consistency in policies and prevention programs to address school violence. In addition, it is vital to remember that as a practitioner, I need to ground my practices in effective learning theories. As the world constantly changes, practitioners need to remain informed on current learning theories and data-driven research. This study was a great opportunity to learn how to analyze and synthesize current research articles in order to address problems affecting schools today.

As a project developer, the importance of organization and developing a clear vision is vital. Staying organizing in all aspects of how is very valuable, however as a project developer, organizing research articles as well as one's own writing is important. Organization can also help a project develop achieve their vision of completing a research project. A project developer must use their organizational skills and clear vision

to outline every stage of a research project while also staying unbiased and not having perceived notions of the research outcomes.

A reflection on the importance of the work will allow the researcher the opportunity to gain insight into the learning experience and share this newfound knowledge with stakeholders, colleagues, parents, and students. The researcher has gained knowledge within this topic both from the literature reviews and the research of the study. Throughout this study, it has become clear that school violence is a problem in many schools across America and the district in this study. This research study could aid this school district in an attempt to combat school violence and develop preventative ways to address violence. Other school districts could adapt this policy recommendation in a similar manner to help the issue of school violence in their district.

Implications for Future Research

This research has the potential for social change in various ways. First and foremost, adopting the policy recommendation to address school violence could decrease acts of violence in the school environment leading to a safer school climate. Having a more positive school atmosphere due to less violence could increase student attendance due to the fact that students might feel more inclined to attend school because they feel safer and less threatened. In addition, a positive school environment could lead to increased academic learning. Students could feel more apt to increase their focus and concentration on academics rather than protecting themselves or finding ways to combat bullying or other acts of violence.

Parents and staff could also feel the positive impact of adopting this policy recommendation by having their children in a safe learning environment. Teachers would

be educated and trained on the district's school violence prevention program and the policies on how to address acts of violence in their classroom. This would allow teachers to focus on academic teaching which could increase productivity instead of the frustrations of violence and the inconsistent discipline procedures.

The recommendation for future recommendations would be continuous evaluation of the implemented behavior intervention program. The use of surveys, interviews, walk-throughs, observations, etc. will help collect data to analyze the challenges and successes of the programs in place and/or ones needed. This will ensure the needs of the students, teachers, and administrators are being met through gathering their perceptions about the school environment. In addition, professional development should be conducted yearly to properly train faculty in any changes or variations that may need to be adapted based on collected data.

Conclusion

This study was designed in hopes to bring light to an issue facing many schools throughout the United States. The topic of school violence needs to be at the forefront of discussion in schools today because it directly or indirectly impacts students, teachers, administrators, parents, and the community. Therefore it is my desire to continue with this research and put it into practice. As the author of this study, a meeting will be scheduled with the administrators and school board to discuss the possibility of utilizing the data and recommendations in this study. As the researcher and driving force behind social change in this district, I would like to volunteer time, energy, and knowledge to help the district develop an action plan to bring this research to fruition. In addition, I

would like to have a position in the leadership team and a role in educating staff about school violence and training staff in SWPBIS.

School violence has the possibility to negatively affect the world in endless ways since we are all connected as social beings. The relationships we develop with one another often begin in school and last throughout our lives. Thus as educators we have a responsibility to address school violence since the best interest of our youth is at stake. Even as human beings we should have the desire to set forth a path of guidance for our next generations to succeed together with one another. I hope this paper has a positive influence on stakeholders in any capacity to strive to make our world a better place.

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A Policy Recommendation to Address School Violence

Created by Jessica Anderson

A Project Study for Walden University

Introduction

A problem with school violence was identified at a school district in the southeastern section of New Jersey. Thus, a research project was designed in response to this topic in order to address the problem facing this school district. The project was developed using current research and focused on the needs of the population in this district. A policy recommendation was chosen as the project genre due to the data analysis derived from the research. This was the most appropriate genre for this research due to the lack of current policies and programs in place in this school district.

This policy recommendation will outline the problem facing this school district and the analysis of the data collected pertaining to this problem. In addition, recommendations will be made on how to identify, implement and evaluate the chosen program in order to address the issue facing this school district. The chosen program in response to this research is the school wide positive behavior intervention support (SWPBIS). This is a “framework comprised of intervention practices and organizational systems for establishing the social culture, learning and teaching environment, and individual behavior supports needed to achieve and social success for all students (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). This is the recommended approach to address the school violence that exists in the district in this case study because research has shown that SWPBIS improves school climate, student learning, and social behavior through a tier leveled system designed to reach all levels of school violence (Ross, Romer, & Horner, 2012).

The Problem

Among the issues facing school districts in America today, school violence is a critical one. Espelage (2015) stated that “Bullying and school violence in general and their aftermath continue to be significant problems for students, teachers, staff, and schools. Thus, there continues to be many pressing issues in the research literature on school violence and bullying” (p. 4). Current research is inundated with the topics surrounding violence among school age children. There are various journals devoted to school violence and an abundant number of peer reviewed articles focused on preventing school violence as well as interventions to combat violence in the school environment.

There are a plethora of problems that surround the issue of school violence that school districts need to address. One of those problems is the existence of school violence in the school climate that negatively impacts student achievement. Research shows that a high rate of violence in a neighborhood has detrimental effects on student achievement and that neighborhood violence is often linked to high rates of school violence (Lacoe, 2015). Servoss (2014) found that low achievement in math and reading is related to all types of misbehavior and also related to a high security level which in turn is an indicator of high levels of school violence. McIntosh, Ty, & Miller (2014) explain that “students in classrooms without critical features of SWPBIS spent significantly more time engaged in off-task behaviors (e.g., disrupting the class, talking inappropriately).” Reinke, Hormont, & Stormont (2013) explained that “when students are engaged in academic instruction, they have higher levels of achievement. Therefore, finding ways to improve engagement in instruction can prevent problem behaviors in the classroom and increase academic achievement (p. 41).” Since the district in this study does not have a violence prevention program in place like SWPBIS, time is often spent on discipline instead of academic

instruction. A decrease in academic learning time effects student achievement and is a problem that could be rectified with the features of a violence prevention program such as SWPBIS.

As a teacher in this studied school, professional development is not offered annually on school violence so the staff does not know the most current legislation on school violence. One mandated professional development was given a few years ago by the district's attorney to explain the new state laws on violence and information regarding Harassment, Intimidation, and Bullying (HIB). However, this was a two hour training that took place in an auditorium with all the district teachers and no follow up training was offered that year or to date. This poses a problem for teachers who may have questions regarding the new laws to address school violence and the district's most current policy to handle violence. Teachers in this district are not up to date on the most current national, state, and local laws and polices surrounding violence in the school environment. This is a problem that could affect teachers, students, parents, and the community due to the fact that teachers are uninformed and not trained about current legislation.

In addition to not receiving professional development on current legislation, teachers are not offered training on a district approved violence prevention program or strategies to combat violence in the classroom that could subdue negative behaviors. Reinke, Herman, and Stormont (2013) explained that "teachers indicate that they consider classroom management to be the most challenging aspect of their job and one in which they receive the least amount of training" (p. 39). A lack of training in this area can foster negative behaviors that lead to more school violence in the classroom as well

as other times throughout the school day. The participants in this study expressed concern that teachers need to be consistent with a unified violence prevention program so all students are, aware of, and receive the same consequences for violent behavior. In addition, the participants felt that the consistency in a violence prevention program should not only pertain to a school but rather the entire district due to the transient population in the city. Often students move from one area of town to another and the district should have consistent programs and policies in place so students can transition easily to a new school by knowing the expectations and consequences are the same.

The reason professional development does not address school violence in this school district is because there is no defined violence prevention program adopted by the district. Schools are left to create their own program or piece meal character education values that the principal or individual teachers deem necessary to implement. Thus, schools are not following a program or even a guiding set of values that the district wants each school to implement. This leaves each school or in many cases, each teacher to design their own type of violence prevention program to combat violence and disruptive behaviors in their class. Unfortunately, this can also leave some teachers with no implementation of violence prevention strategies which could result in an increase of disruptive behavior and provide an opportunity for violence to occur.

Not only is there not a district wide violence prevention program but the district does not have a consistent policy to prevent violence and to deal with violence. In this study, participants expressed concern that administrators were not consistent when dealing with disruptive and violent behaviors. This created a problem because teachers and students were often frustrated when too little or too much punishment was given to

students. In addition, administrators might not have been using the best practices and policies to deal with school violence. Often when negative student behavior or violence is present in the school environment, schools respond with reactive approaches such as zero tolerance policies, increasing security personnel and surveillance, and excluding students from academic learning time with removal from class or school. This management through negative reinforcement, although may have short term success with the cease of violence, will most likely not prevent future occurrences of negative student behavior. The alternative is implementing policies and a violence prevention program such as SWPBIS that will successfully address problem behavior with an emphasis on proactive approaches such as positive reinforcement, directly taught and practiced socially accepted behaviors.

The Analysis

In this study, lack of consistency is a problem due to the fact that the district does not have a clear and defined policy to address school violence nor an implemented district wide violence prevention program. Phillips, Turner, and Holt (2014) found that schools with policies that were generally consistent within the school environment such as uniforms, ID cards, dress code, etc. were more resilient against a serious violent occurrence despite the heightened risk of violence that the school experiences. This data suggests that stakeholders need to be careful in choosing the policies set in place to combat violence because as noted within this study, the consistency of policies that affect the students directly such as uniforms, discipline, ID cards, etc. discourage school violence more so than the policies affecting outsiders like signing in to school at the main office, locked doors, video camera security systems, etc.

As discussed in the above section, teachers do not know the protocol and policies in this district on how to properly and effectively handle school violence. This can be frustrating to teachers when dealing with negative student behaviors because without knowledge of proper protocol and implementation of a violence prevention program, teachers are forced to use their own strategies that may not be district supported and/or effective. Ross, Romer, and Horner (2012) found that teachers in low economic teaching environments felt the practices of SWPBIS greatly increased their feelings of effectiveness and emotional resources they had at their disposal especially in situations where teachers felt overwhelmed.

Cumming (2016) explained that teachers are required to promote a safe and supportive learning environment “however, many teachers feel that they have not received satisfactory preservice instruction in the area of managing student behavior, and feel ill prepared to adequately handle the serious and severe behavior sometimes exhibited by their students” (p. 1). Thus, educators need annual professional development in order to prepare them for negative student behavior. Annual training of teachers in this area will allow the district to continue to prepare teachers for school violence issues as well as provide the opportunity to evaluate the district’s policies and programs. Utilizing an annual professional development focused on the district’s violence prevention program and policies will create a time for staff to reflect. This reflection should then be shared with all stakeholders responsible for making decisions about school violence policies and programs.

It is imperative that teachers are not only aware of the district’s violence prevention program but are properly trained to implement such a program. Reinke et al.

(2014) stated that “there is a need for interventions that focus on building teachers’ knowledge and skills to promote the use of effective strategies that are developmentally appropriate and supportive of children’s emotional and behavioral growth” (p. 75). This supports the notion that teachers need professional development and training to learn the effective strategies to combat school violence. Annual professional development on national, state, and district laws and policies should be incorporated into the district’s yearly professional development schedule as well as training on the district’s violence prevention program.

It is important to note that administration needs to collaborate with teachers to create consistent and effective safety initiatives as well as utilize professional development to train teachers. McIntosh, Kim, Mercer, Strickland-Cohen, and Horner (2015) found that in order for students to have access to evidence-based practices, specifically, implementing school-wide positive behavioral interventions, all district stakeholders need to collaborate before, during, and after professional development in order to have successful policies and programs regarding school violence. McIntosh, Kim, Mercer, Strickland-Cohen, and Horner (2015) stated that “By sharing data frequently with school staff, the school team may enhance not just data-based decision making but also the priority of the practice for staff and administrators and strengthen perceptions that implementation leads to valued outcomes” (p. 188). Utilizing collaboration between all stake holders in a district will create policies and programs from teachers actually dealing with the issue of school violence. After all district teachers receive professional development training, the sustained implementation of these policies

will be more likely to occur. This will allow teachers to properly implement policies and programs as well as not have districts abandon these programs.

Recommendations

Identifying a Program

There is an increasing trend of nearly 14, 000 schools implementing programs to address school violence such as the school wide positive behavioral and intervention supports (SWPBIS). Research has shown that a universal system like SWPBIS is effective when designed to decrease disruptive student behaviors and promote prosocial behavior (Reinke, Herman, & Stormont, 2013). These two areas of limiting negative student behavior and increasing positive behavior are in need in the school district in this study as outlined in the problem and analysis section.

The framework for SWPBIS is comprehensive to meet the needs of all students in the studied district as well as the needs of the district as a whole. The framework encompasses six characteristics: preventative, evidence-based, systems implementation focused, function-based, culturally responsive, and instructionally oriented (U.S. Dept of Ed, 2010). Freeman et al. (2016) explained that SWPBIS is a potentially effective framework for addressing student behavior and improving attendance, behavior, and academic outcomes as well as significant indicators of school effectiveness and long-term student outcomes. Therefore SWPBIS is a program that is a viable option for the district in this study.

SWPBIS focuses on shifting managing student behavior from reactive and aversive to preventative and positive by using data from the district, the school, staff, students, etc. to create a framework to address school violence and disruptive student

behavior. Franzen and Kamps (2008) described that research similar to SWPBIS indicated an overall positive effect on elementary schools' climate with a 40% reduction in the number of suspensions in a two year period. They also found that using data-driven decision making and implementing the effective strategies of the SWPBIS such as establishing school expectations, teaching behavior lesson plans, and using precorrection, and redirects, could decrease disruptive student behavior.

Implementing your Program

Implementation of SWPBIS is a multi-step process. The goal of the first step is to provide the vision, leadership, and resources necessary to successfully execute the strategies at a school level. This implementation step is accomplished through establishing a school leadership team. In this case study, the district already has in place school leadership teams that collaborate to improve school performance on state report cards and state mandated assessments. These existing school leadership teams could create the vision and leadership as well as act as the liaison to provide teachers with the resources necessary to implement SWPBIS.

Implementation of the SWPBIS model matches interventions to the needs of the students by utilizing a three tiered system designed to address behaviors that impede student learning. Tier I is a primary prevention level implemented school-wide that encourages appropriate behaviors in all students and attempts to prevent problem behaviors. Tier II is a secondary prevention level designed to address the problem behaviors of students who do not respond to tier I school-wide supports with need specific interventions. Tier III is a tertiary prevention level created for a small percentage of students suffering from behavioral and emotional issues who need intensive

interventions because they are not responding to tier I or tier II supports (Collins, Hawkins, & Nabors, 2016).

Even though there are three tiers in the SWPBIS framework to support the range of student needs, most students will only need the core features of tier I that promote social responsibility. The school leadership team would develop a brief number of school wide expectations that were positively worded and posted in the school with a matrix that provided specific examples. These expectations would be taught explicitly targeted lessons, demonstrations in settings where school violence might occur, and practice using taught behavior. Also, reinforcement of positive behaviors is strategic with descriptive feedback and sometimes external rewards. In this tier, there are also consequences for violating the expectations that would be developed by the school leadership team. This would include collecting, entering, and analyzing student discipline data to guide decision making, examine patterns, and modify practices to increase effectiveness and efficiency (Andreou, McIntosh, Ross, & Kahn, 2015).

Lambert, Tingstrom, Sterling, Dufrene, & Lynne (2015) found that promoting positive behavior in schools is most effective using evidence-based interventions within SWPBIS such as tootling, a technique that teaches students to report peers' prosocial behaviors. The researchers noted that tootling was most viable as a tier I or tier II intervention where high levels of disruptive behaviors exist in the classroom. Utilizing interventions within SWPBIS can be beneficial to some classrooms in the studied district that exhibit an increase in disruptive behaviors because the implementation of SWPBIS is tailored to meet the needs of the students, teachers, and needs of the learning environment.

When it comes to implementation of SWPBIS, the training and coaching is particularly beneficial to improving academic achievement. Marin and Filce (2013) found that teachers that received training and on-site coaching were more knowledgeable in behavioral strategies that were needed to combat classroom disruptions and allowed them to increase instructional time. Thus the researchers explained that teachers who spent less time dealing with disruptive behavior, gained more instructional time and had students that had better results on high-stake tests. In addition, the authors suggested that implementation of SWPBIS not only increases academic achievement, but consequently decreases drop-out rates and increases graduation rates in problem schools such as some urban districts. Since the district in this study is an urban school district, the implementation of SWPBIS would be beneficial as well as incorporating the continuing training and on-site coaching of teachers on SWPBIS.

The U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (2010) outlined eleven guidelines to consider for implementation of SWPBIS:

- Implementation is interactive and informing.
- Implementation involves stakeholders at multiple levels.
- Implementation occurs in phases.
- Sustainable implementation requires continuous regeneration.
- Implementation success is based on multiple criteria.
- Implementation selects scalable evidence-based practice.
- Practices must be implemented with integrity.
- Policy and practice inform each other.

- Implementation is systemic.
- Implementation decisions are based on responsiveness to intervention.
- Implementation is team-based, strategic, action planning process (page 27).

Thus, the process for implementing the SWPBIS framework would focus on the problem of school violence by meeting the needs of the students in the district in this study.

Evaluating your Program

The evaluation process should be developed by an internal coach such as the leadership team with the purpose of examining the extent to how staff is accurately selecting and implementing the SWPBIS framework, determining the impact of targeted student outcomes, and monitoring the extent to how the leadership team is accurately and consistently implementing the action plan (Freeman, 2016). This would require the leadership team to create an assessment plan that has general and specific evaluation questions to gauge all aspects of the measurable outcomes that consist of multiple sources of data. Then, the data needs to be analyzed to develop an action plan that focuses on the effectiveness of the desired outcomes. As a result, the implemented practices might need to be altered and progress will be monitored.

The evaluation process needs to be not only a consistent and on-going process, but the information collected and analyzed from the evaluation needs to be compiled in an annual report. This yearly report needs to be a formal dissemination of key implementation outcomes to all stakeholders such as the staff, administration, parents, students, board members, and the community. The evaluation report should focus primarily on intervention integrity and student responsiveness and outcomes (U.S. Dept of Ed, 2010). In addition, the leadership team should meet quarterly to engage in an on-

going evaluation process that will disseminate information to stakeholders as well. This evaluation information will focus on acknowledgement of outcomes and accomplishments.

While evaluating the SWPBIS framework, Andreou, McIntosh, Ross, & Kahn (2015) found that critical variables such as staff buy-in, active administrator support, external expertise, teaming, and the use of data affected the sustainability of SWPBIS. Whereas, Turri et al. (2016) found that “barriers such as the philosophical opposition of staff members to SWPBIS, competing initiatives already occurring within the school, and staff turnover frequently present great challenges to the sustainability of practices within schools” (p. 10). Therefore, it is important that school districts design evaluation methods to assess these crucial components of the SWPBIS because they are connected to the effectiveness of implementation.

Appendix B: Letter of Cooperation for the District

To Mr. Spaventa:

My name is Jessica Anderson and I am a teacher at Sovereign Avenue Elementary School. I am conducting research as a requirement of Walden University for a Doctorate in Administrative Leadership for Teaching and Learning.

To conduct my research, I am inviting certified classroom teachers to volunteer for an interview regarding their perceptions and experiences of school violence. Follow-up interviews may need to be conducted with a smaller sample from the original participant pool to clarify participant responses. The participation from the individuals in this study will be completely voluntary and at their own discretion. The information collected will remain entirely confidential and may not be provided to anyone outside of the research team without permission from the Walden University Institutional Review Board.

Your responsibility in this study includes granting permission to conduct this study entitled, Teachers' Perceptions of School Violence: A Case Study. Your permission will authorize me to recruit participants via the district email, collect data from participants via interviews on school grounds, member check with possible follow up interviews to verify participant responses, and disseminate results by sharing my results with yourself as the Superintendent of Schools.

Your responsibility in this study is limited and only includes permission to use the district's email system for recruiting participants and to conduct the interviews on school grounds and not during academic learning time. You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time if the circumstances change. There will be no compensation provided to the school district, you or the teacher participants in the study other than my appreciation to the district for allowing my educational research to be granted at the district's schools. I will share my study at the end of the project so that the district will learn the results of my research.

This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at Walden University. If you have any questions or comments about this study, please contact me via email at Jessica.anderson@waldenu.edu or by phone at 609-442-8153.

Sincerely,

Jessica Anderson

Appendix C: Letter of Cooperation for Administrators

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Jessica Anderson and I am a teacher at Sovereign Avenue Elementary School. I am conducting research as a requirement of Walden University for a Doctorate in Administrative Leadership for Teaching and Learning.

To conduct my research, I am inviting certified classroom teachers to volunteer for an interview regarding their perceptions and experiences of school violence. Follow-up interviews may need to be conducted with a smaller sample from the original participant pool to clarify participant responses. The participation from the individuals in this study will be completely voluntary and at their own discretion. The information collected will remain entirely confidential and may not be provided to anyone outside of the research team without permission from the Walden University Institutional Review Board.

Your responsibility in this study includes granting permission to recruit participants in this study entitled, Teachers' Perceptions of School Violence: A Case Study. Your permission will authorize me to recruit participants at your school via the district email, collect data from participants via interviews in your building, and member check with possible follow up interviews to verify participant responses.

Your responsibilities in this study are limited and only include permission and the use of a classroom for interviews if needed not during academic learning time. You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time if the circumstances change. There will be no compensation provided to you or the teacher participants in the study other than my appreciation to you for allowing my educational research to be granted at your facility. I will share my study at the end of the project with the Superintendent of Schools so the district will learn the results of my research.

If you have any questions or comments about this study, please contact me via email at Jessica.anderson@waldenu.edu or by phone at 609-442-8153.

Sincerely,

Jessica Anderson

Appendix D: Consent Letter

Consent letter for participants in research study titled:

Teachers' Perceptions of School Violence: A Case Study

My name is Jessica Anderson and I am a teacher at Sovereign Avenue Elementary School. For this study, my role is as a researcher and not as a teacher. I am conducting research as a requirement of Walden University for a Doctorate in Administrative Leadership for Teaching and Learning.

To conduct my research, I am inviting certified classroom teachers to volunteer for an interview regarding their perceptions and experiences about school violence. Some examples of interview questions include occurrences with school violence, how school violence may or may not affect a teaching position, an opinion of school violence as it relates to the district and each school, etc. This one on one interview will be 45-60 minutes and conducted by me as the researcher in the participant's classroom or in a quiet location chosen by the participant. Follow-up interviews of approximately 10-30 minutes may or may not need to be conducted to clarify participant responses. Your permission will authorize me to collect data from your interview, member check with a follow up interview, and disseminate results with each participant and the Superintendent.

Your participation as a subject in this study will be completely voluntary and at your own discretion. The information collected will remain entirely confidential by protecting participants' names and may not be provided to anyone outside of the research team without permission from the Walden University Institutional Review Board. Also, the data will be kept in a secured location that no one but myself has access to. This data will be kept for five years after the completion of the study, and then shredded to maintain privacy.

Your responsibilities in this study are limited; however, you may experience some uneasiness discussing the issue of school violence and/or fatigue from taking part in an interview. You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without fear of penalties. There will be no compensation or benefit provided to you as a participant in the study other than my appreciation for engaging in my educational research. However, there will be a benefit to the larger community of possibly using this study's data to increase the effectiveness of the district's school violence program. I will share my study at the end of the project so that each participant and the district will learn the results of my research.

This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at Walden University and if you have questions about your rights as a participant, you can contact a Walden representative at 612-312-1210. If you have any questions or comments about this study,

please contact me via email at Jessica.anderson@waldenu.edu or by phone at 609-442-8153. You are encouraged to keep a copy of this consent form for your records.

Consent Statement

By signing this consent form, I agree to take part in the study titled, Teachers'

Perceptions of School Violence: A Case Study. I am fully aware of my rights as a human subject as well as the limitations and implications of this study. I am fully aware of what is expecting from me during this study and that I can withdraw from this study at any time.

Participant Name _____

Date _____

Participant Signature _____

Date _____

Researcher Signature _____

Date _____

Appendix E: Interview Questions

Participant _____ Date _____ School _____

Researcher Questions	Participant Responses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How long have you been a certified teacher in this district? Another district? Another state? 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What subject and/or grade do you currently teach? 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you think your position affects your experiences with school violence verse other positions within the district? 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you think this district has school violence? 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you think the occurrence of violence in this district warrants addressing the issue? 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you think different schools have differing amounts of violent incidences? 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you think your school has differing types of violent incidences? 	