An Analysis of Alabama School Systems' Policy on Student Bullying

by

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine the present status of bullying policies in Alabama and to compare local educational agency's (LEA's) policies with state and national guidelines. A secondary purpose was to identify districts that had exemplary policies and to discover what factors were involved in fostering their ability to create these policies. The researcher performed a content analysis of the policies using Alabama's *Student Harassment Act* and the U.S. Department of Education's identified key bullying policy components. Content analysis results revealed a majority (84%) of the policies were inclusive of all of Alabama's *Student Harassment Prevention Act* key components. No additional components were included in the construction of these policies. Further content analysis results indicated an insignificant number (.008%) of policies included the U.S. Department of Education identified 13 components suggested for use in formulating bullying policies. Only three systems out of the 131 policies analyzed were identified as exceeding the minimum criteria set by the Alabama Department of Education's model policy. Data collected during the interview process of the three systems exceeding minimum standards revealed three common distinct factors influencing policy development. These factors were committee diversity, seriousness of bullying, and high expectations.

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First, I would like to give praise to God for he alone truly knows the turbulent journey I have traveled to reach this milestone in my life. Life changes may occur, but God throws us a lifeline so that we may continue on our journey. I thank God for my strength and being the source of my strength. One of my favorite bible verses states "… weeping may endure for a night but joy cometh in the morning" (Psalm 30:5). I have had to hold tight to this belief many times in my life. Again, I would like to thank God for his ever presence in my life.

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CHAPTER I. NATURE OF THE STUDY

Introduction

Bullying has become widespread in schools throughout the nation (Coloroso, 2008;

Garett, 2003; Espelarge & Swearer, 2004). National media reports of retaliatory school violence

by students bullied by their peers have led to increased awareness of an age-old problem (Dake,

Price, Telljohann, & Frank, 2003; Denmark, Kruass, Wesner, Midlarsky, & Gielen, 2005; Garett,

2003; Geffner, Loring, & Young, 2001). A study by Nansel et al. (2001) indicated the

substantial prevalence of bullying among youth in the United States. He reported on the results

of the survey of 15,686 students in grades six through ten that were administered the *World

Health Organization's Health Behavior in School-aged Children Survey*. Results of the survey

indicated that 29.9% of the students reported moderate or frequent involvement in bullying.

Card and Hodges (2008) assessment of several studies revealed a 30% to 60% prevalence

rate of victimization of students during the school years. According to Galezewski (2005),

nearly 90% of middle school students reported being bullied during their elementary and middle

school years. Some experienced bullying as early as preschool and kindergarten. Reports from

the 2007 *School Crime Supplement to the National Crime Victimization Survey* indicated 62% of

students who reported being the victim of any crime at school also reported being bullied by their

peers (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010).

Bullying behaviors may have both short and long term effects on victims, perpetrators,

and bystanders. Withdrawal is a common reaction of bully victims. This can result in loneliness

and isolation. Absenteeism is usually high among bully victims. Avoiding school means

avoiding the bully (Sanders & Phye, 2004). Bully victims often struggle academically. The

daily fear of being attacked by the bully interferes with the victim's focus on academics

(Scaglione & Scaglione, 2006). The stress, fear, and worry of facing the bully diminish the

victim's ability to learn (Harris & Petrie, 2003). Bully victims also experience social and

personal development problems, emotional distress, depression, and lowered self-esteem (Harris

& Petrie, 2003; Scaglione & Scaglione, 2006). Severe cases of bullying can lead to desperate

measures such as homicide and suicide (Bonds & Stoker, 2000; Scaglione & Scaglione, 2006).

Bully victims often experience long-term effects of bullying. As they reach adulthood, bully

victims are more likely to be socially anxious, insecure, and depressed (U.S. Department of

Education, 1998).

    Perpetrators and bystanders can be affected by bullying behaviors. Bullies themselves

have been affected by bullying behaviors and as a result are at risk for short- and long-term

consequences. Bullies are more likely to experience conduct problems at school. They also

experience lower levels of school belonging among their peers and frequently participate in

delinquent behaviors (Sanders & Phye, 2004). Social and emotional problems plague the bully

(Lajore et al., 1997; Whitted & Dupper, 2005). Vandalism, shoplifting, truancy, and frequent

drug and alcohol abuse are all typical behaviors exhibited by the bully (Kevorkian & D'Antona,

2008). Bystanders — children who witness incidents of bullying — are negatively impacted as

well although they are not directly involved in the bullying behavior. Bystanders may

experience feelings of anxiety and guilt for not intervening in the bullying situation. This lack of

action can result in a lack of self-respect and confidence in the bystander. Continued observance

of bullying behaviors can result in a sense of personal powerlessness which can lead to a distinct

pattern of avoidance and inaction. In turn, bystanders may eventually become desensitized to the bully's behavior, resulting in a loss of empathy for the victim (Bonds & Stoker, 2000).

The public has been concerned with the school safety and the level of violence around school facilities for some time (Abernathy, 2007). Hence, the Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act was included in the federal legislation known as No Child Left Behind (Hayes, 2008). The provision of No Child Left Behind dealing with school security and drugs was included to alleviate the public's growing fear that schools were no longer a safe learning place (Hayes, 2008). According to Abernathy, "No Child Left Behind seeks to create a group of principals and teachers who focus on what really matters in education: maintaining a safe orderly environment" (pp. 128–129). As noted by Hayes (2008), the purpose of the Safe Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act is as follows:

> To support programs that prevent violence in and around schools; that prevent the illegal use of alcohol, tobacco and drugs; that involve parents and communities; and that are coordinated with related federal, state, school, and community efforts and resources to foster a safe and drug-free learning environment that supports student academic achievement. (p. 101)

The law provided opportunities for states, communities and school systems to obtain federal grant money to implement violence and drug prevention programs (Rozalski & Yell, 2004), which in turn would allow students to attend schools in academic environments best suited for learning (Hayes, 2008). School safety has been deemed an educational right for all students. Morrison, Furlong, D'Incau, and Morrison (2004) affirmed the belief that a safe school environment curtailed the number of threats to others and decreased incidences of violent behavior in and around school buildings. They further acknowledged that a safe school

environment nourished maximum growth and development of students. Therefore, public schools should all share the specific goal of providing a safe environment in which all students can be educated to their highest potential.

Bullying has left its mark on every state, including Alabama. In order to protect students in pre-Kindergarten through grade twelve, Alabama passed a bullying law entitled the Student Harassment Prevention Act. The purpose of the law was to provide for the adoption of policies in public school systems to prevent the harassment of students. The law only applied to student against student harassment, intimidation, violence, and threats of violence in Alabama public schools. The law required the state department of education to develop a model anti-harassment policy for school systems to use in the development of their local policy. Additionally, the law required that the affected student, or the parent or guardian of the affected student, file a written harassment complaint with the school in which the incident occurred (Student Harassment Prevention Act, 2009).

Although Alabama's goal was to protect its students, Bully Police USA, a nationally recognized organization that advocates for children who are bullied, gave the state a grade of B+ for its efforts to construct bullying legislation. Bully Police USA grades each state's anti-bullying law using the following guide:

- The word "bullying" must be used in the text of the bill/law/statute.
- The law must <u>clearly</u> be an anti-bullying law, not a school safety law.
- There must be definitions of bullying and harassment.
- There should be recommendations about how to make policy and what needs to be in the model policy.

- A good law involves education specialists at all levels, starting with the state superintendent's (education) office, through the school districts, schools, parents and students. Together they can define and set rules/policies, and find and implement the best anti bullying programs. Laws should require anti-bullying training and education for students and staff as well as prevention programs.

- A good law mandates anti bullying programs, not suggests programs.

- Laws should include a date the model policy is due, when the schools need to have their policies in place, (in keeping with the anti-bullying law requirements), and when the anti-bullying programs must be in effect.

- There must be protection against reprisal, retaliation or false accusation.

- There must be school district protection against lawsuits upon compliance to policies.

- A top rated law will put the emphasis on the victims of bullying by assigning counseling for victims who suffer for years after peer abuse.

- There must be accountability reports made to either Lawmakers or the state education superintendent and there must be a consequence assigned to schools/districts who don't comply with the law. There should be mandatory posting and/or notification of policies and reporting-form-procedures for students and parents.

- Cyberbullying or "Electronic Harassment" law. (Bully Police USA)

Bully Police USA had several specific concerns as it related to Alabama's bullying legislation. The law pertains "only to one student against another student" harassment and does not address teacher to student harassment or student to teacher harassment. The law also states that complaints must be written and submitted by the effected student or the student's parent. Very young children may not be able to comply with this requirement. According to Bully

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Police USA, the law also uses outdated terms such as "continuous pattern of intentional behavior" and outdated strategies such as peer mediation. The phrase in the law "prompt investigation of reports of serious violations and complaints" is a discretionary phrase. Each person may have a different belief of what is considered serious. The law also directs educators to develop a list of specific of specific personal student characteristics of students bullied. This implies a student may deserve to be bullied because of a specific personal characteristic.

In addition to the guidelines presented by Bully Police, the U.S. Department of Education compiled key policy components found in state bullying laws enacted through 2010. In response to technical assistance requested by state and local officials, educators, and policymakers, a guidance document titled *Ant-Bullying Policies: Examples of Provisions in State Laws* was released to stakeholders charged with the task of developing or revising anti-bullying legislation or policies. The document outlined the following components considered to be best elements needed for the development of effective bullying legislation and policies:

- Purpose Statement: Stated the effect bullying has on students, student learning, school safety, student engagement, and school environment.

- Statement of Scope: Encompassed conduct that occurs on the school campus, at school activities, on school transportation, and through technology owned by the school.

- Specification of Prohibited Conduct: Gave an easily understood definition of bullying to include cyberbullying. Complied with federal, state, and local laws.

- Enumeration of Specific Characteristics: Gave a description of characteristics of students historically targeted for bullying policies, but also made clear that bullying did not have to be based on a specific characteristic.

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- Development and Implementation of LEA Policies: Gave directives to LEAs to develop and implement bullying policies. Stated that the process should be collaborative with all stakeholders.

- Components of LEA Policies: Directed LEAs to provide a bullying definition that met the requirements of state law and included procedures for reporting, investigating, responding, and maintaining written records of incidents of bullying. Included detailed description of consequences for bullying and procedures for referring victims, perpetrators, and others to counseling and other appropriate services.

- Review of Local Policies: Provided for consistent state review of local policies.

- Communication Plan: Provided for the distribution of policy on bullying to all stakeholders.

- Training and Preventive Education: Directed school districts to provide training to all faculty and support staff on preventing, identifying, and responding to bullying.

- Transparency and Monitoring: Directed LEAs to report yearly the number of bullying incidents and school response to the state and to make bullying data available to the public.

- Statement of Rights to Other Legal Reverse: Included a clause that victims may seek other legal action (U.S. Department of Education, 2010d).

The U. S. Department of Education (2010) suggested that states incorporate the components of its document into the formulation of their laws and policies. The components gave detailed descriptions of information inclusive of effective law and policy formulation. The

Department theorized that detailed information promoted implementation with greater fidelity to the intent of the law.

Purpose of the Study

Bullying has affected students throughout the country, sometimes even resulting in suicide or homicide for those involved. Media coverage of such incidents has caused national concern prompting states to pass legislation to address this age-old problem. In 2009, Alabama passed its anti-bullying law entitled the Student Harassment Prevention Act. A component of the law directed the State Department of Education to develop a model anti-harassment policy to be utilized by the local education agencies in the development and adoption of their individual student harassment policies. The purpose of this study was to determine the present status of bullying policies in Alabama and to compare local educational agency's (LEA's) policies to state and national guidelines. A secondary purpose was to identify districts that had exemplary policies and to discover what factors were involved in fostering their ability to create these policies. Policies and regulations were compared to Alabama's *Student Harassment Act* and the U.S. Department of Education's identified key bullying policy components.

Research Questions

The following research questions were explored.

1. Do Alabama school systems' bullying policies align with the United States Department of Education's identified key bullying policy components?

2. Do school systems' bullying policies align with Alabama's *Student Harassment Prevention Act?*

3. Do the individual school systems include additional components in their board adopted bullying policy?

4.   What contributing factors influenced the development of school system bullying policies exceeding minimum criteria?

Background of the Study

The awareness of bullying on school campuses has increased intensely. Bullying is now acknowledged as a severe practice of persecution against students and is believed to be a serious threat to school safety. Its heightened acknowledgement has caused school leaders, the public, and political figures to reassess how school policies can be revised or expanded to include bullying (Furlong, Morrison, & Greif, 2003). According to Limber and Small (2003), state legislatures have taken an active role in passing laws that impact the development of bullying prevention polices in local school systems. Legislative interest has prompted school systems and school administrators to examine and modify current bullying policies and bullying prevention programs being implemented in the schools. This newly found interest in school safety and bullying has led to a burst of legislative, policy, and programmatic activities aimed to eradicate bullying behaviors.

Anti-bullying laws established protocol for local school systems and schools in creating bullying policies. Legislative directives compelled school systems to institute school safety plans which would provide students a safe environment. School safety plans also incorporated programs and strategies to diminish and deter bullying among students (Limber & Small, 2003). The requisite that administrators generate policy to thwart bullying in schools is visible throughout state laws and statues. School boards are generally given the responsibility of overseeing the development of bullying policy in school districts or systems. A minimal number of state laws elected to give this accountability to individual school building personnel. The aim

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of either approach is to create a safe learning environment for students that are conducive to learning (Limber & Small, 2003).

Senseless school shootings and devastating suicide incidents resulting from bullying have incited educational leaders and policy-makers into battle to handle the problem. Recognizing the seriousness of bullying in the nation's schools, the U.S. Department of Education has taken measures to assist educators in structuring or modifying their anti-bullying laws and policies. In response to state and local officials appeal for support in developing bullying legislation and policies, the U.S. Secretary of Education disseminated a memo to all state governors, superintendents, and boards of education specifying key elements of operational anti-bullying legislation and policies. The memorandum entailed a summarization of examples of best practices used to devise bullying laws and policies (U.S. Department of Education, 2010)

Theoretical Framework

This study was framed by a policy ecology metaphor. Viewing policy through an ecological lens allows one to view its procedures as multifaceted, interdependent, and extremely political. Ecology metaphors replicate policy processes on ideas from the life and physical sciences. In the natural sciences, ecology described the relationships among and between organisms and their environments. The ecology metaphor is appropriately suited for policy analysis because the interactions between environments, events, and groups better depict the flexibility of policy processes. In general, policy ecology is characterized by actors, relationships, environments and structures and processes (Weaver-Hightower, 2008).

The actors in policy ecology are multiple with each performing a specific role. The actors all exist in a complex relationship with each other. Some actors compete for resources and power, while other actors prey on others for personal gain. Still, there are actors who put

aside their differences and work for a common goal or even coexist interdependently for mutual

gain. All actors and their multiple relationships are influenced by the environment and social

and institutional structures. In policy ecologies, the environments and structures have boundaries

although the boundaries are not always clear. Existing conditions in the policy ecology such as

history, traditions, and dynamics all carry a certain amount of influence which creates pressure

toward policy change. The dynamics of actors, their relationships, and their interactions with the

environment and structures involve a constant change process. For example, a school may

change their structure to fit new policies or implement policies to complement their existing

structures (Weaver-Hightower, 2008). Such is the case with bullying. Schools change their

structures to fit the new bullying policies or to implement the bullying policy developed by state

legislatures and state school systems.

A strength of the ecological metaphor is the interconnection at which policies interact, get

influence, are created and implemented (Weaver-Hightower, 2008). Figure 1 illustrates policy

ecology depicted in this particular study. The actors are represented in each box. Policy

ecologies can be read chronologically and organizationally. Catalysts of the ecology process

share their opinions and interests with policy makers. As a result, policies or documents that

function as policies are constructed by federal and or state governments. The policies are

disseminated to persons or entities responsible for its implementation (Weaver-Hightower,

2008).
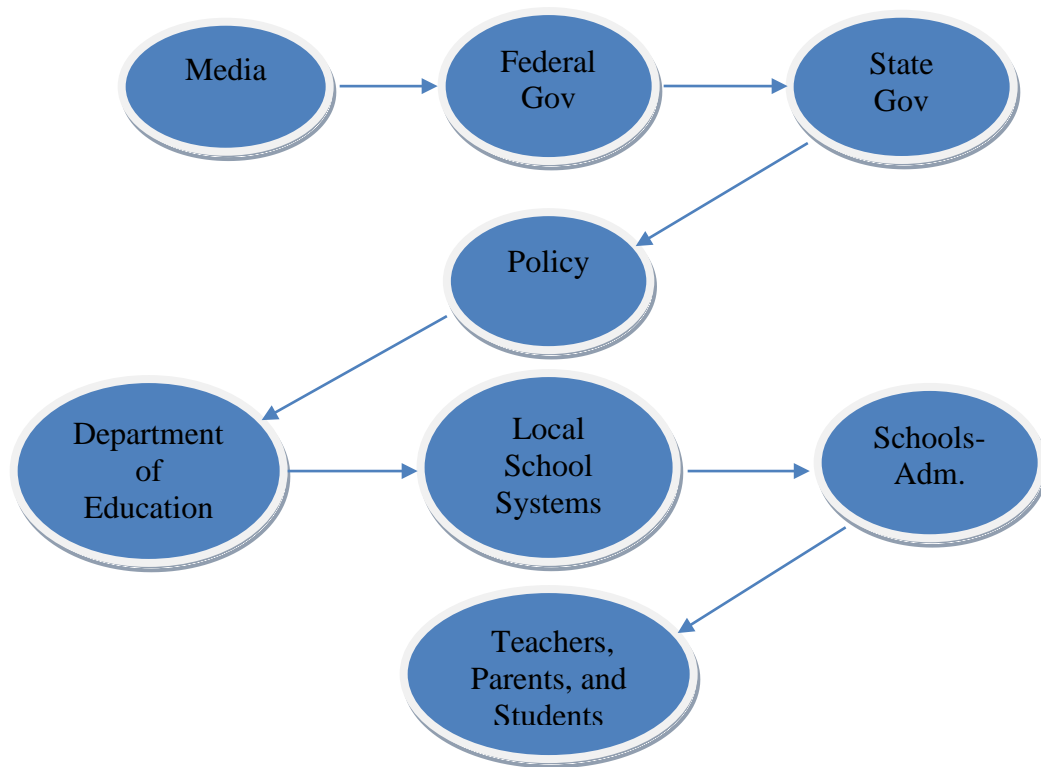
Figure 1. Policy Ecology

Figure 1 shows the elements (actors, relationships, environment and structures, and processes) that are present in the formulation of bullying policies. The arrows represent the relationships between the actors. In this particular study, the media was a major catalyst in the process of developing bullying policies. The media's extensive coverage of violent school shootings resulted in the federal and state government's awareness that bullying was indeed a serious issue (Denmark, Kruass, Wesner, Midlarsky, & Gielen, 2005; Drake, Price, Telljohann, & Frank, 2003; Garett, 2003; Geffner, Loring, & Young, 2001). Increased awareness of the issue led to the federal government's role in establishing effective components for bullying policies and new laws created within state legislatures to address bullying behavior.

Components outlined by the U.S. Department of Education were shared with states in the form of technical assistance. Most state laws mandated that state departments of education provide model bullying policies for local school systems or districts. The local boards of education adopted bullying/harassment policies to be implemented in the schools. Bullying provisions may be integrated into existing policies or created as separate policies (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). The passing down of responsibility for the dissemination of policy eventually filters to the schools with administrators having the ultimate task of translating the policy into practice at the school level and providing stakeholders with knowledge of the policy (U.S. Department of Education, 2011).

Significance of the Study

School systems are charged with providing a safe learning environment for all students. Yet, bullying behavior is on the rise. Media coverage has spotlighted bullying as a serious threat to school safety. Heightened public awareness has resulted in forty-seven states passing laws addressing bullying in school, with Alabama being one of the most recent to enact legislation. Although Alabama has attempted to address the issue of bullying, the state only received a B+ rating by a well-known organization that advocates for bullied children. In addition, the United States Department of Education identified key components for bullying legislation and policy development which thus far has not been incorporated into Alabama legislation or school system policies. Furthermore, Alabama has no specific procedure in place to assure the development and implementation of local education policies on student harassment.

Assumptions of the Study

The following assumptions apply to this study:

1. All student harassment policies received from school systems were adopted by the system's governing board.

2. Based on state law, all school systems developed local policies dealing with student harassment/bullying.

3. Local school systems received a model student harassment policy from the state department of education.

4. Interviewees responded to the interview questions truthfully.

5. Interviewees were asked the same questions.

Limitations of the Study

The role of the researcher is a limitation in this study. In qualitative research, the researcher is the instrument through which data is collected. In this study, the researcher is also an employee of the Alabama Department of Education which is the agency directed by Alabama law to provide school systems with a model student harassment policy. This agency also monitors a third of the school systems yearly through its comprehensive monitoring process. Student harassment policies are a part of the monitoring process at that time. The researcher's role in this study was to compare LEA's student harassment policies to Alabama's *Student Harassment Prevention Act* and to determine if LEA's policies included additional components beyond the model policy.

Another limitation of the study was researcher bias. The reliability of a study may be convoluted by the unavoidably human nature of researchers (Gottschalk, 1995). The researcher

addressed this by peer review. According to Lather (1996), peer reviewing is a means of minimizing the altering consequence of personal bias upon the rationality of evidence.

A final limitation of the study lies in the interview component of the study. Only a few individuals were interviewed for the purpose of the study. The findings related to the interviews may not be generalizable beyond the three individuals and systems examined or beyond the state of Alabama.

Definition of Terms

Bully – students who continuously abuse specific victims who have less verbal, social, or physical prowess than themselves (Hazler, 1996).

Bullying – is intentional aggression that may be physical, verbal, or sexual. It exposes victims to repeated aggression over an extended period of time and involves the same children in the same bully and victim roles (Barton, 2006; Lajore, McLellan, & Seddon, 1997).

Bully-Victims – Children who bully others but are also victims of bullying themselves (Scaglione & Scaglione, 2006).

Bystanders – are the students in the school who are not actively involved in the bullying dynamic. The bystander simply stands by and watches when he or she sees bullying or harassment behaviors occurring (Bonds & Stoker, 2000).

Harassment – a pattern of intentional behavior that takes place on school property, on a school bus, or at a school-sponsored function including, but not limited to written, electronic, verbal, or physical acts that are reasonably perceived as being motivated by any characteristic of a student, or by the association of a student with an individual who has particular characteristics (Alabama Student Harassment Prevention Act, 2009).

Victim – someone who is subjected repeatedly and overtime to the negative actions of one or more bullies (Bonds & Stoker, 2000).

Summary

This chapter provides a general overview of literature that relates to bullying. Specifically, information was reviewed dealing with bullying legislation and policy. In addition, a theoretical framework for policy development was explored. The purpose of this study was to determine the present status of bullying policies in Alabama and to compare local educational agency's (LEA's) policies to state and national guidelines. A secondary purpose was to identify districts that had exemplary policies and to discover what factors were involved in fostering their ability to create these policies. In addition, the researcher investigated exemplary policies within the LEA's to determine what elements made these policies exemplary. Policies and regulations were compared to Alabama's *Student Harassment Act* and the U.S. Department of Education's identified key bullying policy components.

Chapter Two provides a review of research on bullying, federal laws and U.S. Supreme Court cases impacting school safety, incidences of school violence, bullying legislation, and policy development and implementation. This chapter also highlights Alabama's stand against bullying as well as a national awareness toward bullying.

CHAPTER II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

School bullying is an age-old phenomenon that is a major issue for most schools across America. Children are teased, taunted, threatened, and tormented daily by their peers. Although bullying is actively discouraged, it continues to be a problem faced by students because of its tolerance. Administrators, school personnel, parents, and other students often appear to stand by as bullies degrade, humiliate, beat, and ridicule their victims (Barone, 2010). Barone (2010) gave four rationales for the prevalence of bullying in schools. First, he declared that some adults take little notice of bullying because it is considered a normal part of growing up. Secondly, he stressed that educators often become desensitized to bullying and fail to see it occurring. Barone's third rationale for the prevalence of bullying was that schools are overwhelmed by other issues and problems that they must deal with which appear to take priority over incidents of bullying. His final theory on bullying's unabated presence was that schools choose not to identify and address bullying due to lack of resources to tackle the problem.

Although some educators and other adults appear to be complacent concerning bullying, many are not. Increased attention on school bullying by the media in the form of school-based homicides and suicides has raised awareness of the problem for many Americans (Dake, Price, Telljohann, & Funk, 2003). Therefore, reducing school violence has become an issue of concern for educators, parents, and legislators who are in tune to its long-term effects (Whitted & Dupper, 2005). According to Whitted and Dupper, although murder and assault are categorized as high-level incidents of violence, researchers have started to analyze the significance of low-

level acts of violence and its effects on the school climate (as cited in Dupper & Meyer-Adams, 2002). Whitted and Dupper (2005) classified bullying as a leading form of low-level violence. Graham reported that survey data reflected 30% to 80% of students had personally encountered victimization from other students while 10% to 15% may actually be chronic victims (as cited in Card & Hodges, 2008). Tragic episodes of school violence in the form of school shootings and suicides have prompted schools and school systems to provide seminars and professional conferences to school personnel in order to combat acts of bullying. In addition, states and local governments have been forced to begun addressing the need for students and school personnel training in violence prevention (Green, 2007).

Bullying Defined

Bullying is a complex issue with no universal definition. According to Lajore, McLellan and Seddon (1997),

> Bullying in its truest form is comprised of a series of repeated intentionally cruel incidents, involving the same children, in the same bully and victim roles. This, however, does not mean that in order for bullying to occur there must be repeat offenses. Bullying behavior may also be defined as a criminal act if the bully is twelve years of age or older. (p. 16)

Dan Olweus, who is often referred to as the father of the anti-bullying movement, provided the classic definition of bullying used by many researchers and others investigating the bullying phenomenon (Scaglione & Scaglione, 2006). Olweus defined bullying as "aggressive behaviors that (a) is intended to cause distress or harm, (b) exists in a relationship in which there is an imbalance of powers or strength, and (c) is repeated over time" (as cited in Limber &

Small, 2003, p. 445). Borg (1999) points out that the most important concept to be taken from Olweus' definition is that bullying

> involves attacks on a pupil with the intention of inflicting negative consequences, is carried out by one or more perpetrators; occurs repeatedly and over a relatively long period of time; and is directed towards a victim who is weaker than the perpetrator(s). (p. 138)

Kevorkian and D'Antona (2008) stated that bullying occurred when another's self-esteem was lowered and the relationship was one sided. Barton's (2006) definition of bullying employs "three criteria:

- Bullying is intentional aggression that may be physical, verbal, sexual, or more indirect
- Bullying exposes victims to repeated aggression over an extended period of time.
- Bullying occurs within an interpersonal relationship characterized by a real or perceived imbalance of power" (p. 2).

Types of Bullying Behavior

Research indicated there were several types of bullies. Barton (2006) categorized bullying into four types: verbal, physical, relational, and sexual. Lajore et al. (1997) described a more difficult type of bully to identify called reactive bullies. Raskauskas and Stoltz (2007) discussed electronic bullying as a more current method of bullying utilized by students, while Keith and Martin (2005) and Scaglione and Scaglione (2006) described this method as cyberbullying.

Verbal Bullying

Verbal bullying is considered the most common form of bullying (Harvis & Petrie, 2003). Verbal bullies use derogatory words to hurt or humiliate their victims. Verbal bullying includes, but is not limited to, name calling, teasing, insulting, or threatening others (Barton, 2006). Verbal bullying is the easiest way to inflict pain on other children because it is quick, to the point, and can occur in the least amount of time (Lajore, McLellan, & Seddon, 1997). According to Lajore et al. (1997), the effects of verbal bullying could be more devastating than other form of bullying because there are no visible scars.

Physical Bullying

Physical bullying occurs when one or more students attack another student physically resulting in the student being hit, kicked, pushed, shoved or thrown (Raskauskas & Stoltz, 2007). Physical bullying tends to receive more attention from school personnel because it is considered the least sophisticated form of bullying and is easily identified (Lajore, et al., 1997).

Relational Bullying

In relational bullying, the bully attempts to convince peers to exclude a certain student or students from social events or activities and sever the student from all social connections (Lajore et al., 1997). Relational bullying is a method of verbal bullying that utilizes ostracizing or exclusionary behaviors as well as rumor spreading to damage the victim's social standing within the peer group (Barton, 2006). Bonds and Stoker (2000) further described relational bullying as bullying "that takes various forms of social alienation from gossiping and embarrassing to malicious exclusion, rejection, rumor-mongering, and in extreme cases total isolation" (p. 40). Relational bullying can be devastating to a child because it results in the rejection by the peer groups at a crucial stage of development when a child's social connections are needed the most

(Lajore et al., 1997). Kevorkian and D'Antona (2008) considered relational bullying to be "one of the most sinister and subtle forms of bullying because the scars are not obvious on the outside" (p. 91). Furthermore, it is hard to identify because students are not sure that it is occurring.

Sexual Bullying

Sexual bullying has been defined as exhibitionism, voyeurism, sexual propositioning, sexual harassment and abuse involving unwanted physical contact and sexual assault (Sampson, 2009, p. 2). Sexual bullying is a serious issue that affects all students. As cited in Bonds and Stoker (2000),

> The American Association of University Woman conducted a large study of middle schools and found that 85% of the girls and 76% of the boys had experienced sexual harassment at school. The hallways and classrooms were the most frequently cited locations for the harassment. The most frequent behaviors cited were inappropriate jokes, looks, or gestures with sexually suggestive touching, grabbing and pinching. (p. 29)

According to Bonds and Stoker (2000), sexual bullying has historically been confused with normal developmental behaviors exhibited by adolescents. This careless attitude has caused the behavior to be ignored, tolerated, or excused. As a result, sexual bullying has escalated in our society.

Reactive Bullying

Reactive bullying is often difficult to identify because the student plays the role of victim and bully. The reactive bullies taunt other bullies until they obtain a negative response or action from the bully. They instigate the situation by saying things like, "if you bother me today, I'll

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tell the teacher and get you into trouble." Once this interaction takes place, the bully will spring into action which usually results in a fight. The reactive bully fights back claiming self defense in the situation (Lajore et al., 1997).

Electronic or Cyberbullying

Raskauskas and Stoltz (2007) defined electronic bullying "as a means of bullying in which peers use electronics to taunt, insult, threaten, harass, and/or intimidate a peer" (p. 565). Bullies utilizing electronics use messages, pictures, and webpages to spread rumors, secrets, and death threats to torment their victims (Bauman, 2008; Belsey, 2004; Keith & Martin, 2005; Raskauskas & Stoltz, 2007). Electronic bullies have also been known to use images of their peers to create online slam books. The slam books or websites are used to anonymously post humiliating or embarrassing comments about other students (Raskauskas & Stoltz, 2007). Raskauskas and Stoltz (2007) further pointed out that electronic bullying was a greater threat to psychological health than traditional bullying because of its twenty-four hour availability and its transcendence beyond the school yard. Simply put, students' homes are no longer a safety net from bullying. This cowardly form of bullying makes it difficult for parents and educators to both understand the nature of the problem and identify solutions for it (Keith & Martin, 2005).

Gender Identity Bullying

Although sexual bullying was previously addressed, sexual or gender identity has emerged as a specific group of students being targeted by bullies. According to Biegal and Kuehl (2010), lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) students face an array of safety issues on a daily basis. Over 85% of LGBT students reported harassment with over 20% reporting actual physical attacks. Due to the lack of response to this safety issue by teachers and administrators, the suicide rate for LGBT students is about four times the rate of their straight

counter parts and in some parts of the nation LGBT runaways make up 40% of the teen homeless

population (Biegel & Kuehl, 2010). Biegel and Kuel (2010) further contended that court records

and academic research revealed a highly troubling pattern of mistreatment, negative

consequences, and a dramatic failure on the part of many educational institutions to adequately

address LGBT related issues and concerns.

Effects of Bullying on the Victim

Experiences of being bullied appear to have severe, long lasting consequences on

children (Harris & Petrie, 2003). Bullying is not a harmless phenomenon or childhood rite of

passage. According to Bonds and Stoker (2000), "it can be a harmful, damaging set of behaviors

that leaves its victims suffering both short- and long-term effects" (p. 41). Students who are

bullied often feel lonely and isolated. School is no longer viewed as a safe haven; it becomes a

daily nightmare with the victim worrying about the next bully attack. Living with constant fear,

the victim is unable to focus or concentrate on academic tasks which eventually lead to poor

grades (Scaglione & Scaglione, 2006).

Not only do the negative effects of bullying impact academic performance, but it results

in a dislike and avoidance for school. Bully victims have a high absenteeism rate. Feeling

unsafe in the school environment, they simply do not attend for fear of the consequences they

know they will experience at the hands of the bully (Bonds & Stoker, 2000).

Harris and Petrie (2003) also stated that bullied students often have a diminished capacity

to learn due to the stress, fear, worry and anxiety of facing their attackers. Jacobsen and Bauman

(2010) maintained that bully victims displayed an array of issues from social segregation and

absenteeism to suicidal feelings and despair and although these problems vary in severity, it is

logical to conclude that even mild feelings of depression may affect the students' capacity to

learn as well as their success rate in school. Bullied students experience serious adjustment problems. According to Harris and Petrie (2003), bullied students experienced social and personal development issues which often resulted in social isolation and even students dropping out of school. Victims of bullying experience emotional distress, depression, loneliness, anxiety, and lowered self-esteem.

In more serious situations, students who are constantly bullied and who do not develop effective coping skills tend to have increased levels of suicidal ideation and are therefore, more likely to attempt suicide (Bonds & Stoker, 2000). Victims of bullying often have feelings of low self-worth and blame themselves for the bullies' actions toward them. The end result for the victim is often poor self-esteem which can lead to depression or violence against others or themselves (Scaglione & Scaglion, 2006). In extreme instances, the effects of repeated bullying can result in the victim becoming the aggressor. This is evident in the rash of tragedies involving school homicides in newspapers around the world. Although extreme in nature, long term victimization can result in desperate behaviors such as suicide and homicide (Bonds & Stoker, 2000; Scaglione & Scaglione, 2006).

Long-term effects of bullying are clearly evident in the research (Barton, 2006). Often bully victims that survive the experience exhibit deep emotional scars that remain throughout adulthood. Anxiety disorders and depression clearly is a visible fixture in their lives (Scaglione & Scaglione, 2006). According to the U.S. Department of Educations' Office of Educational Research and Improvement, bully victims as adults may be afraid to take risks socially, intellectually or emotionally. They are more likely to grow up socially anxious, insecure, and depressed (U. S. Department of Education, 1998).

Bully victims who are repeatedly harassed display certain behaviors and attitudes that are not consistent with their normal behaviors. For various reasons, children refuse to report bullying. Lajore et al. (1997) outlined specific guidelines to assist adults in identifying a child that maybe victimized. The child may be disinterested in school, reluctant to attend school, and afraid to walk to and from school. The child may also complain of illness, be lethargic, or despondent. In addition, the child may withdraw from social activities and avoid participation in any co-curricular activities.

<div align="center">**Effects of Bullying on the Perpetrator**</div>

Like bully victims, the bullies themselves are high risk for long-term negative outcomes. If they persist with bullying behavior, the pattern becomes a well-defined habit as the bully gets older. They are also high risk for social and emotional problems (Lajore et al, 1997; Whitted & Dupper, 2005). Harris and Petrie (2003) stated that children who are categorized as school bullies have a greater chance of becoming a high school dropout, experience increased involvement in delinquent acts, and being convicted for driving under the influence.

Bullies are popular socially until the early teens. But in the later adolescence years this status starts to dwindle. If still attending school by their senior year, the bullies peer group consists of other bullies and in some instance gang alliances (Lajore at el., 1997). Research indicated that bullies' behavior will only escalate as they get older unless adults intervene. If a child is allowed to use aggressive and hurtful behavior, they start to master the craft. Vandalism, shoplifting, truancy, and frequent drug and alcohol use are all destructive aggressive behavior experienced by bullies. "There is also a direct correlation between substance abuse and gun violence and bullying behavior" (Kevorkian & D'Antona, 2008, p. 53).

According to Whitted and Dupper (2005), "children who bully others are more likely to become involved in the criminal justice system" (p. 168). By the age of twenty-four, about 60% of the population identified as childhood bullies have at least one criminal conviction (Lajore at el., 1997). Scaglione and Scaglione (2006) also concurred that bullying leads to criminal behavior. Bullying appears to be the first step toward serious problems in adulthood unless intervention occurs. In a thirty-five year study, E. Eron, a psychologist at the University of Michigan, noted that children labeled by their peers at age eight as bullies were usually bullies throughout their lives. This longitudinal study revealed that as adults, many of these former childhood bullies required more services from government programs and agencies. They needed more support from these programs and agencies because of their higher rate of court convictions, alcohol and drug use, and antisocial personality disorders (Lajore at el., 1997). In another study by Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, a national advocacy group consisting of 2000 police chiefs, prosecutors, and victims of violence, it was found that aggressive behavior in children eventually lead to serious acts of delinquency, violence, and criminal activity (Scaglione & Scaglione, 2006). Barton (2006) also pointed out that bullies experience poor school adjustments, significantly lower academic success, and a distorted, negative view of the school environment.

Adults who were child bullies simply mature into adults bullies who invoke fear into their spouses, children, and colleagues. It is not uncommon for childhood bullies to continue their aggressive pattern to the point of domestic violence and child abuse cases in later years (McCabe & Martin, 2005). The childhood bullies' children tend to become bullies themselves, creating a continuous cycle of abuse (Harris & Petrie, 2003).

Parents play a major role in influencing children's attitude toward bullying. Children model the behaviors they observe around them. "Parents that are negative, are critical, and lack

warmth increase the possibility of raising children who bully" (Kevorkian & D'Antona, 2008, p. 54). It is not unusual for parents of bullies to support their child's aggressive behavior towards their peers (Lajore et al., 1997). Children must have structure and positive discipline in their lives. They must also have reasonable and consistent consequences when rules are not adhered to as outlined by their parents, teachers, or society.

Specific trends in family characteristics as they relate to bullies have been identified by researchers. Instead of giving children structure and developmentally appropriate guidelines, parents of bullies usually indulge in either highly authoritarian or permissive parenting strategies. Highly authoritarian parents rule their children with an iron fist and offer their children few opportunities to make decisions. This style of parenting puts children at a higher risk of giving in to peer pressure and developing victimization behaviors (Barton, 2006). Parents who use physical violence against each other in the presence of their children usually have noncompliant and aggressive children at home and in school (Barton, 2006). "In addition, literature suggests that children's exposure to violence or experiences with violence in the home predisposes them to becoming perpetrators or victims of violence themselves" (Barton, 2006, p. 21).

Parents who utilize permissive parenting strategies also risk encouraging their children to bully others. Permissive parents do not provide consequences for their children's aggressive behavior. They often excuse the child's behavior or in some circumstances supply the excuse for the child while refusing to correct the behavior. In other situations, parents allow the aggressive behavior because they believe the "environment" will provide the consequences for their child's actions. In other words, the parents' attitude is that the child will eventually meet a bigger, stronger, tougher bully who hits a lot harder (Kevorkian & D'Antona, 2008). "Children need structured, positive discipline that teaches empathy, caring, and reasonable and consistent

consequences when the rules are broken" (Kevorkian & D'Antona, 2008). Swearer, Espelage, and Napolitano (2009) also concluded that

>Families are the major socialization agent for young children. Parents, siblings, and other caregivers provide children with examples of learning emotions, regulating emotions, negotiating conflict, problem-solving situations, and developing other life skills. Unfortunately, children are sometimes presented with less than ideal role models and learn pro-aggression attitudes, develop an inability to identify or regulate emotions, learn a restricted range of emotional reactions to distressing situations (e.g. anger), and often fail to gain the necessary problem-solving or coping skills to manage situations at school and in their community. (p. 20)

Effects of Bullying on the Bystander

According to Whitted and Dupper (2005), "even students who are not directly involved, may be negatively affected by bullying" (p.168). Bystanders or children who witness incidents of bullying are impacted by these occurrences. They may be afraid to associate with the victim for fear of lowering their own status or of retribution from the bully and becoming victims themselves. Bystanders may fear reporting bullying incidents because they do not want to be called snitch, a tattler, or an informer or they may experience feelings of guilt or helplessness for not standing up to the bully on behalf of their classmate. They may also be drawn into bullying behavior by group pressure (U.S. Department of Education, 1998, p. 3).

Bystanders account for 85% of students in a school who are not actively participating in the bullying behavior (Bonds & Stoker, 2000). Research showed that children as young as five years of age who repeatedly witnessed bullying behavior with no intervention from adults are at a high risk of becoming bullies themselves. Children may also become fearful, nervous, or

uncomfortable at school if prevention and intervention of bullying behavior is not addressed by adults. These negative reactions exhibited by bystanders may result in a sense of helplessness or insecurity that can cause depression in later years (Kevorkian & D'Antona, 2008).

Bystanders account for the majority of the school population. Bystanders are common in that they remain silent and inactive when others are being bullied. They are aware of the bullying but are unable or unwilling to take a stand against the negative, harassing behavior being expressed by their peer or peers. The bystanders' detachment from the bullying act can cause them to become desensitized to the negative behaviors occurring around them. When this happens, they become less sensitive to the pain of other students and are more inclined to support the bullies' behavior (Bond & Stoker, 2000).

Rigby (2002) maintained that the bystander's behavior is very important in accounting for the existence of bullying in schools. Rigby stated that "reinforcement by bystanders of bullying behavior, either positively through encouragement given to bullies or through withholding of any adverse comment, practically guarantees that the bullying will go on and on" (p. 71). Harris and Petrie (2003) also maintained that bystanders experience conflicting emotions such as anger, fear, sadness, and indifference when observing another child being bullied. They feel guilt when they cannot assist the victim, yet fear that they may also become a target.

The bystanders "code of silence" is the key to successful bullying. Bullies interpret this "code of silence" as approval or encouragement for their behavior. Many argue that because of their refusal to get involved, bystanders are just as guilty as the student who bullies (Scaglione & Scaglione, 2006). Bystanders, sometimes called the silent majority, have the most potential for solving the problems of bullying in the schools (Scaglione & Scaglione, 2006). Yet, this large

group of children is generally the most ignored and underused resource in the school. Many

bullying prevention programs neglect this silent majority entirely, forgetting that bystanders are

crucial in bully-proofing the school. "Bystanders far outnumber bullies and victims, yet their

value as a majority group is often unrecognized and their potential for power is wasted" (Bonds

& Stoker, 2006, p. 43).

Historical Review of Bullying in Schools

Bullying is thought to be the most prevalent form of aggression found in American

schools and affects the greatest number of students when measured against other forms of

violence. Yet, bullying has only recently become an important item on the United States

educational agenda (Sanders & Phye, 2004). The phenomenon has been thoroughly investigated

in other countries (Dake et al., 2003). Most of the United States knowledge concerning bullying

behaviors was obtained from research in Europe, Australia, and Canada (Swearer & Espelage,

2004). Early research regarding school bullying was initiated in Scandinavia in the 1970s (Dake

et al., 2003). Other countries followed their pursuit.

Professor Dan Olweus was the first scientist to focus on the topic of bullying and to

provide scientific data to the literature. He conducted his research in schools throughout Norway

and Sweden (Rigby, 2002). Olweus defined, classified, and estimated the incidences of bullying

behavior as well as explained why some children bullied and others were victims. Through his

work, he demonstrated that bullying could be significantly reduced in schools (Rigby, 2002).

Olweus' research prompted similar studies to be conduct in countries around the world (Rigby,

2002). "Research attention in Norway and Sweden in the 1980s led to the first national

intervention campaign against bullying" (Sanders & Phye, 2004, p. 2).

Olweus created a whole-school program aimed at preventing and reducing bullying throughout the school setting called "The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program." The program was designed to improve student relations and to make schools a safer place for students to learn and grow. Program goals included decreasing existing bullying behaviors among students, preventing additional bullying behaviors, and obtaining better student relations at school (Olweus Bullying Prevention Program, p. 1). The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program involved program components at four levels. They were school-level components, individual-level components, classroom-level components, and community-level components (Olweus Bullying Prevention Program, p. 1).

According to Swearer and Espelage (2004), for the past decade, research on bullying in the United States has significantly lagged behind European, Australian, and Canadian countries. Although research studies in other countries have been crucial in understanding bullying and victimization occurring in American schools, the unique context which make up U.S schools and in which research on bullying is conducted, argues for an examination of this ubiquitous phenomenon. The strategies designed by other countries to reduce and prevent bullying rely on a country having a nationalized school curriculum, thus allowing a coordinated, nationwide effect to combat the problem. American schools lack such a curriculum. Often time's curriculum varies from state-to-state and in some cases, building-by-building within the same school system (Geffner, Loring, & Young, 2001).

There has been only one large-scale study conducted in the United States. Although considered to be an important study, bullying was only assessed through the administration of a self-report questionnaire. The questionnaire was distributed to 15,686 students in grades six through ten. Results from the study revealed 29.9% of the students reported moderate to

frequent involvement in bullying. Of those 29.9%, 13% self-identified as bullies, 10.6% as victims, and 6.3% as bully-victims. Further study results indicated bullying behaviors occurred more frequently in middle school than high school and more boys were involved in bullying behavior than girls. Additionally, bully-victims showed the most negative psychosocial effects (Espelage & Swearer, 2004).

While bullying prevention has obtained nationwide awareness, other nations appear to be slightly ahead of the United States in the development of policies and deterrent measures. For many decades, public education in America reported very little school-based aggression. This phenomenon was infrequent in occurrence, low in intensity, and quaint in character (Conoley & Goldstein, 2004). In fact, the years prior to the 1960s were entitled the "preescalation period" in American school violence (Conoley & Goldstein, 2004). This false sense of safety and security in America's schools initially hindered research in the area of bullying. However, senseless school shootings and devastating suicide incidents resulting from bullying behavior have impelled educational leaders, policy-makers, and the public into battle to address the problem. States across the nation have constructed legislation to combat bullying, but what the country needs is in depth research conducted to determine best practices, interventions, and preventions to address bullying.

Federal Law and School Safety

Efforts to create safer schools have caused federal, state, and local legislatures and policy makers to pass laws designed to combat the problem (Rozalski & Yell, 2004). Rozalski and Yell outline the role of federal and state governance of public education:

The U.S. Constitution limits the power of the federal government by specifying in the

Tenth Amendment that 'the powers not delegated to the United States by the

Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the states, are reserved to the states.' Because the

Constitution does not explicitly reserve the right of the federal government to provide

public education, the Tenth Amendment prevents the U.S. Congress from legislating how

public schools are operated. Congress, however, can influence a state's effort to govern

public schools either by offering federal grants to state or local education agencies or by

withholding federal money from those states that do not pass laws similar to national

statues. (pp. 507–508)

Rozalski and Yell (2004) present several pieces of legislation passed by Congress to

address the nations concern for school safety. The Improving America's Schools Act of 1994

(IASA) was formerly the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. The Safe and

Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act of 1994 (SDFSCA) and the Gun Free Schools Act of

1994 (GFSA) were subsections of IASA. They were designed to prevent school violence.

The primary purpose of SDFSCA was to reduce the threat of violence in schools and

communities and reverse the trend of its occurrence. To meet its goal, SDFSCA made federal

grant monies available to educational institutions for violence prevention programs. With the

use of SDFSCA's federal monies, schools could distribute information about violence prevention

programs, initiate character education programs, provide technical assistance for teachers,

procure and position metal detectors, and employ extra security personnel (Rozalski & Yell,

2004).

The GFSA was an attempt by Congress to reinstate a previous law determined

unconstitutional by the U.S. Supreme Court. GFSA's purpose was to force states to adopt "zero

tolerance" procedures and policies for students carrying weapons. In order to receive IASA

funding, GFSA compelled states to pass a law requiring school systems to expel for a minimum

of one year any student who brought a weapon to school. School systems' administrators were given the discretion of modifying expulsion requirement on a case by case basis (Rozalski & Yell, 2004).

The Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act (VCCLEA) was created to provide resources and funding to a wide variety of crime-fighting efforts while also assisting community based crime prevention programs. Federal funding was made available to community-school cooperatives for students in high-poverty and high-crime areas. Under the provisions of VCCLEA, the Ounce of Prevention Council was authorized to provide funding to tutoring and mentoring programs that utilized strong adult role models. DARE America and the Boys and Girls Clubs of America are two such programs (Rozalski & Yell, 2004).

The Safe Schools Act of 1994 (SSA) was also established to address the seventh National Education Goal. SSA's purpose was to create safe, disciplined, drug free schools. Federal funding was provided to schools for them to assess problems of violence and to coordinate prevention programs with community agencies (Rozalski & Yell, 2004). While Congress has passed laws to create safer schools for children, it was not until 2010 that the Department of Education began looking at states to determine what was being included in anti-bullying policies and laws among the states.

Potential Implications of Bullying

The prevalence of bullying in schools and communities has become a critical issue. Once thought to be an insignificant part of childhood adolescence, bullying has moved from minor irritations to more serious and dangerous actions exhibited by students (Denmark, Krauss, Wesner, Midlarsky, & Gielen, 2005). With this visible change in the nature of student problem

behavior, increased efforts to create a safer school environment have intensified. According to

Rozalskie and Yell (2005),

> Concerned about the seriousness of violence in schools, has compelled federal, state, and
>
> local legislatures and policy makers to act. These actions have ranged from "get tough"
>
> legislation that has created harsher penalties for violent offenders to the adoption of
>
> school curriculums that attempt to prevent violence through education. (p. 507)

Bullying behavior has a tremendous impact on its victims. Not only do students suffer

from physical harm, they experience long term effects as well. These effects include lowered

self-esteem, increased absenteeism, depression and suicide (Harris & Petrie, 2003). The U.S.

Department of Education (1998) also reported effects victims may experience due to bullying.

Bully victim's grades may suffer because attention is drawn away from learning. Their fear may

lead to absenteeism, truancy, or dropping out. Victims may lose or fail to develop self-esteem,

experience feelings of isolation and may become withdrawn and depressed. As students and

later as adults, victims may be hesitant to take social, intellectual, emotional or vocational risks.

If the problem persists, victims occasionally feel compelled to take drastic measures, such as

vengeance in the form of fighting back, weapon-carrying or even suicide. Victims are more

likely than non-victims to grow up being socially anxious and insecure, displaying more

symptoms of depression than those who were not victimized as children (Department of

Education, 1998).

Physical and psychological victimization of students result in student alienation from

school. This feeling may be mild or temporary for some students; however, others may abhor

deep feelings such as anger, hostility, and resentment toward their peers and school personnel.

Student alienation is a direct result of a student's school experiences. Students experiencing

alienation may express their feelings by vandalizing school property, threatening school personnel, physically attacking teachers, students, and other staff and committing homicide or suicide (Hyman et al., 2004).

Incidents of recent tragic school shootings throughout our nation show that school violence has expanded in regards to age, sex, and geography. These events and other episodes of school violence center on the issues of student bullying and the need for revenge (Garrett, 2003). According to Denmark et al. (2005),

> The recent spate of murderous assaults on our schools has set in motion a reaction that is both intense and broad-based. Elements at every level of our society from the Executive Branch of our national government to local Parent-Teacher Associations have been sensitized to the issues raised by violence in our schools and have been energized to take steps to deal effectively with them. (p. 5)

Incidence of School Violence

Compelled by the number of school shootings that have occurred during the last two decades and the number linked to bullying behaviors, federal and state legislation has been passed to address bullying and harassment in the schools. According to Denmark et al. (2005), a total of forty-eight deaths were reported during the 2003–2004 school year in the United States. These deaths were attributed to school-related violence. A review of recent school tragedies will illustrate the need for all states to embrace the passage of legislation to assist the schools' efforts to prevent and control school violence.

Michael Carneal, a fourteen-year-old student at Heath High School in West Paducah, Kentucky, opened fire on classmates participating in a Morning Prayer session. Three female students were killed and five students were wounded. Essays written by the student indicated he

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felt weak and picked on (Cornell, 2006). Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, two students at

Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, went on a shooting rampage that resulted in the

deaths of twelve students and one teacher. The two students also took their own lives. Twenty-

one other students were injured in the violence that erupted that day (Cornell, 2006; McCabe &

Martin, 2005; Sullivan, Cleary, & Sullivan, 2004). Charles Andrew Williams (Andy), a

fourteen-year-old student at Santana High School in Santee, California, took his father's gun to

school and killed two students while injuring thirteen others. Andy, a victim of chronic bullying,

decided to seek revenge against his tormentors (Sullivan, Clearly, & Sullivan, 2004). John Jason

McLaughlin, a student at Ricori High School in Cold Spring, Minnesota, arrived at school with a

loaded revolver with the intention of shooting Seth Bartell. McLaughlin initially wounded

Bartell. He then chased his intended victim, shooting him in the forehead. Aaron Rollins, who

was an innocent bystander, was shot and killed as McLaughlin opened fire on his intended target

(Minnesota Public Radio, 2005). Teah Wimberly, a fifteen-year-old student at Dillard High

School in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, shot and killed her longtime friend Amanda Collette.

Wimberly, dealing with her own sexual identity, expressed a romantic interest in her friend.

Collette rejected Wimberly's interest. As Collette walked away, Wimberly shot her in the back.

Wimberly later stated in an affidavit that she 'wanted her (Collette) to feel pain like me" (World

Socialist Web Site, 2008, para, 4). Cho Seung-Hui, a senior English Major at Virginia Tech,

began a shooting rampage that has been categorized as the deadliest in American History.

Seung-Hui initially killed two students in a dormitory. He later went to Norris Hall, the

engineering building, where he proceeded to shoot students and professors in the classrooms.

Thirty-two people and the gunman were killed. University officials described Seung-Hui as a

"loner". Bullying during his middle school years was debated as a factor in his overall mental stability (New York Times, 2007, p. 1).

Bullying Legislation

Notorious incidents of school violence, such as the Columbine shooting has led to the passage of legislation in most states to combat the issue of bullying or harassment among students. School safety has been an ongoing concern for federal and state government. The United States Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR) enforces several civil rights laws. These laws include Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 which deals with a person's race, color, or national origin, Title IX of the Federal Education Amendment Act of 1972 which deals with a person's sex, and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 which both deal with a person's disability.

Although these pieces of legislation do not specifically address bullying, discrimination is a key component of bullying. Each law prohibits discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance. OCR's mission is to ensure equal access to education and to promote educational excellence through civil rights enforcement. Incidents of bullying sometimes occur because of a person's race, color, national origin, sex, disability, sexual orientation or religion. These traits are protected by civil rights laws which are in turn enforced by the Office of Civil Rights. Administrators must analyze bullying behaviors for civil rights implications. When the bullying behavior is indicative of a civil rights violation, school systems must respond in accordance with civil rights statutes and regulations enforced by the Office of Civil Rights in addition to any bullying legislation (Office for Civil Rights, 2010). Attention to bullying on American campuses has increased dramatically. Bullying is now recognized as a

serious form of victimization against students and poses a serious threat to school safety. Its heightened recognition has caused school personnel, the public, and policy makers to reconsider how school policies can be modified or expanded to include bullying (Furlong, Morrison, & Greif, 2003). According to Limber and Small (2003), "specifically, many state legislatures now are interested in passing laws that influence the development of school-based violence prevention polices that are inclusive of bullying" (p. 445). Legislative interest has sparked an interest among school administrators to review and modify existing policies to address bullying behaviors and bullying prevention programs to be implemented in the schools. This combined interest has resulted in a flurry of legislative, policy, and programmatic activities designed to eliminate bullying behaviors.

Most school discipline policies, especially guidelines dealing with discipline, suspension, and expulsion, are developed at the state and local levels. However, state laws have made the greatest impact in regards to the inclusion of bullying programs in local schools and school district policies (Limber & Small, 2003). State laws have been the driving force for new initiatives in stamping out bullying behaviors. Bullying is now seen as a precursor to deadly consequences when not properly addressed (Furlong et al., 2003).

Anti-bullying legislation is a direct result of widely publicized school shootings and suicides in schools across the states. Incidents of suicide were the motivating factors for passage of bullying legislation in Finland while school shootings and suicides triggered passages of bullying in the United States. With the onslaught of school shootings in the late 1990s, the theory that school shooters were bully-victims provoked to the point of extreme violence was popularized (Furlong et al., 2003). "Media reports stated that many perpetrators of school

shootings had felt persecuted, bullied or threatened by their peers" (Limber & Small, 2003, p. 446).

Currently, forty-seven states have passed laws addressing bullying in our nation's schools. Three states — Michigan, Montana, and South Dakota — have no laws in place to combat this pervasive issue (Bully Police USA). A time-line of anti-bullying law passage for each state can be found in Table 1.

Table 1

Anti Bullying Law Passage Timeline by State

1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Georgia	New Hampshire	Colorado Louisiana Mississippi Oregon West Virginia	Connecticut New Jersey Oklahoma Washington	Arizona California Rhode Island	Vermont
2005	**2006**	**2007**	**2008**	**2009**	**2010**
Arizona Indiana Maryland Virginia Texas Tennessee Mexico Nevada	Idaho South Carolina Arkansas New Mexico	Delaware Iowa Illinois Kansas Minnesota Ohio Pennsylvania	Nebraska Kentucky Utah Florida	N. Carolina Wyoming Alabama	Massachusetts Wisconsin New York Maryland
2011					
North Dakota Hawaii					

Although the majority of states have passed laws addressing bullying, according to Limber and Small (2003),

> Ultimately, the merit of any law passed to address bullying will depend upon the care with which the law is written, including its attention to and consistency with relevant social science research about bullying and how effectively the law influences school policies and programs. (p. 446)

It is imperative that bullying be defined in state legislation (Furlong et al., 2003; Limber & Small, 2003). Furlong et al. (2003) cited two reasons for clarity in bullying definitions. They stressed that an unambiguous definition is necessary for the scientific purpose of having exactness in what is being studied. They further noted that an unambiguous definition is necessary because a lack of common understanding about what represents bullying could result in a confusing assortment of national, state, and local laws and responses to the problems produced by bullying.

Legislative definitions of bullying vary significantly from state to state. Although the definition usually encompasses the aggressive and intentional aspect of bullying, there is a discrepancy in the types of behaviors that constitutes bullying. Some states used the terms harassment and intimidation synonymously with bullying. Bullying has been defined by some states as (1) any overt acts by a student or groups of students to humiliate or intimidate others, (2) an act that causes stress to others. Acts are defined as written, verbal, physical, or gestures, (3) any physical injury against another (Limber & Small, 2003). Some states failed to provide a clear definition of bullying. In such cases, departments of education or local school systems must interpret the intent of the legislation (Limber & Smaller, 2003).

State Legislative Definitions of Bullying

Of the forty seven states that have passed anti-bullying laws, eleven received a perfect score of A++ from Bully Police USA, a watch-dog organization advocating for bullied children and reporting on state anti bullying laws. In order to receive an A++ rating, a state's anti-bullying law must place emphasis on victims or include a bullying victim's rights clause about getting free counseling and a cyberbullying clause (Bully Police USA). Bullying Police USA used the following criteria to grade states anti-bullying laws:

- The word "bullying" must be used in the text of the bill/law/statutes.

- The law must *clearly* be an anti bullying law, not a school safety law.

- There must be definitions of bullying and harassment.

- There should be recommendations about how to make policy and what needs to be in the model policy.

- A good law involves education specialists at all levels, starting with the State Superintendent's (Education) office, though the School Districts, Schools, Parents and Students. Together they can define and set rules, policies, and find and implement the best anti bullying programs. Laws should require anti bullying training, anti bullying education for students and staff as well as prevention programs.

- A good law mandates anti bullying programs, not suggests programs.

- Laws should include a date the model policy is due, when the schools need to have their policies in place (in keeping with the anti bullying law requirements), and when the anti bullying programs must be in effect.

- There must be protection against reprisal, retaliation or false accusation.

- There must be school district protection against lawsuits upon compliance to policies.

- *A top rated law will put the emphasis on the victims* of bullying by assigning counseling for victims who suffer for years after peer abuse.

- There must be accountability reports made to either lawmakers or the State Education Superintendent and there must be a consequence assigned to schools/districts who don't comply with the law. There should be mandatory posting and/or notification of policies and reporting-form-procedures for students and parents.

- Cyberbullying or "Electronic Harassment" law. (Bully Police USA)

The eleven states receiving A++ ratings for state implemented anti-bullying laws used similar language to define bullying. In some instances, states substituted harassment or intimidation for the term "bullying" or provided a definition for all three terms. Clearly, all states made increased school safety the objective of the anti-bullying laws. With the passing of anti-bullying laws, recommendations were given for state boards of education and local school systems to utilize in formulating bullying policies at the state and local levels.

Legislative Directives to Schools and Systems

Anti-bullying laws provided directives to local school systems and schools in regards to developing bullying policies. Legislative mandates required school systems to establish school safety plans in order to provide students a safe environment conducive to learning. School safety plans also included programs and strategies to reduce and prohibit bullying among students (Limber & Small, 2003). The requirement that administrators create policy to prevent bullying in schools is a commonality among state statutes. School boards are usually charged with the task of ensuring that bullying policy development occurs. However, some state laws designate this responsibility to individual school building personnel. The goal of each approach is to provide a safe learning environment for students (Limber & Small, 2003).

The national effort, as characterized by the majority of states passing anti-bullying laws, will reduce the negative effects of bullying in our nation's schools (Furlong et al., 2003). The enactment of anti-bullying legislation symbolizes to all the seriousness of bullying and the need for preventing its presence in our schools (Limber & Small, 2003). Raising the awareness of bullying and requiring school districts to create policies to address bullying is the first step in protecting students. Yet, Limber and Small (2003) stressed that "the potential effectiveness of any new bullying prevention legislation must be evaluated in light of how well it encourages and supports the development of effective polices, strategies, and programs to reduce and prevent bullying among school children" (p. 449).

Policy Development and Implementation

A major focus of school systems is to provide a safe environment for its students. According to Morrison, Furlong, D'Incau, and Morrison (2004), "a safe school is one that prevents physical, psychological, and developmental harm to its students" (p. 289). They further stressed that the challenge of school safety is a collaborative effort among all education professionals. Collaborative effort allows education professionals to share their visions for school safety and acquire an understanding for others' perspectives on the issue.

School systems alone cannot prevent the occurrences of school violence on our nation's campuses; however, school systems can and do have a huge impact on violence prevention efforts when proactive measures are put into practice. Educators must develop legally correct programs and guidelines to decrease school violence or prevent it entirely. In order to accomplish this goal, educators must understand federal and state laws that impact school safety. They must also be knowledgeable of court cases that have given interpretation of the laws (Rozalski & Yell, 2004).

Rozalski and Yell (2004) recommended seven components for creating legally correct policies. Know the law was the first recommendation made by Rozalski and Yell (2004) in creating school policies that are legally correct. In order for policy-making committees to be knowledgeable of federal and state laws dealing with school safety, they should include a representative from the systems legal department. Rozalski and Yell's (2004) second recommendation was to follow the law. Educators must understand the importance of following legal guidelines. Following the procedural requirements of law can impact the appropriation of funding for school systems and states. The third recommendation given by Rozalski and Yell (2004) was to train all school staff. School violence is not just confined to the classroom. School systems must "train staff to understand the characteristics of safe and unsafe schools and students, and how to respond to violence as it is occurring or after it has occurred" (Rozalski & Yell, 2004, p. 517). Community involvement is an important factor in preventing school violence. Hence, the fourth recommendation by Rozalski and Yell (2004) was to involve the community. Community discussion of school violence prevention programs and initiatives impacts community support. Community involvement also minimizes negative publicity when school violence does rear its ugly head. Rozalski and Yell's (2004) fifth recommendation focuses on evaluating the issue of school violence. Creating safer schools involve assessing current problems arising from students' violent behaviors. The sixth recommendation for creating legally correct policies was to provide intervention. In this recommendation, Rozalski and Yell (2004) gave common approaches to creating safe schools. These approaches included addressing deficiencies, adopting prevention programs, implementing school wide disciplines procedures, and developing a crisis response team. Rozalski and Yell's (2004) final recommendation was progress monitoring. Educators must conduct ongoing assessments of

school violence programs and initiatives. Progress monitoring can assist educators in determining the efficiency of a school's prevention policies, making program adjustments and determining additional staff training.

Clearly-written anti-bullying policies can be the road map for clear communication concerning appropriate student behavior and bullying consequences. Anti-bullying policies allow uniform expectations and consequences for all stake holders concerning bullying behavior. The implementation of anti-bullying policies sends a message to the community that bullying is a serious issue that will not be tolerated (Swearer, Limber, & Alley, 2009).

In addition to Rozalski and Yell's (2004) recommendations for creating legally correct anti-bullying policies, Swearer, Limber, and Alley (2009) outlined several steps for effective policy development and implementation. Step one of their outline called for a clear and appropriate definition of bullying. If available, the definition should reflect the definition used in the state's statute. Consistency with state laws and statutes will illuminate confusion over the correct definition of bullying. If the statutory definition is unclear, educators are encouraged to seek legal counsel for the clarity of the definition. If no anti-bullying law exists or the law does not define bullying, educators should use the definition used by researchers. The term 'bullying' should not be used synonymously with the term 'harassment.'

The second step required the use of available model policies to be used as school systems develop anti-bullying policies. Some state statutes required state departments of education to provide school systems a model anti-bullying policy. With the passage of *Alabama's Student Harassment Prevention Act*, the Alabama State Department of Education was charged with this specific task. In other instances, states or state organizations provided model policies to school systems to be used as a guide to creating anti-bullying policies (Swearer et al., 2009).

Swearer et al.'s (2009) third step involved clearly outlining reporting of incidents in local bullying polices. Local reporting practices should be consistent with those practices found in state law. Guidance or directives for reporting bullying should be clearly outlined for students and school personnel. Reporting of bullying incidents alone will have little impact on the issue.

Anti-bullying policies must provide for appropriate investigation of bullying complaints, provide consequences for bullies and intervention for the bully victims (Limber & Small, 2003). This component of the anti-bullying policy exemplified Swearer et al.'s (2009) fourth step for effective policy development and implementation which is clarifying investigation and disciplinary actions. Some model policies described detailed processes for resolving bullying complaints while other policies provided succinct statements of responsibilities for school personnel to investigate complaints.

The fifth step in policy development addressed the need to include assistance for victims of bullying. Most states give little attention to this vital component of the anti-bullying policy. With the documentation of negative consequences to bullying: emotional, physical, and academic, policy makers must include language that require school personnel to evaluate bully victims for potential problems resulting from bullying. School personnel must provide assistance and referrals as needed for students suffering the trauma of bullying (Swearer et al., 2009).

The inclusion of training and prevention procedures characterized Swearer et al.'s (2009) final step in policy development. Most state model policies addressed staff training needs and prevention strategies, but without specificity. A few states had no prevention efforts outlined in the anti-bullying policy. Others gave only a brief synopsis of prevention strategies. Policy

language generally focused on prohibition and reporting procedures for bullying. This practice alone will have minimal effect on decreasing bullying behaviors.

State laws and statutes have been the driving force behind anti-bullying policy development in local school systems. Although required by state mandates, effective policy implementation requires an eighty percent buy-in from stakeholders. Without this support, the success of a program or policy is unlikely. Thus, effective anti-bullying policies must have the support of administrators, faculty, staff, students, parents, and the community. Effective policy implementation starts with the creation of an anti-bullying task force which includes school personnel and community representation. Anti-bullying policies need to be accessible to the public as well as school staff. School personnel need to be knowledgeable of their system's policy on bullying. Staff training on policies and procedures should be conducted each year. Components of the system policy on bullying should be reflective in all classroom policies and procedures. Specific procedures for addressing bullying behaviors should be clearly shared with all stakeholders (Swearer et al., 2009).

National Bullying Awareness

The U.S. Department of Education is leading a comprehensive approach to end bullying. According to President Obama,

> We've got to dispel the myth that bullying is just a normal rite of passage, or an inevitable part of growing up. It's not. We have an obligation to ensure that our schools are safe for all of our kids. Every single young person deserves the opportunity to learn and grow and achieve their potential, without having to worry about the constant threat of harassment. (U.S. Department of Education, 2010a, para, 4)

In August 2010, the Obama Administration held the first National Bullying Summit. This national summit gave birth to the Stop Bullying Now Campaign (www.bullyinginfo.org) which is a comprehensive database of anti-bullying programs (U.S. Department, 2010a, para, 8).

U.S. Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan echoed President Obama's sentiments on bullying with the following statement:

> As educators, as state and local officials, and at the federal level, we simply have not taken the problem of bullying seriously enough. It is an absolute travesty of our educational system when students fear for their safety at school, worry about being bullied or suffer discrimination and taunts because of their ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, disability or a host of other reasons. The fact is no school can be a great school until it is a safe school first. (U.S. Department of Education, 2010b, para, 2)

In 2009, President Obama formed the Obama Administrations Inter-Agency Task Force on Bullying. The Task Force consisted of representatives from the U.S. Department of Education, the Department of Defense, Justice, Health and Human Services, Agriculture, and the Interior (U.S. Department of Education, 2010a, para 8). The partnership among the various departments allowed a compilation of ideas and suggestions for creating a national anti-bullying plan. Later, the National Council on Disability and the Federal Trade Commission joined the interagency group. The Bullying Prevention Steering Committee was created from this group in order to provide assistance to individuals and organizations in the fight against bullying. (U.S. Department of Education, 2011, para. 15). Since its creation, the Bullying Prevention Steering Committee has focused on the following prevention activities:

- StopBullying.gov: This website provided information from a variety of government agencies on how bullying can be prevented or stopped. Information is also provided on what bullying is and its effects.

- Enforcing Civil Rights Laws: This U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights sent a "Dear Colleague" letter to school systems, colleges, and universities stating educators' legal responsibility to protect students from various forms of harassment. The letter gave examples of harassment and possible school responses as cases occur. The purpose of the letter was to assist educators in handling bullying issues by clarifying when bullying behaviors may violate anti-discrimination laws.

- Shaping State Laws and Policies: U.S. Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan sent each state governor and chief state school officer a letter regarding anti-bullying laws and policies. The letter outlined key elements found in effective state anti-bullying laws and policies.

- Stop Bullying Now! Campaign: This campaign was initiated by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA). The campaign focus was to raise awareness of bullying by strengthening partnerships with other organizations. The campaign also focused on preventing or reducing bullying behaviors through a variety of interventions and strategies. The campaign targeted children 5 to 18 years of age. The children are provided tool kits to assist with the mentoring of other students to take a stand against bullying.

- Safe and Supportive Schools Grant Program: This competitive grant required states to measure school safety at the building level. Student surveys are administered which include bullying and harassment behaviors. Schools identified as having the greatest

need are given federal funds for intervention programs and strategies (U.S.

Department of Education, 2011, para 16–20).

Not only is the President concerned with Federal efforts and commitments to bullying prevention, but through the March 2011 White House Conference on Bullying Prevention, he encouraged public and private partnerships to unite and fight the war against bullying. In his conference speech, the President highlighted several partnerships and commitments from the public and private sector.

Formspring, a social network, and Massachusetts Institute of Technology's (MIT) media lab are collaborating to find new methods to detect online bullying. They are also designing interfaces to prevent or mitigate bullying occurrences. MTV Networks: "A Thin Line" in partnership with several other organizations started an anti-digital discrimination coalition to fight online bullying. The network is also airing a true-life film about a young man that webcast his suicide after experiencing online bullying. In addition, the network will launch online bullying and digital discrimination public service announcements aimed at encouraging bystanders to get involved. Facebook is revamping its multimedia safety center and creating a "Social Reporting" system which will allow the reporting of content violating Facebook policies. Content violating the policies will be removed immediately and parents and teachers notified so that proper disciplinary procedures can be implemented. The Survey Monkey software tool can be used to quickly and easily collect data regarding the existence of bullying in school. Administrators and students can use Survey Monkey's ten question survey to gather information about bullying. The survey can be distributed through email, fliers, or Facebook. Other identifiable bullying/anti-bullying programs include the following.

- Bully-Free: It Starts with Me is an online, national anti-bullying campaign sponsored by the National Education Association (NEA). NEA will use this campaign to identify adults in the schools willing to represent bullied students in schools throughout America. NEA also conducted a survey study of 5,000 educators to analyze their perspectives on bullying and its prevention.

- See a Bully, Stop a Bully, Make a Difference, is a national bullying campaign started by the American Federation of Teachers (AFT). The campaign's purpose was to raise awareness of AFT leaders and members on bullying and its effects. AFT leaders and members received resources, training opportunities, and technical assistance in dealing with bullying behaviors. As a part of the campaign, AFT will host regional summits and topical webinars as well as partner with other agencies to amplify the anti-bullying message.

- Connect for Respect is a national bullying campaign launched by the National PTA. The campaign requested PTAs throughout the nation to host a community Connect for Respect event to share resources about bullying with parents in their service area. The campaign also advocated parents talking to their children on the subject of bullying and parents collaborating with school officials to promote policies and practices that create safe school environments.

- Raising Student Voice and Participation Bullying Challenge: The National Association of Student Councils (NASC) is leading the charge in organizing thousands of student groups to participate in student-led conversations and action plans to combat bullying. Student-led summits will identify strategies and projects to address bullying issues.

- Students on Board for Bullying Prevention: The National School Boards Association (NSBA) is organizing middle and high school student conversations with boards of education. The dialogue will be based on research-based school climate survey questions (U.S. Department of Education, 2011, para. 6-14).

National Guidelines for Bullying Laws and Policies

Worse case scenarios resulting from bullying have spurred educators and policy-makers into action to deal with the issue. The U.S. Department of Education, understanding the urgency of the problem, has taken measures to assist educators in developing or revising their anti-bullying laws and policies. In response to state and local officials' requests for assistance in crafting bullying legislation and policies, U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan distributed a memorandum to all state governors, state superintendents and state boards of education detailing key components of effective anti-bullying legislation and policies. Secretary Duncan's memo consisted of a summarization of examples obtained from various states on best practices used to devise bullying laws and policies. This technical assistance will be vital in developing strong anti-bullying legislation (U.S. Department of Education, 2010c, para. 1-5).

Secretary Duncan's office utilized information from twenty-nine states to identify key components in existing effective anti-bullying legislation. The laws were categorized into eleven sections. Illustrations were included to depict the key elements in each section. The U.S. Department of Education provided technical assistance to educators in the form of a memorandum outlining best state practices for bullying policies; however, the Department did not endorse any particular state anti-bullying law (U.S. Department of Education, 2010c, para. 3). The U.S. Department of Education gave the following examples of elements included in

current state legislation considered to be best practices necessary for the development of strong, effective bullying laws and policies:

- Purpose Statement: Stated the effect bullying has on students, student learning, school safety, student engagement, and school environment.

- Statement of Scope: Encompassed conduct that occurs on the school campus, at school activities, on school transportation, and through technology owned by the school.

- Specification of Prohibited Conduct: Gave an easily understood definition of bullying to include cyberbullying. Complied with federal, state, and local laws.

- Enumeration of Specific Characteristics: Gave a description of characteristics of students historically targeted for bullying policies, but also made clear that bullying did not have to be based on a specific characteristic.

- Development and Implementation of LEA policies: Gave directives to LEAs to develop and implement bullying policies. Stated that the process should be collaborative with all stakeholders.

- Components of LEA Policies: Directed LEAs to provide a bullying definition that met the requirements of state law and included procedures for reporting, investigating, responding, and maintaining written records of incidents of bullying. Included detailed description of consequences for bullying and procedures for referring victims, perpetrators, and others to counseling and other appropriate services.

- Review of Local Policies: Provided for consistent state review of local policies.

- Communication Plan: Provided for the distribution of policy on bullying to all stakeholders.

- Training and Preventive Education: Directed school districts to provide training to all faculty and support staff on preventing, identifying, and responding to bullying.

- Transparency and Monitoring: Directed LEAs to report yearly the number of bullying incidents and school response to the state and to make bullying data available to the public.

- Statement of Rights to Other Legal Reverse: Included a clause that victims may seek other legal action (U.S. Department of Education, 2010d).

"States and local school districts can use these examples as technical assistance in drafting effective anti-bullying laws, regulations, and policies" (U.S. Department of Education, 2010d, para. 4). U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan stated

> We need the commitment from everyone at the federal, state, and local level to put an end to bullying. We have been told that bullying has been going on in our schools forever. But we can stop it now. Strong anti-bullying policies instill a climate that this behavior will not be tolerated. (U.S. Department of Education, 2010c, para 6)

Alabama's Response to Bullying

Incidents of bullying have impacted every state with devastating effects. Alabama has been no exception. In October, 2009, twelve-year-old Anniston Middle school student Tre'Juan "Trey" Figures committed suicide by hanging himself in his bedroom closet. His family named bulling as the cause. Several family members reported that the sixth grader had been bullied for more than a year by his peers. In a separate incident, fifteen-year-old Jemison High School student Alex Moore committed suicide by jumping off an overpass above the interstate.

Facebook information revealed she had been teased and bullied by her classmates. Alex's family reported that she was overweight and not a part of the "in" crowd. Alex was already experiencing depression due to the death of her older sister. Research indicates students experiencing depression are more apt to commit suicide when subjected to bullying (Al.Com, 2010).

Alabama is one of the more recent states to pass an anti-bullying law. The new law is designed to protect students in pre-kindergarten through grade twelve. Previous Democratic State Representative Betty Carol Graham of Alexander City sponsored Alabama's bullying law. According to Graham, "Home and school should be the two safest places in the world for children, and Alabama didn't have a policy in place to assure that in schools. Not only is that unbelievable, it's unforgiveable" (Times Daily, 2009, para. 11). On May 20, 2009, Governor Bob Riley signed Alabama's bullying law entitled the Student Harassment Prevention Act (Bully Police, USA). The new law became effective on October 1, 2009 with local boards to establish anti-bullying policies on or before July 1, 2010 (Alabama Education News, 2010).

> In creating the Student Harassment Prevention Act, it was the intent of the Legislature to provide for the adoption of policies in public school systems to prevent the harassment of students. It is the further intent of the Legislature that this act apply only to student against student harassment, intimidation, violence, and threats of violence in the public schools of Alabama, grades prekindergarten through 12, and that the State Department of Education develop, and each local board of education adopt, procedural policies to manage, and possibly, prevent these acts against any student by another student or students based on the characteristics of a student. (Student Harassment Prevention Act, 2009)

Does Alabama Make the Grade?

According to the Bully Policy USA guidelines, Alabama obtained a B+ grade for its efforts in bullying legislation. Bully Police USA had several specific concerns as it related to Alabama's bullying legislation. The law pertains "only to one student against another student" harassment and does not address teacher to student harassment or student to teacher harassment. The law also states that complaints must be written and submitted by the effected student or the student's parent. Very young children may not be able to comply with this requirement. According to Bully Police USA, the law also uses outdated terms such as "continuous patter of intentional behavior" and outdated strategies such as peer mediation. The phrase in the law "prompt investigation of reports of serious violations and complaints" is a discretionary phrase. Each person may have a different belief of what is considered serious. The law also directs educators to develop a list of specific of specific personal student characteristics of students bullied. This implies a student may deserve to be bullied because of a specific personal characteristic

Bully Police USA grades each state's anti-bullying law according to the inclusion of certain key points. These key areas are as follows:

- The word "bullying" must be in the text of the bill/law/statutes.

- The law must clearly be an anti-bullying law, not a school safety law.

- There must be definitions of bullying and harassment.

- There should be recommendations about how to make policy and what needs to be in the model policy.

- A good law involves education specialists at all levels, starting with the state Superintendent's office, through school districts, schools, parents, and students.

- A good law mandates anti-bullying programs, not suggests programs.

- Laws should include a date the model policy is due, when the schools need to have their policies in place, and when the anti-bullying programs must be in effect.

- There must be protection against reprisal, retaliation or false accusation.

- There must be school district protection against lawsuits upon compliance to policies.

- A top rated law will put the emphasis on the victims of bullying by assigning counseling for victims who suffer for years after peer abuse.

- There must be accountability reports made to either lawmakers or the State Education Superintendent and there must be a consequence assigned to schools/districts who don't comply with the law. There should be mandatory posting and or notification of policies and reporting form procedures for students and parents.

- Cyberbullying or Electronic Harassment Law (Bully Police USA).

Brenda High, executive director for the Bully Police USA organization provided the following inclusive information for assignments of letter grades to each state:

- All states with no anti-bullying laws get an F.

- States with worthless anti-bullying laws get a D.

- States with mediocre laws get a C.

- States with acceptable laws get a B.

- States that have near perfect laws get an A.

- All plus's (+) and minus (-) are at the option of the executive director.

- No state gets an A+ unless there is an emphasis on victims or a bullying victim's right clause about getting free counseling or a cyberbullying clause. (Bully Police USA)

A letter grade for each state's anti-bullying law is illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2

Anti Bullying Law Letter Grade by State

Alaska A	Hawaii B-	Maine A-	New Jersey A++	South Dakota F
Alabama B+	Iowa A-	Michigan F	New Mexico B+	Tennessee A-
Arkansas A-	Idaho A-	Minnesota C-	New York B+	Texas C-
Arizona B-	Illinois A-	Missouri A-	Nevada B+	Utah A-
California B	Indiana B+	Mississippi C	Ohio A	Virginia A++
Colorado B	Kansas B	Montana F	Oklahoma A	Vermont A-
Connecticut B-	Kentucky A++	North Carolina B+	Oregon A+	Washington A+
Delaware A++	Louisiana C	North Dakota A++	Pennsylvania B+	Wisconsin B+
Florida A++	Massachusetts A++	Nebraska C+	Rhode Island A+	West Virginia A+
Georgia A++	Maryland A++	New Hampshire A++	South Carolina A-	Wyoming A++

State Department of Education's Role in Creating Safe Schools

Administration for public education in the United States rests with the states, not the constitution. States rarely exercise their power directly with regards to education. This responsibility is normally carried out through state departments of education. State Departments of Education generally have four main functions. These areas of function are regulation, operation, administration of special services, and leadership (Grady, Haar, & Losh, 2004).

According to Grady, Haar, and Losh (2004), a major responsibility of the state, education departments, and leadership was creating a safe school environment. In order for children to learn and teachers to teach, it is vital for schools to be a safe, nurturing environment. The idea that schools should be a safe haven for students has garnered support from legislation throughout the history of public education. Mandates, initiatives, and policies are considered the driving force for creating a safe school environment. "Mandates included establishing behavior standards, developing crisis and safety plans, developing policies, providing services for students in schools, and implementing specific programs such as Character Education, Codes of Conduct, Conflict Resolution, and Peer Mediation" (Grady et al., 2004, p. 12). State department of education staff are the liaisons between state laws and the local school systems. They ensure that school systems comply with state mandates, initiatives, and policies. They are also responsible for providing school systems with assistance, resources, and professional development training required to meet compliance guidelines (Grady et al., 2004).

State departments of education emphasized prevention as a major component in creating safe school environments. Prevention is the key to decreasing violence in schools. Educators must focus on the needs and concerns of students. Immediate attention should be given to issues and problems experienced by students, especially incidents of bullying, harassment, and hazing.

Elimination of this behavior is crucial in the provision of a safe school environment (Grady et al., 2004).

The provisions of school services are another important emphasis for state departments of education in creating safe schools. These services are divided into two distinct areas. The first area is the physical aspect of safety. State department personnel provided training and technical assistance, workshops, conferences, documents, and resources to local school systems. They also administered funds, managed grants, and reviewed plans. The second area deals with the social and emotional aspects of safety. State department personnel focused on addressing student needs, behavior interventions, counseling, and social skills (Grady et al., 2004).

Alabama's Department of Education

As with other state departments of education, Alabama's Department of Education is responsible for overseeing compliance of state legislative mandates. With the passage of Alabama's Student Harassment Prevention Act, the Alabama Department of Education was required to develop a model policy for local boards pertaining to student harassment prevention. Every local board in the state was required to develop and implement a student harassment policy. On October 20, 2009, Dr. Thomas Bice, Deputy State Superintendent of Education sent a memorandum to all city and count superintendents with a model anti-harassment policy attached. Local boards of education would use the state's model policy to develop their own policy.

The model anti-harassment policy consists of six sections. They were as follows:

- harassment, violence, and threats of violence prohibited
- definitions
- descriptions of behavior expected of students
- consequences for violations

- reporting, investigating, and complaint resolution procedures

- promulgation of policy and related procedures, rules and forms (ALSDE Model Anti-Harassment Policy, p. 1–3).

According to Dr. Thomas Bice, "it is the intent of this policy to ensure that all of Alabama's students participate in a supportive learning environment free from harassment." Dr. Bice further stated that "to support local education agencies, the state department of education will be providing a service of professional development opportunities to assist local education agencies as they develop practices and procedures in support of their policy (T.B. Bice, personal communication, October 20, 2009).

The Alabama State Department of Education's commitment to assisting local schools systems was evident in its 2011 Statewide Mega Conference. The State Department of Education's Mega Conference was a week-long event of professional development opportunities for Alabama Educators. In particular, this year's conference included several sessions on bullying. Presenters focused on identifying bullying behaviors and implementing intervention strategies, providing an overview of Alabama's Harassment Law and using digital literacy to combat bullying (Mega Brochure, 2011).

Bullying is an ever present problem facing America's youth. Alabama's State Department of Education recognized this problem through data collection obtained from the Pride Survey School Climate Questionnaire. This survey provided Alabama educators with useful data about students through information retrieved directly from the students based on their behaviors, beliefs, and living environments (Alabama Statewide Student Survey, 2010).

A specific statement on Alabama's Pride Survey focused on threatening and harmful behaviors. During the 2009–2010 Alabama Pride Questionnaire, 278,830 were surveyed with

269,928 students responding to the questions. Of the total number of students responding to the

questions specific to threatening and harmful behaviors 109, 183 or 40.4% of the students

reported threatening or harmful behaviors. Survey results were based on students reporting

threatening incidents with a club, knife or gun or threatening to hit, kick, or slap (Alabama

Statewide Student Survey, 2010). Information obtained from Alabama's Pride Survey was used

in the development of bullying intervention programs.

<center>**Stop Bullying in Alabama**</center>

The State Department of Education created a website called Stop Bullying in Alabama.

The website was created to provide anti-bullying resources for students, parents, and educators to

utilize in combating the issue of bullying in Alabama's schools. A copy of Alabama's Student

Harassment Prevention Act as well as examples of Alabama schools' bullying policies is located

on the website. Bullying videos are posted on Alabama's Podcast Treasury Gallery 360. There

are also links to the Southern Poverty Law Center and the National Council Safety Center. The

Southern Poverty Law Center provided current information relating to bullying. The National

Council Safety Center contained information concerning state laws related to bullying (Stop

Bullying in Alabama).

The website contained a link called Alabama experts. These Alabama educators share

resources and recommendations to address school bullying. The website also contains

information on a safe method of reporting bullying for students and an easy way for

administrators to obtain information about bullying behaviors and situations.

AnonymousTips.com is a safe, effective tool for reporting bullying as well as a means for

administrators to receive information about bullying behaviors. The website is a reporting

service for schools and law enforcement. Students can report incidents without the fear of

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retaliation. Law enforcement and schools must register on the website in order to utilize the services (Stop Bullying in Alabama).

Summary of the Review of Literature

For decades, bullying has been one of the most underestimated and persistent problems faced by students across the nation. Yet, it is quickly becoming one of the most significant issues faced by students and educators in our schools today. Media attention is testament of this phenomenon giving rise to school shootings and suicide resulting from bullying behavior. Increased attention on school bullying by the media has impacted the desensitized mind set of educators, legislators and parents.

Bullying appears to have long lasting consequences for all involved. This includes the victim, the bully, and the bystander. Victims of bullying often feel lonely and isolated. They live in constant fear which causes them to perform poor academically. Sometimes the victims often experience emotional scares throughout their lives (Scaglione & Scaglione, 2006). Like their victims, bullies often experience long term consequences as a result of the bullying behavior. The bully is at risk for social and emotional problems. They often grow into adult bullies, terrorizing their spouses and children (Lajore at el., 1997; Whitted & Dupper, 2005). Children who witness bullying incidents are also affected by what they see occurring. They experience fear of the bully although they may not be the bully's target. They may also have feelings of guilt for not intervening in bullying incidents. Some bystanders loose empathy for the victims and may eventually become bullies themselves (U.S. Department of Education, 1998; Whitted & Dupper, 2005).

Increasingly, school personnel and public and elected officials have come to view bullying as a very serious and often ignored problem facing students and the local school

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systems (Swearer, Limber, & Alley, 2009). According to Greene and Ross (2005), the

Columbine High School shooting ignited a wave of new state legislations aimed at addressing

the bullying behavior occurring in schools. Additional school shootings and suicides linked to

bullying fueled this trend (Marr and Field, 2001). According to Limber and Small (2003), many

state legislatures are now interested in establishing laws that call for the development of school

based bullying policies.

Currently, forty-seven states have passed legislation addressing bullying, with Alabama

being one of them. Although the majority of states have passed laws addressing bullying,

according to Limber and Small (2003),

Ultimately, the merit of any law passed to address bullying will depend upon the care

with which the law is written including its attention to and consistency with relevant

social science research about bullying and how effectively the law influences school

policies and programs. (p. 446)

In 2009, Alabama passed its anti-bullying law entitled the *Student Harassment Prevention Act*.

A component of the law directed the State Department of Education to develop a model anti-

harassment policy to be utilized by the local education agencies in the development and adoption

of their individual student harassment policies. The present study is being conducted to

determine the present status of bullying policies in Alabama and to compare local educational

agency's (LEA's) policies to state and national guidelines. A secondary purpose of the present

study is to identify districts that had exemplary policies and to discover what factors were

involved in fostering their ability to create these policies. In addition, the researcher will

investigate exemplary policies within the LEA's to determine what elements made these policies

exemplary. To determine the inclusion of best practices, policies will be analyzed using to

Alabama's *Student Harassment Act* and the U.S. Department of Education's identified key

bullying policy components.

CHAPTER III. METHODS

Introduction

The focus on bullying behavior in and around the school environment has become

prevalent across the United States (Coloroso, 2008; Garett, 2003; Espelarge & Swearer, 2004).

Media coverage of school-related homicides and suicides has raised awareness of the severity as

well as the consequences of bullying (Denmark et al., 2005; Drake et al, 2003; Garett, 2003;

Geffner et al, 2001). As a result, eliminating school violence and providing a safe learning

environment has become a concern of parents, educators, and legislators who understand the

long- term effects of bullying (Whitted & Dupper, 2005). In addition, heightened interest in

bullying has prompted school personnel, the public, and policy-makers to rethink how school

policies can be revised to address bullying (Furlong et al., 2003). Specifically, states have

passed legislation and statutes that influence the development of effective school bullying

policies (Limber & Small, 2003).

This chapter describes the methodology used in the study. A description of the purpose

of the study, the research questions, instrumentation, research design, population and sample,

data collection, and analysis procedures will be presented in this chapter.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine the present status of bullying policies in

Alabama and to compare local educational agency's (LEA's) policies to state and national

guidelines. A secondary purpose was to identify districts that had exemplary policies and to

discover what factors were involved in fostering their ability to create these policies. Policies were compared to Alabama's *Student Harassment Act* and the U.S. Department of Education's identified key bullying policy components. The U.S. Department of Education, Program and Policy Service, conducted a study analyzing state bullying laws and policies. The study's design allowed for viewing of the types of provisions addressed in legislation as well as the expansiveness.

The U.S. Department of Education identified key policy components present in state bullying legislation. The components were categorized and used to underlie their study's method of reviewing the content of bullying laws. The researcher used the U.S. Department of Education-identified key components as a means of analyzing Alabama's school system policies. Hence, the researcher used the U.S. Department of Education key components and the Alabama model policy as a filter for the Alabama LEA bullying policies. According to the literature, educators must develop legally correct policies to decrease or eliminate school violence. To be effective, these policies must also include best practices for policy development and implementation (Bully Police USA; Rozalski & Yell, 2004; Swearer et al., 2009; USDOE, 2010d).

Significance of the Study

Although there is a significant amount of literature pertaining to the many facets of bullying, there is a continued need for an expansion of literature addressing bullying policy development and implementation. Increasing legal issues concerning bullying dictated a need for in-depth information regarding current state bullying legislation and state and district policy formulation. Affective bullying policy can only be determined by analyzing all policies and determining the best practices inclusive of the policies. According to Gallagher (1992), policy

analysis ultimately leads to making choices and engaging in decision making. Through this particular policy analysis, the researcher hoped to improve the quality and effectiveness of bullying policies in Alabama school systems by providing information which educators and policy-makers could use to assist with the modification or expansion of existing bullying policies and laws. Fusarelli (2008) encouraged school leaders to use research to discern what policies and programs worked best and why. The researcher further hoped to contribute to the existing research on bullying and to create a sense of urgency in school systems to analyze their bullying policies and their incidents of bullying to determine if the policy's goals and objectives are being met.

Research Questions

The following research questions were developed as a basis for the body of research conducted in the study.

1. Do Alabama school systems' bullying policies align with the United States Department of Education's identified key bullying policy components?

2. Do school systems' bullying policies align with Alabama's *Student Harassment Prevention Act*?

3. Do the individual school systems include additional components in their board adopted bullying policy?

4. What contributing factors influenced the development of school system bullying policies exceeding minimum criteria?

Instrumentation

Researchers utilizing the qualitative research method gather the data themselves through inspecting documents, noting behavior, and questioning participants. The researcher may use a

protocol or instrument to gather data but they are the ones actually collecting the information. Generally, they do not rely on instruments developed by others (Creswell, 2007). In order to gather data for this study, the researcher obtained available student harassment policies from system websites. Policies not available on system websites were requested via email from the school system directly. Systems not responding within 14 days of the email request were contacted by telephone and a verbal request for the information was made. Follow-up telephone calls were limited to one. Additional data were collected from select systems via telephone interviews.

Research Design

This qualitative research study focused on the use of content analysis of LEA bullying policies and individual interviews of key personnel in select LEA's to address the first three research questions. According to Creswell (2007) qualitative researchers usually collect multiple types of data, such as documents, interviews, and observations, rather than rely on single data source. Patton (2002) further supports this assessment by stating that qualitative findings are the results of data collections in the form of in-depth open-ended interviews, direct observations, and written documents. The use of individual interviews using open-ended questioning was utilized to address the fourth research question. For this study the researcher relied upon open-ended interviews and written documents. Researchers then evaluate all of the data, organizing them into categories or themes that cut across all of the data sources. Qualitative researchers also form patterns, categories, and themes from the bottom-up. They organize the data into progressively more abstract pieces of information. This inductive procedure encompasses researchers working between the themes and the database until they form a broad set of themes (Creswell, 2007).

Population and Sample

The population studied to address the first three research questions was all school systems in Alabama. There are 65 city systems and 67 county systems in Alabama for a total of 132 school systems. Information pertaining to school systems in Alabama was obtained from the Alabama Department of Education's website www.alsde.edu. The list of school systems was retrieved on March 17, 2012. All school systems in Alabama are required to complete an Assurance of Compliance form and send to the state department of education. Information on the form is presented in a check list format. Systems must respond to the items on the form by checking yes, no, work in progress, or projected date of compliance. Item number five on the form states that the school board has adopted and implemented a policy to prevent harassment. According to information on file in the Prevention and Support Services section of the state department, all school systems reported a school board adopted harassment policy was being implemented in the system. Available student harassment policies were obtained from school systems websites. Policies not available on system websites were requested directly from the system. At the time of the study, the researcher was employed with the Alabama Department of Education and therefore had access to system information. The population studied to address the fourth research question was all school sytems in Alabama with policies exceeding the minimum criteria established by the Alabama's Department of Education's model student harassment policy. Only three school systems exceeded the criteria. The sample was the same as the population.

Role of the Researcher

As an education specialist in the Alabama Department of Education, the researcher has a vested interest in the well-being and safety of students in Alabama. After

Alabama legislatures enacted its bullying law entitled the *Student Harassment Prevention Act*,

the Alabama Department of Education was directed to develop a model ant-harassment policy

for school systems to use as a framework for developing their local policy. All school boards

adopted and implemented a policy to prevent harassment. This study has allowed me to analyze

all system policies and determine if key policy development components were inclusive of the

policies. The study also allowed me to identify school systems that went beyond minimum

policy requirements.

Research Procedures

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Auburn University Institutional Review Board approval was obtained by submitting an

application for human subject research. The application included type of research, the objectives

of the research and its significance, methods for selecting subjects, a consent form, and methods

used to ensure confidentiality. The researcher was given exempt status for the study (see

Appendix 1).

Data Collection

Data collection for the study began January, 2012. The researcher obtained a copy of the

Assurance of Compliance form for each school system in Alabama. In order to show compliance

as mandated by Alabama laws and regulations related to school safety, all Alabama school

systems are required to complete an Assurance of Compliance form and send to the state

department of education. Information on the form included a section that dealt with the school

board adoption and implementation of a policy to prevent harassment. The researcher used the

form to establish which systems had a student harassment/bullying policy in place. According to

information reviewed by the researcher, all school systems had a school board adopted

harassment policy that was being implemented in the system. The researcher downloaded a copy of available student harassment policies from the systems' website. Several system policies were not available on system websites. Each school system without a policy on the website was contacted via email requesting a copy of the policy. School systems were asked to send the copy via email to the researcher. Systems were allowed 14 days to respond to the email request. After 14 days, the systems were contacted by telephone and a verbal request for the information was made. Follow-up telephone calls were limited to one. An additional seven days were allowed for systems contacted by phone to send a copy of the policy.

The U.S. Department of Education conducted a study which analyzed the content of state bullying laws and its relationship to state model policies, and district policies. Atlas.ti qualitative data analysis software was used in the study to categorize and code text in the laws and policies. The U.S. Department of Education noted key policy components found in state bullying legislation. The components were categorized and used to underlie their study's method of reviewing the content of bullying laws. The researcher used the U.S. Department of Education-identified key components as a framework for analyzing Alabama's school system policies and Alabama's Student Harassment Act.

In addition to the gathering data for the content analysis of the system bullying policies, interviews were conducted with key personnel in systems with policies exceeding the minimum criteria established in the Alabama Department of Education's model student harassment policy. Only three school systems were eligible for the follow-up interview protocol. The researcher contacted each system's central office to obtain the name of the person listed as chairperson for the development of the student harassment policy. In each case, central office level personnel were determined to be the individual contact. The researcher contacted each chairperson via

telephone in order to determine the chairperson's willingness to participate. All three system representatives complied with the researcher's request for an interview. An agreeable interview time was determined for each individual. An information letter was emailed to the selected participants. As previously noted, interviewing is a common characteristic found in qualitative studies. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2000), structured interviews can be conducted by telephone as such was the case in this study. This method yields better results because the interviewer is less likely to influence the interviewee's responses. It also calls for the interviewer to play a more neutral role. In addition it allows the researcher to use member checking. Interviewee's selected were utilized to double check the researcher's analysis and to confirm why the system had gone beyond the minimum. Interviews lasted an average of 15–20 minutes.

Data gathered through the interview process provided insight into the development of the policy. Selected participants were given the same set of interview questions. Utilizing information obtained through the review of literature, questions were designed by the researcher for the purpose of obtaining information on the development of the student harassment policy, involvement in the development of the policy, resources utilized in the development of the policy, and developers' knowledge of existing laws and best practices in policy development. The researcher used note taking as a means of collecting data from the interview process. Summarization of the information obtained was used as a reporting mechanism for the data collected during the interview process.

Data Analysis

For this study, the researcher was interested in whether local board policies included language previously identified in the U.S. Department of Education's identified key bullying components and Alabama's *Student Harassment Prevention Act*. The researcher conducted a

content analysis to analyze the documents. Content analysis is an investigation tool concentrated on the actual content and internal features of media. It is utilized to establish the existence of specific characters, concepts, phrases, themes, words, or sentences within texts or sets of texts. In order to perform a content analysis on a text, the text is coded and organized into manageable categories (Schwandt, 2007). Due to the previous coding of the text to formulate categories for the documents for the study, the researcher was able to use the pre-existing data to complete this study without incorporating a new coding process.

Content analysis is generally labeled as conceptual or relational. In the present study the researcher used conceptual analysis for questions one, two and three. Conceptual analysis establishes the frequency of concepts in a text while relational analysis examines the relationships among concepts in a text. In conceptual content analysis, a concept is chosen for examination. Once chosen, the researcher codes the text into manageable content categories. This allows specific characteristics of the text to be analyzed and interpreted. In a conceptual content analysis, the researcher merely wants to investigate presence with respect to the research question. For instance, in this study the researcher wanted to determine the alignment of school systems bullying policies with Alabama's *Student Harassment Act* and the U.S. Department of Education's identified key components of a bullying policy.

In addition to the gathering data for the content analysis of the system bullying policies, interviews were conducted with key personnel in systems with policies exceeding the minimum criteria established in the Alabama Department of Education's model student harassment policy. Only three school systems exceeded the criteria and were eligible for the follow-up interview protocol. Structured interviews were conducted by telephone with select participants. Outcomes from qualitative studies should encompass descriptive data on the interviewee's spoken word

providing the audience a feeling of actually being a part of the interview process (Taylor &

Bogdan, 1998). Analyzing data includes an overall review of the information from interview

transcripts and field notes taken during the study (Creswell, 2007). The researcher used note

taking as a means of collecting data from the interview process.

Data analysis involves a process of making sense of the information collected, gaining a

deeper understanding of the data gathered, representing the data, and interpreting the larger

meaning of the data (Creswell, 2007). Qualitative methods to data analyses can be intricate;

therefore, researchers should acquire the fundamental techniques of thematic analysis. Thematic

analysis is a research tool used to identify, analyze and report patterns or themes (Braun &

Clarke, 2006). There are three types of thematic analysis but for the purpose of this study the

researcher will use inductive analysis which is data driven and does not attempt to fit the data

into preexisting categories. The data collected from each school system interview was

summarized and analyzed individually. All repeated themes from the participants were then

synthesized. Data collected revealed distinct factors influencing policy development for the

three systems. System A's exemplary policy was the result of high standards set by the

community, the diversity of the committee formed, and the seriousness of the issue of bullying.

System B's exemplary policy resulted from an Office for Civil Rights compliance review and the

system's result from Alabama's pride survey. Data collected addressing school climate and

learning environments indicated bullying was a potential problem in the system. System C's

exemplary policy stemmed from similar factors found in the development of System A's policy.

System C's exemplary policy was the result of high standards set by the school system and the

seriousness of the issue of bullying. Three common distinct factors influencing policy

development within the systems were committee diversity, seriousness of bullying, and high expectations.

Data analysis for the study was organized by research questions. The following information depicts the procedure.

Research Questions

1.   Do Alabama school systems' bullying policies align with the United States Department of Education's identified key bulling policy components?

The first study question focused on the structure and content of policies developed and implemented at the local school system level. The policy analysis aimed to determine policy components present in local policies with regards to components identified by the U.S. Department of Education.

2.   Do school systems' bullying policies align with Alabama's *Student Harassment Prevention Act*?

The second study question called for an intensive analysis of school system's policies to determine the structure and content of the policies. System policies were evaluated based on components found in Alabama's *Student Harassment Policy Act*.

3.   Do individual school systems include additional components in their board adopted bullying policy?

The third study question is an extension of the previous two research questions. Further analysis of school system policies was conducted to determine if additional information or content was discovered beyond requirements of Alabama's *Student Harassment Prevention Act*. The analysis also looked at the relationship between state law and local policy development and implementation.

4.   What contributing factors influenced the development of school systems' bullying policies exceeding minimum criteria?

The final study question focused on local education agencies that exceeded the minimum criteria set by the Alabama Department of Education's model student harassment policy. School systems were determined to have exceeded criteria standards if their policies included additional components outlined by the U. S. Department of Education's suggested guidelines for bullying policy development. Follow-up interviews were conducted with school systems determined to have exceeded minimum criteria found in the model policy.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is the term Lincoln and Guba (2007) used to describe a set of criteria that act as quality control for qualitative research. Trustworthiness rests on a foundation of:

1. Credibility

2. Transferability

3. Dependability

4. Confirmability

Credibility

Credibility is the researcher's assurance that what is reported in the study coincides with what is meant (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I conducted follow up interviews with school system personnel who were heavily involved in the creation of their LEA's bullying policy. The initial interviews took between 15 and 20 minutes and occurred during business hours. Follow-up discussions occurred through emails.

Peer reviewing. Like all other forms of qualitative and quantitative research, the issue of reliability and validity was important for the present study. According to Gottschalk (1995)

reliability may be complicated by the inescapably human nature of researchers. For this reason, he suggests that coding errors by peer reviewers and the researcher can only be minimized, and not eliminated. Gottschalk determined that 80% agreement was important in establishing reliability.

Peer reviewing is a tool to assist in checking "the credibility of our data and minimize the distorting effect of personal bias upon the logic of evidence (Lather, 1986). I chose two individuals to help check my analysis. Since I was interested in achieving the maximum amount of trustworthiness to my study, I asked two individuals who were familiar with the bullying literature to assist in the data check. One was a college professor who was familiar with bullying and the issues of Alabama's bullying policy work. The second member of the analysis check was a member of my doctoral cohort who had recently completed a dissertation on bullying. Both members volunteered to help (Miles & Hubermann, 1994). My goals for the peer review included verification of coding and interpretations of findings from the content analysis of LEA bullying policies (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Schwandt, 2007).

I met with the peer reviewers twice using Skype (http://www.skype.com). Skype software offers users the ability to perform group video calling. I worked to arrange convenient meeting times through email. Files were exchanged via Dropbox (http://www.dropbox.com). Dropbox is a cloud-based file sharing service. During the initial meeting, I discussed with them their roles as peer reviewers and set a tentative date to meet again. They were asked to address any biases they felt towards the subject matter and data. They also presented their overall impressions of my coding of the material. My peer reviewers served to add to the trustworthiness of my research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Peer reviewers and I reached an 80% agreement of the creditability of data thus establishing liability.

Transferability

Transferability or generalization allows the reader to delve into the research and possibly extract data that may lend clarity to the reader's personal experiences with the subject matter (Stake, 1995). Geertz (1973) argues that one should provide thick descriptions in order to produce research that may be transferable to others. Thick descriptions should bring the participant experiences to life. In other words, others who read this study should feel as though they have conducted the same analysis of LEA bullying policies as did the researcher. Furthermore, they should reach the same conclusions as has the researcher (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Dependability and Confirmability

An audit trail is the documentation surrounding the development and execution of my research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Dependability relies on the depth and transparency of the audit trail, so that future researchers can judge and reconstruct the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1994). I used a day planner calendar and a journal. These two mechanisms allowed me to share my knowledge and collaborate with others such as my research advisor and my peer reviewers. Both were used to log my progress, collect my thoughts and clarify the purpose and outcomes of the study.

<div align="center">Summary</div>

This chapter provided information about the methodology used in the study. The purpose of this study was to determine the present status of bullying policies in Alabama and to compare local educational agency (LEA) policies to state and national guidelines. A secondary purpose was to identify districts that had exemplary policies and to discover what factors were involved in fostering their ability to create these policies. In addition, the researcher investigated

exemplary policies within the LEAs to determine what elements made these policies exemplary.

Policies were compared to Alabama's *Student Harassment Act* and the U.S. Department of

Education's identified key bullying policy components. All school system policies were

requested for use in this study. Of the 132 policies requested, 131 policies were obtained for

analysis. To address the secondary purpose of the study, follow-interviews were conducted with

school systems that exceeded the minimum criteria established for bullying policies in Alabama

school systems. Only three systems were eligible for the follow-up interview process. The next

chapter details the findings of the study. It includes information about the population and sample

of the study.

CHAPTER IV. RESULTS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to determine the present status of bullying policies in Alabama and to compare local educational agency's (LEA's) policies to state and national guidelines. A secondary purpose was to identify districts that had exemplary policies and to discover what factors were involved in fostering their ability to create these policies. In addition, the researcher investigated exemplary policies within the LEAs to determine what elements made these policies exemplary.

The researcher performed a content analysis of the policies using Alabama's *Student Harassment Act* and the U.S. Department of Education's identified key bullying policy components. In addition to the content analysis of the system bullying policies, the researcher conducted interviews with key personnel in systems with policies exceeding the minimum criteria established in the Alabama Department of Education's model student harassment policy. Personnel to be interviewed were selected based on their involvement in the development and implementation of the system's student harassment policy. Data gathered through the interview process provided insight into the development of the policy. Selected participants were given the same set of interview questions. The questions were designed by the researcher for the purpose of obtaining information on the development of the student harassment policy, involvement in the development of the policy, resources utilized in the development of the policy, and developers' knowledge of existing laws and best practices in policy development.

According to the literature, school leaders must create appropriate policies to address incidents of school violence. Inclusive of these policies should be best practices for policy formulation and execution (Bully Police USA; Rozalski & Yell, 2004; Swearer et al., 2009; USDOE, 2010d). Policy analysis ultimately leads to improved quality and effectiveness of existing policies (Gallagher, 1992). In order to provide information which Alabama educators and policy makers could use to modify or expand existing policies and laws relative to bullying, the researcher analyzed the results of the study to determine if researched based key components were present in the policies.

Research Questions

The following research questions were developed as a basis for the body of research conducted in the study.

1.   Do Alabama school systems' bullying policies align with the United States Department of Education's identified key bullying policy components?

2.   Do school systems' bullying policies align with Alabama's *Student Harassment Prevention Act*?

3.   Do the individual school systems include additional components in their board adopted bullying policy?

4.   What contributing factors influenced the development of school system bullying policies exceeding minimum criteria?

The most applicable research design for this study was determined to be a content analysis. For this study, the researcher was interested in whether local board policies included language previously identified in the U.S. Department of Education's identified key bullying components and Alabama's *Student Harassment Prevention Act*.

Description of the Population

The population included all school systems in Alabama. At the time of this study, there were 67 county school systems and 65 city school systems for a total of 132 systems located in Alabama. Information relevant to school systems in Alabama was obtained from the Alabama Department of Education's website at www.alsde.edu. All school systems were solicited for copies of their local board approved Student Harassment Policies. Policies were retrieved through school system websites. Policies not located on system websites were requested via email. Of the 67 county school systems in Alabama, 67 policies were obtained for a response rate of 100%. Of the 65 city school systems in Alabama, 64 policies were obtained for a response rate of 98%. The total number of policies acquired was 131 for a response rate of 99%.

Tables 3 and 4 report the number of key components that were identified in each school systems' student harassment policy. The components are based on key components suggested by the U.S. Department of Education. The U.S. Department of Education identified 13 components suggested for use in formulating bullying policies. In viewing Table 3, of the 67 county school system policies analyzed, no system policy was inclusive of all suggested components. The most number of components found in the county system policies was nine with 57 or 85% of the policies reflecting this number. Other component inclusions were as follows: one policy included 11 components, one policy included eight components, one policy included seven components, one policy included six components, four policies included five components, one policy included two components, and one policy included none of the suggested components.

In viewing Table 4, of the 64 city school system policies analyzed, there was only one policy inclusive of all suggested policies. As with the county policies, the most number of components found in the city system policies was nine with 53 or 83% of the policies reflecting

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this number. Other component inclusions were as follows: one policy included 11 components, one policy included eight components, two policies included seven components, two policies included four components, one policy included three components, one policy included two components, one policy included one component, and one policy included none of the suggested components.

Tables 5 and 6 report the number of key components that were identified in each school systems' student harassment policy as required by Alabama's *Student Harassment Prevention Act*. Information reported in tables is categorized as county or city school systems. Alabama's *Student Harassment Prevention Act* outlined 12 identified key components that local education agencies should include in the development of bullying policies. In Table 5, of the 67 county school system policies analyzed, 57 or 85% of the policies included all 12 of Alabama's *Student Harassment Prevention Act* key components. Other component inclusions were as follows: two policies included 11 components, one policy included 9 components, one policy included seven components, one policy included six components, one policy included four components, and three policies included two components.

In Table 6, of the 64 city school system policies analyzed, 52 or 81% of the policies included all 12 of Alabama's *Student Harassment Prevention Act* key components. Two policies included 11 of the components required in the development of bullying policies. Other component inclusions were as follows: one policy included nine components, two policies included seven components, two policies included six components, one policy included five components, one policy included three components, two policies included two components, and two policies included none of the required components.

Table 3

Extent of Coverage of U.S. Department of Education-Identified Key Components in Bullying Polices By School System (n= 67)

Alabama County School Systems	Definitions				District Policy Components					Additional Components				Total
	Purpose	Scope	Prohibited Behavior	Enumerated Groups	Reporting	Investigations	Written records	Consequences	Mental Health	Communications	Training/ Prevention	Transparency/ Monitoring	Legal Remedies	
Aaron	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			X			9
Alton	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Barry	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Brent	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Chris	X	X	X	X						X				5
Clint	X	X	X	X			X							5
Cole	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Demarris	X	X	X	X			X							5
Derek	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Devin	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Elmer	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Forrest	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Gary	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Hunter	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Jack	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Jeston	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Keller	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Leo	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Mack	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Manny	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Overton	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Radu	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Scott	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Werner	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Will	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9

Alabama County School Systems	Definitions				District Policy Components					Additional Components				Total
	Purpose	Scope	Prohibited Behavior	Enumerated Groups	Reporting	Investigations	Written records	Consequences	Mental Health	Communications	Training/ Prevention	Transparency/ Monitoring	Legal Remedies	
Andrew	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Bart	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Chason	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Dennis	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Doug	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Ewan	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Gavin	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Hank			X					X						2
John	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Jeff	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Kaufman	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Keane	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Kent	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Kevin	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Mitchell	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Norton	X	X			X	X	X	X						6
Patton	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Rance	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Robert	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Schultz	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Scott	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Skip	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Teague	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X						8
Thorne	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Usher	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Adam	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X					9
Alvie	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Art	X	X	X		X	X	X						X	7
Carlos	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9

Alabama County School Systems	Definitions				District Policy Components					Additional Components				
	Purpose	Scope	Prohibited Behavior	Enumerated Groups	Reporting	Investigations	Written records	Consequences	Mental Health	Communications	Training/ Prevention	Transparency/ Monitoring	Legal Remedies	Total
Gabe	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Garrick	X	X	X	X				X						5
Mario	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Pierre	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Ransome	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Rory	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			X	11
Tab	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Zach	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Zennie	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Jerry														0
Craig	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
George	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Tiger	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Total:	65	65	65	63	61	61	63	64	2	57	15	0	2	0
Percent:	97	97	97	94	91	91	94	95	93	85	24	0	.03	0

Table 4

Extent of Coverage of U.S. Department of Education-Identified Key Components in Bullying Polices by School System (n = 65)

Alabama City School Systems	Definitions				District policy components					Additional components				Total
	Purpose	Scope	Prohibited Behavior	Enumerated Groups	Reporting	Investigations	Written records	Consequences	Mental Health	Communications	Training/ Prevention	Transparency/ Monitoring	Legal Remedies	
Addy	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Emma	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Amica														0
Amy	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Beth	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Carrie	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Vanessa	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Amber	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
April	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Brianna	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Candace	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Celeste	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Chloe	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Daisy	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Darcy	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Gloria	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Hilary	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Ingrid	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Lara	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Mia	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Molly	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Sharon	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Oprah	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Reese	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Anna	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9

Alabama City School Systems	Definitions				District policy components					Additional components				Total
	Purpose	Scope	Prohibited Behavior	Enumerated Groups	Reporting	Investigations	Written records	Consequences	Mental Health	Communications	Training/ Prevention	Transparency/ Monitoring	Legal Remedies	
Devane	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Gert	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Kala	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Kim	X	X	X	X	X		X	X						7
Kitty	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Margot	X	X	X	X	X	X	X							7
Megan	X													1
Rachel	X	X	X	X										4
Shannon	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Skylar	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Sonora	X		X		X	X	X	X			X	X		8
Stephanie	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Anita	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Angel	X	X	X	X										4
Edith	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Electra	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	13
Justine	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Jenice	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Kalisha	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Ladonia	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Melrose	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Tina	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Mary	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Marissa	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Pam	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Carolyn	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Summer	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Colleen	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Winter	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Ryanne	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9

Alabama City School Systems	Definitions				District policy components					Additional components				Total
	Purpose	Scope	Prohibited Behavior	Enumerated Groups	Reporting	Investigations	Written records	Consequences	Mental Health	Communications	Training/ Prevention	Transparency/ Monitoring	Legal Remedies	
Nadia	X			X										2
Natasha	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Fabiana	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Misty					X	X	X							3
Shawna	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Sabrina	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	11
Swan	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Promise	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Chastity	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Caitlin	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				9
Total:	63	60	61	60	60	59	60	58	2	56	2	1	2	1
Percent:	98	94	95	94	94	92	94	91	.03	88	.03	.01	.03	.01

Table 5

Extent of Coverage of Alabama's Student Harassment Prevention Act-Identified Key Components in Bullying Polices by School System (n = 67)

Alabama County School Systems	Prohibition Statement	Harassment Defined	Student Behavior Defined	Consequences for Violations	Reporting Procedures	Investigations Procedures	Complaint Resolution Procedures	Reprisal/Retaliation Statement	Consequences for False Accusations	Procedure for Publicizing Policy	Procedure for Promulgating	Characteristics of Victims	Total
Aaron	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	11
Alton	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Barry	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Brent	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Chris	X	X		X					X	X		X	6
Clint	X	X											2
Cole	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Demarris	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Derek	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Devin	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Elmer	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Forrest	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Gary	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Hunter	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Jack	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Jeston	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Keller	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Leo	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Mack	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Manny	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Overton	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Radu	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12

Alabama County School Systems	Prohibition Statement	Harassment Defined	Student Behavior Defined	Consequences for Violations	Reporting Procedures	Investigations Procedures	Complaint Resolution Procedures	Reprisal/Retaliation Statement	Consequences for False Accusations	Procedure for Publicizing Policy	Procedure for Promulgating	Characteristics of Victims	Total
Scott	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Werner	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Will	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Andrew	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Bart	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Chason	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Dennis	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Doug	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Ewan	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Gavin	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Hank		X		X									2
John	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Jeff	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Kaufman	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Keane	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Kent	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Kevin	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Mitchell	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Norton	X			X	X	X	X	X	X				7
Patton	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Rance	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Robert	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Schultz	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Scott	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Skip	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Teague	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	11
Thorne	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Usher	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Adam	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X				X	9

Alabama County School Systems	Prohibition Statement	Harassment Defined	Student Behavior Defined	Consequences for Violations	Reporting Procedures	Investigations Procedures	Complaint Resolution Procedures	Reprisal/Retaliation Statement	Consequences for False Accusations	Procedure for Publicizing Policy	Procedure for Promulgating	Characteristics of Victims	Total
Alvie	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Art	X	X	X	X									4
Carlos	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Gabe	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Garrick	X	X											2
Mario	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Pierre	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Ransome	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Rory	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Tab	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Zach	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Zennie	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Jerry													0
Craig	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
George	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Tiger	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Total:	65	65	60	64	62	62	61	62	61	59	58	61	58
Percent:	97	97	90	96	93	93	95	93	95	88	87	95	87

Table 6

Extent of Coverage of Alabama's Student Harassment Prevention Act-Identified Key Components in Bullying Polices by School System (n = 65)

Alabama City School Systems	Prohibition Statement	Harassment Defined	Student Behavior Defined	Consequences for Violations	Reporting Procedures	Investigations Procedures	Complaint Resolution Procedures	Reprisal/Retaliation Statement	Consequences for False Accusations	Procedure for Publicizing Policy	Procedure for Promulgating	Characteristics of Victims	Total
Addy	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Emma	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Amica													0
Amy	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Beth	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Carrie	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Vanessa	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Amber	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
April	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Brianna	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	11
Candace	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Celeste	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Chloe	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Daisy	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Darcy	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Gloria	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Hilary	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Ingrid	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Lara	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Mia	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Molly	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Sharon	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Oprah	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12

Alabama City School Systems	Prohibition Statement	Harassment Defined	Student Behavior Defined	Consequences for Violations	Reporting Procedures	Investigations Procedures	Complaint Resolution Procedures	Reprisal/Retaliation Statement	Consequences for False Accusations	Procedure for Publicizing Policy	Procedure for Promulgating	Characteristics of Victims	Total
Reese	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Anna	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Devane	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Gert	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Kala	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Kim	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X			X	9
Kitty	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Margot	X	X		X	X		X					X	6
Megan	X		X	X									3
Rachel	X	X		X	X	X							5
Shannon	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Skylar	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Sonora	X	X	X	X	X	X	X						7
Stephanie	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Anita	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Angel	X	X	X	X	X	X						X	7
Edith	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Electra	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	11
Justine	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Jenice	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Kalisha	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Ladonia	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Melrose	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Tina	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Mary	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Marissa	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Pam	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Carolyn	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Summer	X	X		X	X			X	X				6
Colleen	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12

Alabama City School Systems	Prohibition Statement	Harassment Defined	Student Behavior Defined	Consequences for Violations	Reporting Procedures	Investigations Procedures	Complaint Resolution Procedures	Reprisal/Retaliation Statement	Consequences for False Accusations	Procedure for Publicizing Policy	Procedure for Promulgating	Characteristics of Victims	Total
Winter	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Ryanne	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Nadia	X	X											2
Natasha	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Fabiana	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Misty					X	X	X						3
Shawna	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Sabrina	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Swan	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Promise	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Chastity	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Caitlin	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Total:	63	60	58	62	62	59	59	57	56	55	55	58	52
Percent:	98	94	91	97	97	92	92	89	88	86	86	91	81

Discussion of Research Questions

Research Question 1: Do school systems' bullying policies align with the United States Department of Education's identified key bullying policy components?

The U.S. Department of Education identified 13 components suggested for use in formulating bullying policies. Of the 67 county school system policies analyzed, no system policy was inclusive of all suggested components. The most number of components found in the county system policies was nine with 57 or 85% of the policies reflecting this number. Other component inclusions were as follows: one policy included 11 components, one policy included eight components, one policy included seven components, one policy included six components, four policies included five components, one policy included two components, and one policy included none of the suggested components.

Of the 64 city school system policies analyzed, there was only one policy inclusive of all suggested policies. As with the county policies, the most number of components found in the city system policies was nine with 53 or 83% of the policies reflecting this number. Other component inclusions were as follows: one policy included 11 components, one policy included eight components, two policies included seven components, two policies included four components, one policy included three components, one policy included two components, one policy included one component, and one policy included none of the suggested components.

A combination of the 131 county and city school system policies revealed only one policy was inclusive of all of the U.S. Department of Education's identified suggested key components. Two policies reflected 11 components. The most number of components found in the policies was nine with 110 policies reflecting this number. Other component inclusions were as follows: two policies included eight components, two policies included seven components,

one policy included six components, four policies included five components, two policies included four components, one policy included three components, two policies, included two components, one policy included one component, and two policies included none of the suggested components.

Research Question 2: Do school systems' bullying policies align with Alabama's *Student Harassment Prevention Act*?

Alabama's *Student Harassment Prevention Act* outlined 12 identified key components that local education agencies should include in the development of bullying policies. Of the 67 county school system policies analyzed, 57 or 85% of the policies included all 12 of Alabama's *Student Harassment Prevention Act* key components. Other component inclusions were as follows: two policies included 11 components, one policy included 9 components, one policy included seven components, one policy included six components, one policy included four components, and three policies included two components.

Of the 64 city school system policies analyzed, 52 or 81% of the policies included all 12 of Alabama's *Student Harassment Prevention Act* key components. Two policies included 11 of the components required in the development of bullying policies. Other component inclusions were as follows: one policy included nine components, two policies included seven components, two policies included six components, one policy included five components, one policy included three components, two policies included two components, and two policies included none of the required components.

A combination of the 131 county and city school system policies indicated 109 or 83% of the policies were inclusive of all of Alabama's *Student Harassment Prevention Act* key components. Four of the policies analyzed reflected 11 key components. Other component

inclusions were as follows: two policies included nine components, three policies included seven components, three policies included six components, one policy included 5 components, one policy included four components, two policies included three components, four policies included two components, and two policies included none of the required components.

Research Question 3: Do the individual school systems include additional components in their board adopted bullying policy?

Alabama's *Student Harassment Prevention Act* delineated 12 identified key components that local education agencies should include in the formulation of bullying policies. Of the 131 county and city school system policies analyzed for the study, 109 or 83% included all 12 components reflected in Alabama's model bullying policy which evolved from Alabama's Student Harassment Act. No additional components were inclusive of the policy although some systems elaborated on the descriptions of the components themselves.

The U.S. Department of Education identified 13 components suggested for use in formulating bullying policies. Communication of the policy to stakeholders, prevention and training for school personnel and students, monitoring incidents and reporting, and victim rights to pursue legal remedies are labeled as additional components. Of the 131 county and city school system policies analyzed for the study only one policy included all 13 components suggested by the U.S. Department of Education with two other school systems having 11 components noted in the policy.

Research Question 4: What contributing factors influenced the development of school system bullying policies exceeding minimum criteria?

The researcher conducted interviews with key personnel in systems with policies exceeding the minimum criteria established in the Alabama Department of Education's model

student harassment policy. Based on the content analysis of Alabama's 131 school system policies on harassment, only three school systems' policies exceeded the minimum criteria established for the development of the policy. The researcher selected and interviewed system personnel based on their involvement in the development and implementation of the system's student harassment policy. Selected participants were given the same set of interview questions. The questions were designed by the researcher for the purpose of obtaining information on the development of the student harassment policy, involvement in the development of the policy, resources utilized in the development of the policy, and developers' knowledge of existing laws and best practices in policy development. In order to maintain the anonymity of the systems and the data obtained, the researcher labeled the interviews as System A, System B, and System C. Summaries of the interviews follow.

System A: According to personnel interviewed in System A, administrators, teachers, counselors, and central office personnel were charged with the task of developing the system's student harassment policy. There were no parents or community leaders officially appointed to the committee; however, there were public readings of the policy as it was developed. When asked about parent or community involvement in creating the system's policy, System A stated, "We had no parents on our community leaders on our committee but we accepted feedback from these particular stakeholders whenever we and public reading of the policy." Diversity was the motivating factor in the formation of the policy development committee. The system strives on representing as many areas as possible in all policy development. According to the interviewee, "The system likes to form committees using personnel from as many different areas as possible." Resources used in the development of the policy included Alabama's law on student harassment, the Alabama Department of Education's model policy, and best practices researched by the

committee. Two of the main factors influencing the development of the student harassment policy were the seriousness of bullying and community expectation for the school system. The interviewee stated, "We take bullying very seriously. Our community holds us to high standards. Simply being mediocre is not acceptable." Another factor was the concern of "what does the policy need to include specifically for our schools?" What should it look like? Because of the system's desire to have a viable policy that would impact harassment in their schools, the committee researched best practices across the country to include in the policy. The U.S. Department of Educations identified key components were discovered in the system's search for best practices. These identified key components as well as Alabama's Department of Education's model policy and Alabama's *Student Harassment Prevention Act* all had a significant impact on policy development for System A. This is evident in the quality of their policy. When asked what resources were utilized in the development of the student harassment policy, the interviewer responded, "We knew we were going to use the model policy, but we wanted to make sure we were following Alabama's law as well. In researching other information to include, we came across the components suggested from the USDOE. We used all the information we located to assist in the development of the policy."

System B: Personnel interviewed from System B identified administrators and school board members as the policy developers for their student harassment policy. This particular group was targeted for the policy development committee because they had participated in training on bullying and because of their awareness of Alabama law relating to student harassment. When asked about the people that made up the committee, the interviewee replied, "We only used system administrators and school board members. We thought they would be the best to use because they already had some training on bullying and they knew about the law."

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The Alabama Department of Education's model policy was noted as the main resource utilized in the development of System B's policy. No other resources were noted during the conversation. A major factor influencing the expansion of System B's policy beyond the minimum criteria was a compliance review of the system by the Office for Civil Rights (OCR). When asked what prompted their system to include additional components on the student harassment policy, the interviewee stated, "We had an audit by the OCR. Some of the information they shared with us we included in the policy." The purpose of the Office for Civil Rights is to certify equal access to education and to foster educational excellence through vigorous enforcement of civil rights for everyone. An important function of OCR is resolving complaints and issues of discrimination. OCR also offers technical assistance to institutions in order for them to achieve voluntary compliance with the civil rights laws that OCR imposes (Office for Civil Rights, U.S. Department of Education). Another factor influencing the expansion of the policy was the Pride Survey results for the system. Data collected addressing school climate and learning environments indicated bullying was a potential problem in the system. When asked if there were any other factors influencing the policy development, the interviewee responded, "When we received our Pride survey results, we knew we had problems with bullying. We decided that policies addressing this area must be strengthened." Although the system's policy was exemplary, personnel interviewed expressed no knowledge of the U.S. Department of Education's identified key components for bullying policies nor was the *Student Harassment Prevention Act* utilized as a reference in the development of the system's policy.

System C: Interviews of personnel in System C revealed that administrators and teachers from schools in the system as well as central office administrators were inclusive of the policy development committee for the student harassment policy. School administrators were

selected by the central office staff while the school level administrators were asked to send one or two teachers to represent their respective school. The school system took the task of developing a policy seriously; therefore, they wanted a solid representation of personnel from the system. During the course of the interview, the interviewee stated, "Bullying is serious, so we treated it in that manner. Because bullying is so serious we wanted our committee to reflect the system. We tried to include administrators and teachers throughout the system." The committee utilized Alabama's model policy and other research based information to develop the system's student harassment policy. School system expectations lead to the development of a policy that surpassed Alabama's minimum requirements. The system does not believe in being mediocre when it comes to the well-being of the students. Bullying is perceived as a serious issue facing students today; therefore they wanted a policy addressing this problem which reflected its importance. The committee was aware of the existence of the U.S. Department of Education's suggested guidelines for bullying policies. However, the Alabama State Department of Education's model policy was used as the foundation for the development of the system's policy. During the interview, the interviewee maintained, "We were aware of the USDOE guidelines, but decided to build from the model policy and include other components once we established our foundation for the policy." Other components were included after the state department's criteria were met. Additional information included in the policy was derived from information found in the state law, federal guidelines as well as other best policies researched.

Data analysis began at the time of the interview process. The researcher's method of recording information was in the form of note taking. Thematic analysis was the projected method of choice for analyzing information obtained in the interview process. It was selected because it offers a flexible process to identify, analyze, and report patterns or themes feasible to

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the purpose of the research (Braun & Clarke, 2006). After summarizing the interview notes, the researcher began to highlight sentences of meaningful data that were relevant to the purpose of the study. During this process data irrelevant to the study was omitted. Emerging from the data were phrases which allowed the researcher to organize the data to develop themes. The overall story of the analysis yielded three themes: committee diversity, seriousness of bullying, and high expectations.

Summary of Findings

The purpose of this study was to determine the present status of bullying policies in Alabama and to compare local educational agency's (LEA's) policies to state and national guidelines. In addition, the researcher wanted to investigate any LEA bullying policies that went beyond the specific minimum guidelines. The researcher performed a content analysis of the policies using Alabama's *Student Harassment Act* and the U.S. Department of Education's identified key bullying policy components. Content analysis results revealed a majority (84%) of the policies were inclusive of all of Alabama's *Student Harassment Prevention Act* key components. No additional components were included in the construction of these policies. Further content analysis results indicated an insignificant number (.008%) of policies included the U.S. Department of Education identified 13 components suggested for use in formulating bullying policies. Only three systems out of the 131 policies analyzed were identified as exceeding the minimum criteria set by the Alabama Department of Education's model policy. Data collected during the interview process of the three systems exceeding minimum standards revealed three common distinct factors influencing policy development. These factors were committee diversity, seriousness of bullying, and high expectations.

Conclusion

Results of the content analysis indicated that Alabama local education agencies bullying policies were more inclusive of components in Alabama's *Student Harassment Prevention Act* than the U.S. Department of Education identified 13 components suggested for use in developing bullying policies. Important here is the fact that LEA's followed the policy set forth by the state and did not alter their local policy by adding additional policy statements. In conclusion, the state policy, which was rated as a B+ by national bullying organizations like the Bully Police, influenced the local policy decisions. Local system policies were only as strong as what had been given to them by the state. The U.S. Department of Education policy components were taken from systems throughout the country. This national policy was developed two years after Alabama's harassment policy and was stronger in terms of what should be included. Alabama fell short in comparison. In the next chapter, results are discussed and implications for policy development and implementation are outlined. Research for future studies is also suggested.

CHAPTER V. SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to determine the present status of bullying policies in Alabama and to compare local educational agency's (LEA's) policies with state and national guidelines. A secondary purpose was to identify districts that had exemplary policies and to discover what factors were involved in fostering their ability to create these policies. The researcher performed a content analysis of the policies using Alabama's *Student Harassment Act* and the U.S. Department of Education's identified key bullying policy components. Content analysis results revealed a majority (84%) of the policies were inclusive of all of Alabama's *Student Harassment Prevention Act* key components. No additional components were included in the construction of these policies. Further content analysis results indicated an insignificant number (.008%) of policies included the U.S. Department of Education identified 13 components suggested for use in formulating bullying policies. Only three systems out of the 131 policies analyzed were identified as exceeding the minimum criteria set by the Alabama Department of Education's model policy. Follow-up interviews were conducted with personnel noted as chairperson for the development of the school system's student harassment policy. Data collected during the interview process of the three systems exceeding minimum standards revealed three common distinct factors influencing policy development. These factors were committee diversity, seriousness of bullying, and high expectations. This chapter presents a summary of the study and important conclusions drawn from the data presented in Chapter IV.

It also provides a discussion of the implications for action and recommendations for further research.

Discussion

An overview of research has yielded startling statistics of bullying and its consequences (Swearer, Espelage, Vaillancourt, & Hymel, 2010). Compelled by the vast cases of school shootings and instances of youth suicide that have occurred during the last two decades and the number linked to bullying, legislation at the federal and state levels has been passed to address bullying and harassment in the schools. Currently, Alabama as well as other states have enacted laws requiring schools to create policies and guidelines to assist students with reporting bullying and to empower adults in the school environment to better deal with bullying (Crain, 2012).

In accordance with the law, the Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE) created a model policy for school systems to utilize in the development and implementation of their student harassment policies. This model policy represented the minimum criteria established by the law. As with other state departments of education, Alabama's Department of Education is responsible for overseeing compliance of state legislative mandates. Every local board in the state was required to develop and implement a student harassment policy. A memorandum was sent to all city and count superintendents with a model anti-harassment policy attached. The model anti-harassment policy consists of six sections. They are:

- Harassment, violence, and threats of violence prohibited
- Definitions
- Descriptions of behavior expected of students
- Consequences for violations
- Reporting, investigating, and complaint resolution procedures

- Promulgation of policy and related procedures, rules and forms (ALSDE Model Anti-Harassment Policy, p. 1–3).

Local school systems could utilize the model policy or create their own, as long as the provisions of the law were included. One objective of this study was to analyze the content of student bullying policies adopted by local education agencies in Alabama to determine if school systems' bullying policies aligned with Alabama's *Student Harassment Prevention Act*. A follow-up objective was to determine if individual school systems included additional components in their board adopted policies. Results of the content analysis performed by the researcher indicated that of the 131 county and city school system policies analyzed, 109 or 83% of the policies were inclusive of all of Alabama's *Student Harassment Prevention Act* key components. This means that the majority of the school systems policies were in direct alignment with Alabama's *Student Harassment Prevention Act* with no additional components included. A conclusion here could be drawn that the majority of school systems in Alabama were more concerned with meeting the minimum provisions as outlined in the minimum criteria rather than use the flexibility of creating a policy more expansive of their individual district needs.

When determining if school systems' bullying policies aligned with the United States Department of Education's identified key bullying policy components, of the 131 county and city school system policies analyzed only one policy was inclusive of all of the U.S. Department of Education's identified suggested key components. Two policies reflected 11 of the 13 components identified. The results clearly indicate that Alabama school system's student harassment policies are not inclusive of the U. S. Department of Education's identified key components.

When the Alabama legislature passed the *Student Harassment Prevention Act* during its 2009 regular session, the law mandated that local boards adopt a policy to prevent student harassment. The law required that school systems do the following:

- Adopt a policy in accordance with the law

- Adopt a written form for victims to report harassment in school

- Develop procedures for investigating reported incidents and providing consequences for students who violate the law

- Report statistics on incidents of harassment annually (Crain, 2012).

It is clear from the results of the present study that the school systems developed their policies based on the compliance factor. The Alabama Department of Education was given the task of providing a model policy to school systems; however the law did not mandate the adoption of the actual model policy as long as the local board adopted policy contained the necessary provisions of the law. Yet, when policies were analyzed by the researcher, 83% of the system policies mirrored the model policy provided by the Alabama Department of Education. Systems were given autonomy in developing their policies as long as the provisions of the law were included but only three of the 131 policies analyzed included additional components to strengthen the effectiveness of the policy for their specific system. As previously mentioned, the model policy represented the minimum criteria established by the law. It could be concluded from the results of the study that Alabama law makers' decision to only require minimum standards for system harassment policies has in itself fostered the mindset that minimum is acceptable.

As previously mentioned, based on the content analysis performed, only three of the 131 policies analyzed exceeded the minimum criteria established by the state. In order to understand these three systems exemplary student harassment policies, the researcher conducted follow-up

interviews with personnel directly involved with the policy development process. The interview process revealed that two of the systems utilized current best research practices in developing their policy. They also used Alabama law, the state department's model policy, and information from the U.S. Department of Education. Recommendations for policy development by Swearer et al. (2009) encourage the use of available model policies and the state's statute. These systems realized the seriousness of bullying and wanted policies that would truly address the needs of the students in their system. Clearly-stated bullying policies can be the vehicular road map for distinctive communication concerning suitable student behavior and bullying consequences. Bullying policies permit consistent expectations and consequences for all stakeholders concerning bullying behavior. The development and implementation of strong bullying policies sends a message to the community that bullying is a serious issue that will not be tolerated (Swearer, Limber, & Alley, 2009).

The two systems developed policy committees that reflected a diverse group of stakeholders from the system. According to Morrison, Furlong, D'Incau, and Morrison (2004), the challenge of school safety is a collaborative effort among all education professionals. Collaborative effort allows education professionals to share their visions for school safety and acquire an understanding for others perspectives on the issue.

Major areas of neglect for other system policies were training and prevention, monitoring, and legal remedies. Both Bully Police USA and the U.S. Department of Education's guidelines for laws and policy development focused on inclusion of these components. Both systems expanded their policies to include these areas. School systems need to provide training to all faculty and support staff on preventing, identifying, and responding to bullying. The inclusion of training and prevention procedures characterized one step in Swearer et al.'s (2009)

policy development guidelines. Most state model policies addressed staff training needs and prevention strategies, but without specificity. Their policy content typically focused on prohibition and reporting procedures for bullying. This practice alone will have minimal effect on decreasing bullying behaviors. Progress monitoring is a recommendation given by Rozalski and Yell (2004) in policy development. Educators must conduct ongoing assessments of school violence programs and initiatives. Progress monitoring can assist educators in determining the efficiency of a school's prevention policies, making program adjustments and determining additional staff training.

Although the third system went above and beyond the minimum criteria set for school systems as they construct their policies, the driving force for the stringent development of their policy was compliance with the Office of Civil Rights (OCR). OCR's mission is to ensure equal access to education and to promote educational excellence through civil rights enforcement. Incidents of bullying sometimes occur because of a person's race, color, national origin, sex, disability, sexual orientation or religion. These traits are protected by civil rights laws which are in turn enforced by the Office of Civil Rights. Administrators must analyze bullying behaviors for civil rights implications. When the bullying behavior is indicative of a civil rights violation, school systems must respond in accordance with civil rights statutes and regulations enforced by the Office of Civil Rights in addition to any bullying legislation (Office for Civil Rights, 2010).

A major focus of school systems is to provide a safe environment for its students. According to Morrison, Furlong, D'Incau, and Morrison (2004), "a safe school is one that prevents physical, psychological, and developmental harm to its students" (p. 289). They further stress that the challenge of school safety is a collaborative effort among all education

professionals. Collaborative effort allows education professionals to share their visions for school safety and acquire an understanding for others perspectives on the issue.

School systems alone cannot prevent the occurrences of school violence on our nation's campuses; however, school systems can and do have a huge impact on violence prevention efforts when proactive measures are put into practice. Educators must develop legally correct programs and guidelines to decrease school violence or prevent it entirely. In order to accomplish this goal, educators must understand federal and state laws that impact school safety. They must also be knowledgeable of court cases that have given interpretation of the laws (Rozalski & Yell, 2004).

State laws and statutes have been the driving force behind anti-bullying policy development in local school systems. This is true in Alabama as well. Alabama legislatures passed the harassment act and required the state board of education to provide systems with a model policy to assist in the development and implementation of local system harassment policies. These directives were carried out by the state department as well as within the school systems. However; the problem with this is that the majority of the school systems mimicked the model policy without any thought given to the issues and concern of their individual school systems. This is a concern because school systems were given the flexibility to create their own policies as long as they followed the provisions of the law. Law makers and policy makers fail to realize that although they may mandate laws and statutes, effective policy implementation requires an eighty percent buy-in from stakeholders. Without this support, the success of a program or policy is unlikely. Thus, effective anti-bullying policies must have the support of administrators, faculty, staff, students, parents, and the community. Effective policy implementation starts with the creation of an anti-bullying task force which includes school

personnel and community representation. Anti-bullying policies need to be accessible to the

public as well as school staff. School personnel need to be knowledgeable of their system's

policy on bullying. Staff training on policies and procedures should be conducted each year.

Components of the system policy on bullying should be reflective in all classroom policies and

procedures. Specific procedures for addressing bullying behaviors should be clearly shared with

all stakeholders (Swearer et al., 2009).

Implications

It is clear from Alabama's passage of the *Student Harassment Prevention Act* that the

state realizes that bullying is a serious issue that must be addressed. The passage of the

legislation clearly lets the public know of the state's awareness of the problem and its efforts to

solve the problem. However, consideration must be given to the structure of the law itself. Is

the law written in a manner that is most effective for Alabama students? Will the law protect

students from bullying and harassment? Although at the time of the study there were 47 states

with bullying legislation, currently there are 49 states that have passed bullying legislation with

Alabama being one of them. (Bully Police USA). A review of bullying prevention literature

indicates that the terms 'bullying' and 'harassment' are used interchangeably; however,

Alabama's law only uses the term 'harassment.' The term 'bullying' is omitted. Kentucky is the

only other state that does not include the term 'bullying' as a part of the law (Stuart-Cassell, Bell,

& Springer, 2011). Alabama's law specifically protects students when they are victims of

harassment, intimidation, violence, or threats of violence. Alabama's *Student Harassment*

Prevention Act (2009) defines harassment as:

> a continuous pattern of intentional behavior that takes place on school property, on a
>
> school bus, or at a school-sponsored function including, but not limited to, written,

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electronic, verbal, or physical acts that are reasonably perceived as being motivated by any characteristic of a student, or by the association of a student with an individual who has a particular characteristic, if the characteristic falls into one of the categories of personal characteristics contained in the model policy adopted by the department or by a local board. (p. 3)

Interpretation of the law then means that a single instance of being bullied may not meet the definition of harassment, but multiple instances, even when committed by different children, do meet the definition of harassment. This does not mean that bullying is an acceptable behavior in Alabama's schools; it does mean that a student subjected to a lone incident of bullying is not protected by the law.

Alabama's law further states that to constitute harassment, a pattern of behavior may do any of the following:

- Place a student in reasonable fear of harm to his or her person or damage to his or her property.

- Have the effect of substantially interfering with the educational performance, opportunities, or benefits of a student.

- Have the effect of substantially disrupting or interfering with the orderly operation of the school.

- Have the effect of creating a hostile environment in the school, on school property, on a school bus, or at a school-sponsored function.

- Have the effect of being sufficiently severe, persistent, or pervasive enough to create an intimidating, threatening, or abusive educational environment for a student (Alabama's Student Harassment Prevention Act 2009, p. 3).

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One instance of deliberate behavior, then, does not meet the law's level of harassment. The inflicted behavior must be "a continuous pattern" and have one of the five outcomes stated in the law. While Alabama's 2009 law was a commendable effort to protect Alabama's students, it is still not clear how much of an impact the law will have on incidents of bullying. The law never uses the term 'bullying' yet it is perceived as Alabama's bullying law. Since bullying and harassment are typically used interchangeably, Alabama legislators need to consider revising the law to include bullying as well as the term harassment. This addition will prompt acknowledgement of behaviors more familiarly recognized as bullying.

Since the passage of the 2009 *Student Harassment Prevention Act*, there has been some attempt to revise the law to be more inclusive of bullying behaviors. Multiple bills have been introduced but have died without action. The intent was to toughen accountability and improve reporting procedures. Three of the bills introduced in the 2011 and 2012 legislative sessions were in honor of Alex Moore. Alex was a 15-year-old Chilton County student who committed suicide by jumping off an interstate overpass. Her parents believed her death to be a direct result of bullying. Alex's death is one of four cases of suicide in Alabama thought to be triggered by bullying (Crain, 2012). Educators and legislatures need to take a closer look at these statistics and act accordingly. Not only should Alabama students be protected from harassment but bullying as well. Previous Democratic State Representative Betty Carol Graham of Alexander City sponsored Alabama's bullying law. According to Graham, "Home and school should be the two safest places in the world for children, and Alabama didn't have a policy in place to assure that in schools. Not only is that unbelievable, it's unforgiveable" (Times Daily, 2009, para. 11). With the support of State Representative Graham, Alabama's *Student Harassment Prevention Act* came to fruition, but it is still questionable whether Alabama students are being protected in

the manner in which they should be. Should students feel suicide is their only option to escape

bullying? How many students need to take their own lives to escape bullying before we as

leaders in the state revisit the law? Have we done everything in our power to protect our

students? These are questions we must as a state ask ourselves. Policy makers, educators, and

advocates wanting to make Alabama's *Student Harassment Prevention Act* stronger should refer

to the U. S. Department of Education's December 2011 Analysis of State Bullying Laws and

Policies. This analysis can assist the state law makers in identifying deficits in the current law.

 In addition, the State Department of Education could also use the analysis to identify deficits in

the model policy created for use by the school systems.

Another concern revealed through this study was the inaccuracy of data obtained through

the reporting process for incidents of bullying and harassment in Alabama. Initially, the

researcher sought to establish a relationship between bullying policies and the incidents of

bullying in the school systems. A directive of Alabama's current *Student Harassment*

Prevention Act is that school systems must report to the Alabama Department of Education any

incidents of harassment. This statistical information was to be reported from the *Student*

Harassment Prevention Act data. Categories to be reported were fighting, harassment, threats,

intimidation, and sexual harassment. The program used to collect the data was also designed to

further categorize this data as incidents of bullying if the law's definition of bullying was

applied. Many school systems were not aware of this additional procedure and failed to classify

incidents of harassment as bullying when warranted (Mock, 2012). Lack of knowledge and

training for school systems on this new collection process possibly resulted in the state's data

being skewed. When looking at the data, many of the large systems reported zero incidents of

harassment. It should be stressed here that in a 2009 report by the Centers for Disease Control,

30.7% of Alabama's Black students and 42.5% of White students in grades six through eight reported being bullied at school (Crain, 2012). These percentages were higher than the national average, yet actual percentages reported by school systems were lower than the national average. The assumption could be made here that the national data is unreliable or the school systems in Alabama are not reporting incidents of harassment. A further assumption could be made that policy makers have also reviewed this information and decided that Alabama's law on harassment is an effective piece of legislation that has positively impacted the percentage of student's bullied in Alabama.

Accurate reporting is crucial. Underreporting inevitably hampers educator's ability to address the issue as well as lawmakers' willingness to revise bullying legislation. A simple solution to this problem may lie in the monitoring process. The Alabama Department of Education conducts a state monitor of school systems every three years for compliance of school laws and procedures. However, only a third of the school systems are monitored at these three year intervals. The review of student harassment policies are included as part of the monitoring process but is the only time the policy is actually reviewed. One may conclude that if the state inspects what it expects from the systems in a timely manner, the development and implementation of the policies may really have a value to the school systems as well as our state. The state's monitoring of the policies will hopefully model for the systems the need for them to monitor their own policies, resulting in strengthened policies across the state.

A vital part of this study included the researcher obtaining copies of all school system student harassment policies. A directive of the law charged the Alabama Department of Education with creating a model policy for the school systems of Alabama to utilize as they developed their own policies. Section six of the model policy clearly states the following:

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Policy and any procedures, rules, and forms developed and approved to implement the

policy will be published, disseminated, and made available to students, parents and legal

guardians, and employees by such means and methods as are customarily used for such

purposes, including publication on the [local board]'s Web site. (Crain, 2012, p. 11)

As the researcher attempted to collect school system policies via system websites as stated in

section six of the model policy, it became clear that not all systems followed this directive. Of

the 132 school system policies needed for the study, the researcher was only able to obtain 79

policies in this manner. Even in locating these 79, the researcher found that the policies were

five or six clicks deep into the website with some being embedded in individual schools' code of

conduct. The lack of ease of accessibility of these policies is troubling. Research tells us that

bullying behavior has lasting effects on its victims. It has even revealed bullying cases that have

resulted in homicide or suicide. School systems have to be careful of the message that they are

sending concerning the protection of their students. Policies addressing the safety of students

should be readily accessible for parents, students, the public, etc. To simplify the process of

locating this information, school systems need to place their policy in a one-click position. This

can be easily remedied by school systems placing a link on their home page.

The main objective of this study was to determine through content analysis if school

system policies aligned with Alabama's *Student Harassment Prevention Act* and the U.S.

Department of Education's suggested guidelines for policy development. The researcher also

wanted to determine if any school system went beyond minimum expectations for policy

development. Results indicated that over 80% of system policies were exact duplicates of

minimum criteria find in the law and that only three policies added additional components as

outlined in the U.S. Department of Education's suggested guidelines. As previously noted,

because of the omission of the term bullying, it is questionable whether Alabama's law really protects students who are bullied. It should be noted that over 80% of system policies mirrored the minimum criteria outlined in the law. The assumption here could be made that if the actual law is not fully protecting students that are bullied then how would system policies that mirror the law truly protect students who are bullied. A concern with system policies is that they did not address how all staff would receive training and prevention in the area of bullying, legal remedies for students who are bullied, and a method of monitoring the plan they implemented.

Recommendations for Further Study

The resulting recommendations for study are based on the findings and discussions of this study.

1. As a result of this study, the researcher identified three school systems with exemplary student harassment policies. The researcher recommends a case study approach for each school in order to follow the development and implementation of the student harassment policy in the schools. Data could be collected over a period of time to determine if policy implementation had an impact on the number of bullying incidents in the system as well as individual schools.

2. According to Bully Police USA guidelines, a concern of Alabama's law is that it pertain "only to one student against another student" which does not address teacher harassment of students. The researcher recommends further research in the area of teacher bullying of students. Additionally, teacher on teacher bullying could be another area which needs to be addressed.

3. The Alabama Department of Education directed systems to collect specific data through the School Incident Report (SIR) on incidents of bullying in each system and

school. The researcher attempted to collect this information, however, due to inaccurate system reporting this data was not available. Plans are in progress to provide school systems proper training to adequately capture this data for the 2013–2014 school year. Upon the collection of accurate bullying data, the researcher recommends further research to determine the effect bullying policies has had in the reduction of bullying incidents in the system and schools.

4. The State Department of Education developed a model anti-harassment policy for school districts saying that violence; threats of violence, harassment and intimidation are prohibited based on race, sex, religion, national origin or disability. It did not specify sexual orientation. The researcher recommends further research as it relates to bullying or harassment of students because of their sexual orientation.

5. School systems in Alabama were provided a model student harassment policy by the Alabama Department of Education. It was acceptable for systems to utilize the model policy or create their own within the provisions of the law. Over 80% of the systems mirrored the model policy when creating their policies. The researcher recommends further qualitative research be conducted with the school systems to determine why they opted not to use the flexibility allotted them to create policies conducive to their individual systems.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to determine the present status of bullying policies in Alabama and to compare local educational agency's (LEA's) policies to state and national guidelines. In addition, if there were exemplary policies within the LEAs, the researcher wanted to investigate why these particular LEAs should be considered as exemplary. The researcher

performed a content analysis of the policies using Alabama's *Student Harassment Act* and the

U.S. Department of Education's identified key bullying policy components. Content analysis

results revealed a majority (84%) of the policies were inclusive of all of Alabama's *Student*

Harassment Prevention Act key components. No additional components were included in the

construction of these policies. Further content analysis results indicated an insignificant number

(.008%) of policies included the U.S. Department of Education identified 13 components

suggested for use in formulating bullying policies. Only three systems out of the 131 policies

analyzed were identified as exceeding the minimum criteria set by the Alabama Department of

Education's model policy. Data collected during the interview process of the three systems

exceeding minimum standards revealed three common distinct factors influencing policy

development. These factors were committee diversity, seriousness of bullying, and high

expectations.

School safety is believed to be an educational right for all students. As stated by

Morrison, Furlong, D'Incau, and Morrison (2004), "a safe school is one that prevents physical,

psychological, and developmental harm to its students" (p. 289). Morrison, Furlong, D'Incau,

and Morrison asserted the belief that a safe school environment reduced the number of threats to

others and diminished occurrences of violent behavior in and around school buildings. They

further acknowledged that a safe school environment promoted maximum progression and

growth of students. Therefore, schools should all share the specific goal of providing a safe

environment in which all students can be educated to their highest potential. They further

stressed that the task of school safety is a shared effort among all educators, policy makers, and

other stakeholders. State laws and system level policies cannot work in isolation. State laws

have made a huge impact in regards to the inclusion of bullying programs in school district

policies (Limber & Small, 2003). The passing of anti-bullying legislation signifies to all the

seriousness of bullying and the necessity for preventing its existence in our schools (Limber &

Small, 2003). Levitating the consciousness of bullying and requiring school districts to develop

policies to address bullying is the first step in protecting students. Yet, Limber and Small (2003)

stressed that "the potential effectiveness of any new bullying prevention legislation must be

evaluated in light of how well it encourages and supports the development of effective polices,

strategies, and programs to reduce and prevent bullying among school children" (p. 449).

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APPENDIX

AUBURN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB)

APPROVAL AND INFORMATION LETTER

AUBURN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD for RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS
RESEARCH PROTOCOL REVIEW FORM

For Information or help contact THE OFFICE OF RESEARCH COMPLIANCE, 115 Ramsay Hall, Auburn University
Phone: 334-844-5966   e-mail: hsubjec@auburn.edu   Web Address: http://www.auburn.edu/research/vpr/ohs/

Revised 03.26.11 – DO NOT STAPLE, CLIP TOGETHER ONLY.   [Save a Copy]

1. PROPOSED START DATE of STUDY: July 1, 2013

PROPOSED REVIEW CATEGORY (Check one):   FULL BOARD   ✓ EXPEDITED   EXEMPT

2. PROJECT TITLE: An Analysis of Alabama School Systems' Policy on Student Bullying

3. Carolyn Ellis Townsend   Graduate Student   EFLT   334-372-2266   ellisca@auburn.edu
   PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR   TITLE   DEPT   PHONE   AU E-MAIL

   741 Lismore Place, Montgomery, Alabama 36117   N/A   ctownsend@alsde.edu
   MAILING ADDRESS   FAX   **ALTERNATE E-MAIL**

4. SOURCE OF FUNDING SUPPORT: ✓ Not Applicable   Internal   External Agency:_____   Pending   Received

5. LIST ANY CONTRACTORS, SUB-CONTRACTORS, OTHER ENTITIES OR IRBs ASSOCIATED WITH THIS PROJECT:

6. GENERAL RESEARCH PROJECT CHARACTERISTICS

6A. Mandatory CITI Training

Names of key personnel who have completed CITI:
Carolyn Ellis Townsend
Dr. Ellen Reames
_____
_____

CITI group completed for this study:
✓ Social/Behavioral   Biomedical

PLEASE ATTACH TO HARD COPY ALL CITI CERTIFICATES FOR EACH KEY PERSONNEL

6B. Research Methodology

Please check all descriptors that best apply to the research methodology.

Data Source(s):   ✓ New Data   Existing Data

Will recorded data directly or indirectly identify participants?
✓ Yes   No

Data collection will involve the use of:
   Educational Tests (cognitive diagnostic, aptitude, etc.)
✓ Interview / Observation
   Physical / Physiological Measures or Specimens (see Section 6E)
   Surveys / Questionnaires
   Internet / Electronic
✓ Audio / Video / Photos
   Private records or files

6C. Participant Information

Please check all descriptors that apply to the participant population.
✓ Males   ✓ Females   AU students
Vulnerable Populations
   Pregnant Women/Fetuses   Prisoners
   Children and/or Adolescents (under age 19 in AL)
Persons with:
   Economic Disadvantages   Physical Disabilities
   Educational Disadvantages   Intellectual Disabilities
Do you plan to compensate your participants?   Yes ✓ No

6D. Risks to Participants

Please identify all risks that participants might encounter in this research.
✓ Breach of Confidentiality*   Coercion
   Deception   Physical
   Psychological   Social
   None   Other
_____
_____
_____

*Note that if the investigator is using or accessing confidential or identifiable data, breach of confidentiality is always a risk.

Do you need IBC Approval for this study? ✓ No   Yes - BUA #_____   Expiration date _____

FOR OHSR OFFICE USE ONLY

revisions
DATE RECEIVED IN OHSR: 7/31/13 by _____   PROTOCOL # 13-256 EP 1308
DATE OF IRB REVIEW: 8/3/13 by _____   APPROVAL CATEGORY: 45 CFR 46.110 (6,7)
DATE OF IRB APPROVAL: _____ by _____   INTERVAL FOR CONTINUING REVIEW: 1 year
COMMENTS: original 7/8/13

7. PROJECT ASSURANCES

PROJECT TITLE: An Analysis of Alabama School Systems' Policy on Student Bullying

A. PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR'S ASSSURANCES

1. I certify that all information provided in this application is complete and correct.
2. I understand that, as Principal Investigator, I have ultimate responsibility for the conduct of this study, the ethical performance this project, the protection of the rights and welfare of human subjects, and strict adherence to any stipulations imposed by the Auburn University IRB.
3. I certify that all individuals involved with the conduct of this project are qualified to carry out their specified roles and responsibilities and are in compliance with Auburn University policies regarding the collection and analysis of the research data.
4. I agree to comply with all Auburn policies and procedures, as well as with all applicable federal, state, and local laws regarding the protection of human subjects, including, but not limited to the following:
    a. Conducting the project by qualified personnel according to the approved protocol
    b. Implementing no changes in the approved protocol or consent form without prior approval from the Office of Human Subjects Research
    c. Obtaining the legally effective informed consent from each participant or their legally responsible representative prior to their participation in this project using only the currently approved, stamped consent form
    d. Promptly reporting significant adverse events and/or effects to the Office of Human Subjects Research in writing within 5 working days of the occurrence.
5. If I will be unavailable to direct this research personally, I will arrange for a co-investigator to assume direct responsibility in my absence. This person has been named as co-investigator in this application, or I will advise OHSR, by letter, in advance of such arrangements.
6. I agree to conduct this study only during the period approved by the Auburn University IRB.
7. I will prepare and submit a renewal request and supply all supporting documents to the Office of Human Subjects Research before the approval period has expired if it is necessary to continue the research project beyond the time period approved by the Auburn University IRB.
8. I will prepare and submit a final report upon completion of this research project.

My signature indicates that I have read, understand and agree to conduct this research project in accordance with the assurances listed above.

Carolyn Ellis Townsend	*Carolyn Ellis Townsend*	05/30/2013
Printed name of Principal Investigator	**Principal Investigator's Signature** **(SIGN IN BLUE INK ONLY)**	**Date**

B. FACULTY ADVISOR/SPONSOR'S ASSURANCES

1. By my signature as faculty advisor/sponsor on this research application, I certify that the student or guest investigator is knowledgeable about the regulations and policies governing research with human subjects and has sufficient training and experience to conduct this particular study in accord with the approved protocol.
2. I certify that the project will be performed by qualified personnel according to the approved protocol using conventional or experimental methodology.
3. I agree to meet with the investigator on a regular basis to monitor study progress.
4. Should problems arise during the course of the study, I agree to be available, personally, to supervise the investigator in solving them.
5. I assure that the investigator will promptly report significant adverse events and/or effects to the OHSR in writing within 5 working days of the occurrence.
6. If I will be unavailable, I will arrange for an alternate faculty sponsor to assume responsibility during my absence, and I will advise the OHSR by letter of such arrangements. If the investigator is unable to fulfill requirements for submission of renewals, modifications or the final report, I will assume that responsibility.
7. I have read the protocol submitted for this project for content, clarity, and methodology

Dr. Ellen Reames	*Ellen Reames*	05/30/2013
Printed name of Faculty Advisor / Sponsor	**Signature (SIGN IN BLUE INK ONLY)**	**Date**

C. DEPARTMENT HEAD'S ASSSURANCE

By my signature as department head, I certify that I will cooperate with the administration in the application and enforcement of all Auburn University policies and procedures, as well as all applicable federal, state, and local laws regarding the protection and ethical treatment of human participants by researchers in my department.

Dr. Sherida Downer	*Sherida Downer*	05/30/2013
Printed name of Department Head	**Signature (SIGN IN BLUE INK ONLY)**	**Date**

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8. **PROJECT OVERVIEW: Prepare an abstract that includes:**
   (400 word maximum, in language understandable to someone who is not familiar with your area of study):

   I.) A summary of relevant research findings leading to this research proposal:
   (Cite sources; include a "Reference List" as Appendix A.)
   II.) A brief description of the methodology,
   III.) Expected and/or possible outcomes, and,
   IV.) A statement regarding the potential significance of this research project.

I.) Bullying has become widespread in schools throughout the nation (Coloroso, 2008; Garett, 2003; Espelarge & Swearer, 2004). National media reports of retaliatory school violence by students bullied by their peers have led to increased awareness of an age-old problem (Dake, Price, Telljohann, & Frank, 2003; Denmark, Kruass, Wesner, Midlarsky, & Gielen, 2005; Garett, 2003; Geffner, Loring, & Young, 2001). A study by Nansel et al (2001) indicated the substantial prevalence of bullying among youth in the United States. A total of 15,686 students in grades six through ten were administered the World Health Organization's Health Behavior in School-aged Children Survey. Results of the survey indicated that 29.9% of the students reported moderate or frequent involvement in bullying. According to Galezewski (2005), nearly 90% of middle school students reported being bullied during their elementary and middle school years. Some experienced bullying as early as preschool and kindergarten. Reports from the 2007 School Crime Supplement to the National Crime Victimization Survey indicated 62% of students who reported being the victim of any crime at school also reported being bullied by their peers (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010). Card and Hodges (2008) assessment of several studies revealed a 30% to 60% prevalence rate of victimization of students during the school years. Heighten public awareness has resulted in forty-seven states passing laws addressing bullying in school, with Alabama being one of the most recent to enact legislation (Bully Police, USA; Stuart-Cassel, Bell, & Springer, 2011). Although Alabama has attempted to address the issue of bullying, the state only received a B+ rating by a well-known organization that advocates for bullied children (Bully Police, USA). In addition, the USDOE identified key components for bullying legislation and policy development (U.S. Department of Education, 2010) which thus far has not been incorporated into Alabama legislation or school system policies. Furthermore, Alabama has no specific procedure in place to assure the development and implementation of local education policies on student harassment (Stuart-Cassel, Bell, & Springer, 2011).

II.) Methodology: The most applicable research design for this study was determined to be a content analysis. For this study, the researcher was interested in whether local board policies included language previously identified in the U.S. Department of Education's identified key bullying components and Alabama's Student Harassment Prevention Act.
III.) Possible Outcomes: Through this particular content analysis, the researcher hopes to improve the quality and effectiveness of bullying policies in Alabama school systems by providing information which educators and policy-makers can use to assist with the modification or expansion of existing bullying policies and laws. The researcher further hopes to contribute to the existing research on bullying and to create a sense of urgency in school systems to analyze their bullying policies and their incidents of bullying to determine if the policy's goals and objectives are being met.
IV.) Potential Significance: Although there is a significant amount of literature pertaining to the many facets of bullying, there is a continued need for an expansion of literature addressing bullying policy development and implementation. Increasing legal issues concerning bullying dictated a need for in-depth information regarding current state bullying legislation and state and district policy formulation.

Reference List (See Appendix A)   *Bullying and student harassment used interchangeably*

9. **PURPOSE.**
   a. **Clearly state all of the objectives, goals, or aims of this project.**
   The purpose of this study is to analyze the content of student bullying policies adopted by Alabama local education agencies. The researcher will perform a content analysis of the policies using Alabama's Student Harassment Act and the U.S. Department of Education's identified key bullying policy components. In order to provide information which Alabama educators and policy makers could use to modify or expand existing policies and laws relative to bullying, the researcher will analyzed the results of the study to determine if researched based key components are present in the policies. The following research questions were developed as a basis for the body of research conducted in the study.

   Research Questions
   1. To what extent do school systems' bullying policies align with the United States Department of Education's identified key bullying policy components?
   2. To what extent do school systems' bullying policies align with Alabama's Student Harassment Prevention Act?
   3. Do the individual school systems include additional components in their board adopted bullying/harassment policy?
   4. What contributing factors influenced the development of school system bullying policies exceeding minimum criteria?

   b. **How will the results of this project be used? (e.g., Presentation? Publication? Thesis? Dissertation?)**

   Results from this study will be used for a doctoral dissertation, presentations, and future publications.

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10a. KEY PERSONNEL. Describe responsibilities. Include information on research _training or certifications_ related to this project. **CITI is required.** Be as specific as possible. (Attach extra page if needed.) _All non AU-affiliated key personnel must attach **CITI certificates of completion.**_

Carolyn Ellis Townsend   Graduate Student   ellisca@auburn.edu
Principle Investigator_____ Title:_____ E-mail address _____
Dept / Affiliation: College of Education, EFLT

Roles / Responsibilities:
1.) Principal Investigator and sole Interviewer
2.) Obtain informed consent form
3.) Recruit participants/collect data
4.) Prepare final report
Investigator has completed the required CITI training.

Dr. Ellen Reames   Committee Chair   reamseh@auburn.edu
Individual: _____ **Title:** _____ **E-mail address** _____
Dept / Affiliation: College of Education, EFLT

Roles / Responsibilities:

Dr. Ellen Reames will serve as advisor and member of dissertation committee. She will provide editorial, format, and content feedback.

Individual: _____ **Title:** _____ **E-mail address** _____
Dept / Affiliation: _____

Roles / Responsibilities:

Individual: _____ **Title:** _____ **E-mail address** _____
Dept / Affiliation: _____

Roles / Responsibilities:

Individual: _____ **Title:** _____ **E-mail address** _____
Dept / Affiliation: _____

Roles / Responsibilities:

Individual: _____ **Title:** _____ **E-mail address** _____
Dept / Affiliation: _____

Roles / Responsibilities:

11. **LOCATION OF RESEARCH. List all locations where data collection will take place.** (School systems, organizations, businesses, buildings and room numbers, servers for web surveys, etc.) **Be as specific as possible. Attach permission letters in Appendix E.**
(See sample letters at http://www.auburn.edu/research/vpr/ohs/sample.htm)

With permission, research will take place through interviews via phone contact with central office personnel responsible for the development and implementation of the school system's bullying policy.

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12. PARTICIPANTS.

a. Describe the participant population you have chosen for this project.
___ Check here if there is existing data; describe the population from whom data was collected & include the # of data files.

Participants will be central office personnel responsible for the development and implementation of the school systems bullying policy.

b. Describe why is this participant population is appropriate for inclusion in this research project. (Include criteria for selection.)
Participants were selected based on their knowledge and involvement in the development and implementation of their school system's bullying policy.

c. Describe, step-by-step, all procedures you will use to recruit participants. *Include in Appendix B a copy of all e-mails, flyers, advertisements, recruiting scripts, invitations, etc., that will be used to invite people to participate.*
[See sample documents at http://www.auburn.edu/research/vprohs/sample.htm.]

Participants from this study will not be coerced. Before data is collected, the study will be explained to the participants and informed that their participation is strictly voluntary. Only those participants who agree to participate will be selected and included in the data phase of the study.
1.) Identify top five school systems with bullying policies that are inclusive of all or the majority of suggested best components for bullying policies.
2.) Identify central office personnel responsible for the development and implementation of the school system's bullying policy.
3.) Email participants and inform them of the study; reminding them that the study is strictly voluntary.
4.) Contact all participants to answer questions and schedule individual interviews.
5.) Email or fax consent form for participants signature.

Recruitment e-mail letter (See Appendix B)

What is the minimum number of participants you need to validate the study? ⁵ _____

Is there a limit on the number of participants you will recruit?   ☐ No   ☑ Yes – the number is ⁵ _____

Is there a limit on the number of participants you will include in the study?   ☐ No   ☑ Yes – the number is ⁵ _____

d. Describe the type, amount and method of compensation and/or incentives for participants.
(If no compensation will be given, check here ✓.)

Select the type of compensation: ___ Monetary   ___ Incentives
___ Raffle or Drawing Incentive (Include the chances of winning.)
___ Extra Credit (State the value)
___ Other

Description:
N/A

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13. PROJECT DESIGN & METHODS.

a. Describe, step-by-step, all procedures and methods that will be used to consent participants.

(⌊_ Check here if this is "not applicable"; you are using existing data.)

1.) Email participants introducing the study.

2.) Contact each participant via phone and let them know you will email/fax them a consent form letting them know the aims, risks, benefits, and purpose of the study.

3.) Ask participant if there are any questions.

4.) Inform participants that information gathered from all interviews will be confidential. Information gathered will be presented in an overall summary format without the identification of any specific school system or its personnel.

5.) Schedule and conduct interviews at participants discretion.

6.) Researcher will script responses to questions posed to the participants.

7.) Ensure anonymity in expressing that all information discussed shall remain confidential.

8.) Conduct data analysis.

b. Describe the procedures you will use in order to address your purpose. Provide a step-by-step description of how you will carry out this research project. Include specific information about the participants' time and effort commitment. (*NOTE: Use language that would be understandable to someone who is not familiar with your area of study. Without a complete description of all procedures, the Auburn University IRB will not be able to review this protocol. If additional space is needed for this section, save the information as a .PDF file and insert after page 6 of this form.*)

The purpose of this study is to analyze the content of student bullying policies adopted by Alabama local education agencies. The researcher will perform a content analysis of the policies using Alabama's Student Harassment Act and the U.S. Department of Education's identified key bullying policy components. After retrieving a copy of each school system's student harassment policy from the system's website, the researcher will create a content analysis sheet for Alabama's Student Harassment Act and a content analysis sheet for the U.S. Department of Education's identified key bullying policy components. The content in Alabama's city and county school systems' student harassment policy will will be analyzed according to the content obtained from the aforementioned documents. The researcher will analyze the results of the study to determine if components found in Alabama's Student Harassment Act and the U.S. Department of Education's identified key bullying policy components were present in the policies.

Upon completion of the content analysis of the policies, the researcher will identify the systems with student harassment policies that exceed the criteria established by Alabama's Student Harassment Act and the U.S. Department of Education's identified key components. These systems will be asked to complete a follow-up interview in addition to the information obtained from the content analysis. The purpose of the interview is to identify what factors prompted these systems to develop policies that exceeded the expectations set by Alabama's Student Harassment Policy and the U.S. Department of Educations identified key components. Once the systems are identified, local boards of education will be contacted for submission of the names of lead personnel responsible for the development of the student harassment policy. After obtaining these names, participants will be identified and contacted. The researcher will via e-mail or phone call share the purpose of the study with identified participants. Participants interested in participation in the study will receive via e-mail a consent form for participation in the interview. Interviews will be scheduled as allowable by participants' schedule. In order to obtain the necessary data to address the research question "What contributing factors influenced the development of school system bullying policies exceeding minimum criteria?", participants will be asked specific questions. Interviews will be the secondary source of data collection. The purpose of the interview process will be to clarify data from the content analysis of the documents used in the study. In an effort to capture the information shared by the participants, an audio tape will be used to aid in data collecting. A pseudonym will be given to each participant to ensure their privacy.

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13c. List all data collection instruments used in this project, in the order they appear in Appendix C.
(e.g., surveys and questionnaires in the format that will be presented to participants, educational tests, data collection sheets, interview questions, audio/video taping methods etc.)

Instruments being used to complete this project include the following: interview questions, e-mail, audio, paper, and pen. These instruments will be the only tools used to collect interview data. All aforementioned instruments are essential to the data collection process

Interview questions (See Appendix C)

d. Data analysis: Explain how the data will be analyzed.
Researcher's scripted responses from the interview process will be summarized for each of the five participants identified.

14. RISKS & DISCOMFORTS: List and describe all of the risks that participants might encounter in this research. *If you are using deception in this study, please justify the use of deception and be sure to attach a copy of the debriefing form you plan to use in Appendix D.* (Examples of possible risks are in section #6D on page 1.)

Breach of confidentiality is a possible risk that participants might encounter in this research.

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15. **PRECAUTIONS.** Identify and describe all precautions you have taken to eliminate or reduce risks as listed in #14. If the participants can be classified as a "vulnerable" population, please describe additional safeguards that you will use to assure the ethical treatment of these individuals. *Provide a copy of any emergency plans/procedures and medical referral lists in Appendix D.*

Data will be kept confidential. Participants will be issued informed consent letters. Before data is collected the study will be explained to participants and they will be informed that their participation is strictly voluntary. Only participants who volunteer or agree to participate will be selected and included in the data collection phase of this study. Emphasis will be made that that no identifying factors such as name or Social Security Numbers will be used.

If using the Internet to collect data, what confidentiality or security precautions are in place to protect (or not collect) identifiable data? Include protections used during both the collection and transfer of data.
(These are likely listed on the server's website.)

N/A

16. **BENEFITS.**
   a. List all realistic direct benefits participants can expect by participating in this specific study.
   (Do not include "compensation" listed in #12d.)   Check here if there are no direct benefits to participants.

   N/A

   b. List all realistic benefits for the general population that may be generated from this study.
   Through this particular content analysis, the researcher hopes to improve the quality and effectiveness of bullying policies in Alabama school systems by providing information which educators and policy-makers could use to assist with the modification or expansion of existing bullying policies and laws. The researcher further hopes to contribute to the existing research on bullying and to create a sense of urgency in school systems to analyze their bullying policies and their incidents of bullying to determine if the policy's goals and objectives are being met.

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17. PROTECTION OF DATA.

a. Will data be collected as anonymous? ☐ Yes ☑ No *If "YES", skip to part "g".*
("Anonymous" means that you will not collect any identifiable data.)

b. Will data be collected as confidential? ☑ Yes ☐ No
("Confidential" means that you will collect and protect identifiable data.)

c. If data are collected as confidential, will the participants' data be coded or linked to identifying information?
   ■ Yes (If so, describe how linked.) No ■

Participants' data will be linked to identifying information (school systems that exceeded criteria for the development of bullying policies).

d. Justify your need to code participants' data or link the data with identifying information.

In order to determine why some system's student harassment policy exceeded established criteria, participants information must be included for that particular school system.

e. Where will code lists be stored? (Building, room number?)

Coding information will be stored on researcher's computer under password protection.

f. Will data collected as "confidential" be recorded and analyzed as "anonymous"? ☑ Yes ☐ No
(If you will maintain identifiable data, protections should have been described in #15.)

g. Describe how and where the data will be stored (e.g., hard copy, audio cassette, electronic data, etc.), and how the location where data is stored will be secured in your absence. For electronic data, describe security. If applicable, state specifically where any IRB-approved and participant-signed consent documents will be kept on campus for 3 years after the study ends.

I. Use an informed consent form that will ask all participants to maintain confidentiality.
II. All audio transcriptions will be destroyed after completed and analyzed.
III. All identifying information will be labeled and kept in a separate folder.
IV. All information will be advised by Dr. Ellen Reames to ensure participant's anonymity.

h. Who will have access to participants' data?
   (The faculty advisor should have full access and be able to produce the data in the case of a federal or institutional audit.)

The principle investigator, Carolyn Ellis Townsend and dissertation committee chair, Dr. Ellen Reames will have full access to participant's data.

i. When is the latest date that confidential data will be retained? (Check here if only anonymous data will be retained. ✓)

August 2014; Transcripts will be maintained indefinitely for future research opportunities. Participants will be asked for permission to maintain the transcriptions for future research.

j. How will the confidential data be destroyed? (NOTE: Data recorded and analyzed as "anonymous" may be retained indefinitely.)

Audio tapes from interviews and any labeled informaton will be destroyed by the primary investigator after transcription is complete. labeled information will be destroyed by January 2015.

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PROTOCOL REVIEW CHECKLIST

All protocols must include the following items:

1.   Research Protocol Review Form (All signatures included and all sections completed)

(Examples of appended documents are found on the OHSR website: http://www.auburn.edu/research/vpr/ohs/sample.htm)

2.   **Consent Form or Information Letter** and any Releases (audio, video or photo) that the participant will sign.

3.   **Appendix A, "Reference List"**

4.   **Appendix B** if e-mails, flyers, advertisements, generalized announcements or scripts, etc., are used to recruit participants.

5.   **Appendix C** if data collection sheets, surveys, tests, other recording instruments, interview scripts, etc. will be used for data collection. Be sure to attach them in the order in which they are listed in # 13c.

6.   **Appendix D** if you will be using a debriefing form or include emergency plans/procedures and medical referral lists (A referral list may be attached to the consent document).

7.   **Appendix E** if research is being conducted at sites other than Auburn University or in cooperation with other entities. A **permission letter** from the site / program director must be included indicating their cooperation or involvement in the project. NOTE: If the proposed research is a multi-site project, involving investigators or participants at other academic institutions, hospitals or private research organizations, a letter of **IRB approval** from each entity is required prior to initiating the project.

8.   **Appendix F** - Written evidence of acceptance by the host country if research is conducted outside the United States.

FOR FULL BOARD REVIEW, NUMBER ALL PAGES, INCLUDING APPENDICES
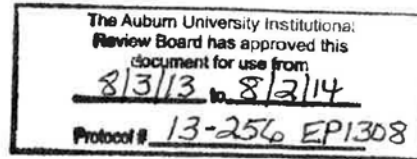
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(NOTE: DO NOT AGREE TO PARTICIPATE UNLESS AN IRB APPROVAL STAMP WITH CURRENT DATES HAS BEEN APPLIED TO THIS DOCEMENT)

INFORMATION LETTER

For a Research Study entitled

"An Analysis of Alabama School Systems' Policy on Student Bullying"

You are invited to participate in a study which analyzes the content of student bullying policies adopted by Alabama local education agencies as they relate to Alabama's Student Harassment Act and the U.S. Department of Education's identified key bullying policy components. The study is being conducted by Carolyn Ellis Townsend, a graduate student under the direction of Dr. Ellen Reames, Associate Professor in the Auburn University Department of Education, Foundation, Leadership, and Technology. You were selected as a possible participant because of your role in the development of a school system's student bullying policy and you are age 19 or older.

If you decide to participate in the research study, you will be asked to respond to several interview protocol questions. The interview will be audio taped. Your total time commitment will be approximately twenty minutes.

The researcher expects no risks or discomforts associated with this study because no identifying factors such as names or social security numbers will be used.

Although there are no personal benefits to participants in this study, the benefits to the stakeholders in education are immeasurable as the results of the study will add to available literature on bullying and policy development.

There will be no compensation provided to participants nor will there be a cost for participating.

If you change your mind about participating, you can withdraw at any time during the study. Your participation is completely voluntary. If you choose to withdraw, your data can be withdrawn as long as it is identifiable. Your decision about whether or not to participate or to stop participating will not jeopardize your future relations with Auburn University or the Department of Education, Foundation, Leadership, and Technology.

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Any information obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential. Information obtained through your participation may be used to fulfill educational requirements, published in a professional journal, or presented at professional meetings.

If you have questions about this study, please contact Carolyn Ellis Townsend at ellisca@auburn.edu or Dr. Ellen Reames at reamseh@auburn.edu.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Auburn University Office of Human Subjects Research or the Institutional Review Board by phone (334)-844-5966 or email at hsubjec@auburn.edu or IRBChair@auburn.edu.

HAVING READ THE INFORMATION PROVIDED, YOU MUST DECIDE WHETHER OR NOT YOU WISH TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH PROJECT. IF YOU DECIDE TO PARTICIPATE, THE DATA YOU PROVIDE WILL SERVE AS YOUR AGREEMENT TO DO SO. THIS LETTER IS YOURS TO KEEP.

Carolyn Ellis Townsend   7-23-13

Investigator's signature   **Date**

Carolyn Ellis Townsend   7-23-13

Printed Name

Ellen A. Reames   7/27/13

Co-Investigator's signature   **Date**

Ellen H. Reames   7/27/13

Printed Name

> The Auburn University Institutional Review Board has approved this document for use from
> 8/3/13 to 8/2/14
> Protocol # 13-256 EP 1308

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