Summer 5-19-2016

K-12 and the Active Shooter: Principals’ Perceptions of Armed Personnel in New Jersey District Factor Group GH Public Schools

Brian P. Kelly
brian.kelly2@student.shu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarship.shu.edu/dissertations

Part of the Community-Based Research Commons, Educational Leadership Commons, Education Policy Commons, Elementary and Middle and Secondary Education Administration Commons, Emergency and Disaster Management Commons, and the Fourth Amendment Commons

Recommended Citation
http://scholarship.shu.edu/dissertations/2202
K-12 and the Active Shooter: Principals’ Perceptions of Armed Personnel in

New Jersey District Factor Group GH Public Schools

Brian P. Kelly

Dissertation Committee

Daniel Gutmore, Ph.D, Mentor/Advisor
Gerard Babo, Ed.D.
David Costantino, Ed.D
Dominick Varricchio, Ed.D.

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education

Seton Hall University

2016
SETON HALL UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN SERVICES
OFFICE OF GRADUATE STUDIES

APPROVAL FOR SUCCESSFUL DEFENSE

Brian P. Kelly, has successfully defended and made the required modifications to the

DISSERTATION COMMITTEE
(please sign and date beside your name)

Mentor:
Dr. Daniel Gutmore

Committee Member:
Dr. Gerard Babo

Committee Member:
Dr. David Constantino

Committee Member:
Dr. Dominick Varricchio

The mentor and any other committee members who wish to review revisions will sign
and date this document only when revisions have been completed. Please return this
form to the Office of Graduate Studies, where it will be placed in the candidate’s file and
submit a copy with your final dissertation to be bound as page number two.
Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore the predicament school principals face when formulating the best methodology to provide a safe environment for their students and faculty, while simultaneously creating an atmosphere that is conducive to education.

This multiple-case study is a replication of a dissertation published in 2014 which explored a unique phenomenon containing multiple variables within an urban public school district. Conversely, this research study examined suburban public school districts within communities that possessed a median household salary ranging between $86,000 and $105,000, where the socioeconomic status of these schools is identified and delineated by New Jersey District Factor Group GH, as designated by the New Jersey Department of Education. Twenty-one school principals were interviewed to collect evidence of their perceptions in relation to utilizing armed personnel in their schools.

The literature on school shootings and armed personnel in schools was thoroughly reviewed. This literature consisted of peer-reviewed articles and federal and state laws, as well as books and ancillary studies and articles depicting the contemporary climate of school shootings in our nation.

Through the face-to-face interviews I conducted with the school principals, this research study examined the perceptions of the principals as they related to school safety, armed personnel, policies and procedures, mental health, and communications among all stakeholders within the scope of their employment as administrators.

The results of this study provided valuable information, which I was able to vividly articulate into recommendations for future research, policy, and practice.
DEDICATED TO

GRAZIELLA ELIZABETH

My daughter, who from the day she was born, allowed me to finally realize

life’s purpose and meaning….

Her mere existence defines me as a human; for I am a father, husband, son, brother, friend, educator, and protector. Her innocence, her laugh, her smile, are the very things which now drive me; for she is my motivation, and my motive for possessing more tenacity than before. My daughter, you have allowed me to endure more, in the midst of doubt, while preserving a smile as you extend your arms to me.

My daughter, always there with her smile beaming, her eyes filled with happiness, and a heart full of joy.

I will always be there for you.

My daughter, Grazie baby

I dedicate this to you.
“You do not throw rocks at a man holding a machine gun.”

Roderick George Toombs
Acknowledgments

The decision to replicate a qualitative study within this genre of subject matter was a choice that I made with confidence as well as with trepidation. Obviously it is a subject that is always intruding in the minds of us all, at least in contemporary society. However, I recognized that this study would not only be an inheritance of a methodology and design conducted by a different researcher, as well as the decision to use a different version of the total sample population with its own characteristics and values, it was coupled with the involvement of interviewing principals about their perspectives on faculty, staff, students, police officers, and in fact, guns and violence.

For their enthusiastic participation, I cannot thank the principals of the West Orange, Fairfield, Frelinghuysen, Springfield, Paramus, Fair Lawn, and Roxbury Public School Districts, which volunteered to be interviewed, enough. It is apparent and honorable that their dedication to their faculty and students is second to none. Most appreciated was their honesty in their responses to the interview questions, which was invaluable to the completion of this study.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the many professors and administrative staff at Seton Hall University who have supported me in this study. Their time and dedication in the field of education is without question admirable and commendable, in the spirit of Seton Hall University.

I would like to especially thank my mentor, Dr. Daniel Gutmore, who throughout this study was instrumental in ensuring that I maintained my direction, and remained engrossed in the purpose and significance of the study. His commitment and dedication as a mentor was invaluable. Since 2012, as my academic advisor, Dr. Gutmore has provided his leadership and shared this mission with me.
I also would like to thank Dr. Gerard Babo. First, during my studies, Dr. Babo introduced a subject to me that I literally feared, and made it motivational. This was Statistics. Next, when I encountered some academic hurdles, Dr. Babo saw my determination and assisted me to clear those hurdles that were vital to the completion of this doctoral program. As my second reader, working in close collaboration with Dr. Gutmore, he provided his honest and constructive advice, allowing me to become a much improved researcher.

Dr. David Costantino has been a friend to me in many ways. I say this honorably and humbly. He is a rare breed. His academic quest, previous to mine, was a guiding force which allowed me to charge forward when I needed to, and when I could have easily quit, but chose not to. Dr. Dominick Varricchio, my leader since the Ed.S. program, has provided a contribution of direction and friendship that I consider incomparable. His advice and experience has proven to be remarkable, in and out of the classroom, and I am thankful to have received it. I would like to also thank my former classmate, Dr. Richard Reyes, for granting me permission to replicate his study.

I would be thoughtless if I did not acknowledge Michele Rullo and Beverly Kroeger for the many calls and emails they each took from me over the years. They never wavered to assist me by answering my questions or helping to find the answers.

Finally, I need to give special thanks to my wife Dana. For the last three years, she has spent many days and nights listening to me talk, complain, stress, and re-motivate myself, as it pertained to completing this program and, most importantly, this research. Her patience and support of me has never been absent during the extent of this study. She refueled my fire to complete what I set out to do. I did this for her, and I did this for us. Thank you to God and to my entire family. We don’t do things halfway
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract ......................................................................................................................... ii

Dedication ...................................................................................................................... iii

Acknowledgments ......................................................................................................... v

Table of Contents ......................................................................................................... vii

List of Tables ................................................................................................................ xi

List of Figures ............................................................................................................... xii

I. INTRODUCTION

Background .................................................................................................................. 1

Statement of the Problem ............................................................................................ 6

Purpose of the Study .................................................................................................... 10

Research Questions .................................................................................................... 12

Conceptual Framework ............................................................................................... 12

Design and Methodology ......................................................................................... 14

Significance of Study ................................................................................................. 17

Definition of Terms .................................................................................................... 18

Delimitations and Limitations .................................................................................. 20

Organization of the Study .......................................................................................... 21

II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction .................................................................................................................. 22

Literature Search Methods ......................................................................................... 28

Criteria for Inclusion in the Literature .................................................................... 28

Relevant Literature .................................................................................................... 29

Federal Laws and Mandates ..................................................................................... 29
III. METHODOLOGY

Introduction........................................................................81

Background........................................................................83

Design...............................................................................87

Settings............................................................................90

Public School District Participants (Townships)..................93
Participants.................................................................93
Profiles of the Participants..............................................97
Validity and Reliability...................................................101
Data Analysis...............................................................102
Research Questions......................................................102
Summary...........................................................................107

IV. FINDINGS

Introduction........................................................................109
Emergent Themes.............................................................113
   Research Questions.....................................................113
Policy and Procedures ......................................................118
   Armed Personnel .........................................................122
Concerns ...........................................................................127
   Physical Security ........................................................129
   Mental Health ............................................................132
Communication...............................................................135
   Summary........................................................................138

V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction........................................................................144
Summary of Findings........................................................145
Research Questions...........................................................147
   Research Question 1 ....................................................147
   Research Question 2 ....................................................149
   Research Question 3.....................................................150
## List of Tables

Table 1. Grid of designated NJDFG(s)–Total Districts within each DFG.........................92

Table 2. District Factor Group GH by County–Eight in Total........................................95

Table 3. List of Survey Questions–Principals’ Demographics......................................104

Table 4. List of Interview Questions Based on the Research Questions..........................105

Table 5. List of Codes Used: Primary Themes and Sub-Themes..................................110

Table 6. Principal Demographics: Total Number per Category......................................112

Table 7. List of Codes Used: Public School Districts and Personnel...............................116

Table 8. List of Codes Used: Personnel Race and Gender.............................................117

Table 9. List of Codes Used: Armed Personnel (Race/Gender)......................................141

Table 10. Ages, Race, and Gender Endorsing Armed Personnel..................................142
List of Figures

Figure 1. Age of Participants .................................................................98

Figure 2. Gender of Participants .............................................................99

Figure 3. Total Years in Education–Participants ........................................99

Figure 4. Years as a Principal–Participants ..............................................100

Figure 5. Years in School District–Participants ........................................100

Figure 6. Emergent Themes: Numeric Responses .......................................113

Figure 7. Previous Emergent Themes (Original Study): Numeric Responses ....114
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Background

Compulsory education in the United States began with the establishment of the nation’s first elementary school system in Massachusetts in 1647. The Massachusetts Law of 1647, also known as the Old Deluder Satan Act, decreed that every town of at least 50 families hire a schoolmaster who would teach the town’s children to read and write (Sass, 2015).

Despite significant advances in the fields of elementary, secondary, and higher education since the mid-17th century, one idea has remained constant, until perhaps recently: the perception of a school being a safe haven for all students and staff. A school’s climate can be defined as the traditions, beliefs, policies, norms, and practiced skills that act as a foundation for what takes place within the everyday workings of a school (Cohen et al., 2009). In the last several decades, the climate of our nation’s schools has changed from a relatively peaceful place of learning, to an environment where a host of more advanced challenges present themselves, outside the category of traditional education. History has displayed that schools can be portrayed as emotionally charged environments where frustrated students, as well as staff, commit acts of violence. This new paradigm requires a shift in thinking to increase the likelihood of a school free from violence.

A negative school climate can become a breeding ground for violence in schools, while a positive climate can engender nonviolence and cooperation, not polarization (Blanchfield, 2013). In an era considered to be and often referred to as Post 9/11, an alteration in thought processes within school districts across the nation, and perhaps the
world for that matter, displays cause for security-minded decision making within many educational infrastructures, regardless of the jurisdiction examined.

In Sparks, Nevada, a math teacher stood in the way of a 12-year-old student with a handgun to protect his students and as a result was shot and killed (Williams, 2013). This incident is merely one incident of hundreds that have impacted modern learning settings for quite some time. However, when we learn of these horrific acts of violence perpetrated on school children, we are reminded of the violence that has become a part of our national discourse (James & McCallion, 2013). In Edinboro, Pennsylvania, on April 21, 1998, 14-year-old Andrew Wurst opened fire at his eighth grade dance and killed a teacher (Hays, 1999). In Springfield, Oregon, on May 21, 1998, 15-year-old Kip Kinkel killed both his parents and killed two students in a shooting spree at the Thurston High School cafeteria (Verhovek, 1999). In Pearl, Mississippi, on October 1, 1997, 16-year-old Luke Woodham walked into Pearl High School with his hunting rifle and killed two students (Sack, 1997).

As discussed, many of these school shootings occurred two years prior to the April 20, 1999, Columbine High School attack in Littleton, Colorado, wherein 18-year-old Eric Harris and 17-year-old Dylan Klebold shot and killed 12 students and one teacher before committing suicide (Cullen, 2009). Nonetheless, the attack at Columbine High School attained a very high profile within the crime category of school violence, and more importantly served as a catalyst for many of the reforms schools themselves have undertaken in regard to a more calculated response to an active-shooter situation, including but not limited to the implementation of safety-related procedures, and demonstrating an overall endorsement of increasing school security by administrators and lawmakers. As it pertains to this study, an active shooter is defined as a suspect whose activity is immediately causing death and serious injury (NJ Attorney General Guidelines, 2001).
Historically, school leadership has emphasized safety with regard to dealing with school violence. Developing procedures that make schools safer places to learn seems an obvious conclusion, yet such measures can lead to a false sense of security. Focusing only on physical security measures sets the precedent for evasion of these measures rather than prevention of the underlying reasons for violence in schools (Blanchfield, 2013). Studies have shown that school violence has a direct effect on education and affects the students’ learning and the teachers’ ability to teach, as well as having an effect on teacher retention. Students that have been victimized by school violence have reported “feelings of social isolation, depression, frustration, and poorer school attachment” (Johnson, 2009, p. 452).

In this age of frequent school shootings and the perceived rise of school violence, we look to school administrators for guidance and to ensure the safety of our children (James & McCallion, 2013). School principals are tasked with ensuring a safe and secure school environment for both students and faculty. The most daunting challenge facing school administrators, faculty, security personnel, and anyone else tasked with protecting the student body, is an active-shooter situation. The inherent danger lies in the immediate risk of death or serious injury to potential victims if the incident is not rapidly contained (Borelli, 2005). A goal of the actors at Columbine High School was not to get out alive, as is frequently the case with this kind of event. In an active-shooter situation, suicide is often a part of the plan from the start (Scanlon, 2001). Therefore, this dynamic includes variables that could be considered as multiple tests within an overarching challenge.

In 2013, the National Association of School Psychologists, in developing a framework for “a safe and successful school environment” recommended the following effective school safety efforts (Cowan, Vaillancourt, Rossen, & Pollitt, 2013):
1. Begin with proactive principal leadership.

2. Allow school leaders to deploy human and financial resources in a manner that best meets the needs of their school and community.

3. Provide a team-based framework to facilitate effective coordination of services and interventions.

4. Balance the needs for physical and psychological safety.

5. Employ the necessary and appropriately trained school-employed mental health and safety personnel.

6. Provide relevant and ongoing professional development for all staff.

7. Integrate a continuum of mental health supports within a multi-tiered system of supports.

8. Engage families and community providers as meaningful partners.


After the active-shooter incident in Newtown, Connecticut, on December 14, 2012, where 20-year-old Adam Lanza went into the Sandy Hook Elementary School and killed 20 first graders and six staff members before killing himself, the New York City Police Department (NYPD) issued their Active Shooter Recommendations to the New York City Department of Education. The New York City Police Department studied 324 active-shooter cases from 1966 to 2012. Of these 324 cases, 30 were in office buildings, 71 were in open spaces, 33 were in factories and warehouses, 130 were in schools, 93 resulted in school shootings, and 60 were identified as having occurred in other locations (NYPD, 2010, 2012). Of the active shooting incidents that were studied, they identified that 38% of the active-shooter incidents were of a personal nature between the victim and the shooter,
26% of the active shooter incidents had no connection between the victim and the shooter, 22% were in an academic setting, and 6% involved family disputes.

Since the Newtown, Connecticut, school shooting, there have been over 150 active shooter incidents in schools across this nation. Therefore, school principals and administrators must acknowledge and respect how rapidly active-shooter incidents can escalate, often spawning from a different impetus. Although violent crime in schools, in general, has been on the decline since the early 1990s (Kleck, 1999), school principals must adapt to trends where violent critical incidents are becoming more common on their watch.

School administrators are tasked with making critical decisions regarding protecting students and faculty, while simultaneously preserving the academic integrity of the educational institution. As a result of the shootings in Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, school districts today are budgeting money to hire school police officers or security guards with the intention of keeping students and faculty safe (Molner, 2013). Conversely, the cost of placing an armed officer in every school has been estimated to cost anywhere from $4 billion (O’Brien, 2012) to as much as $13 billion (Hill, 2013). Budgetary constraints often hinder administrators’ decision-making processes in regard to whether or not to utilize armed personnel in schools. Nonetheless, this is not the only variable an administrator weighs upon regarding the choice to implement armed personnel.

Modern-day schools are highly complex and unique organizations that operate with an urgent imperative: educate and prepare students to realize their potential and contribute to society, no matter their socioeconomic background or geographic location. Creating safe, orderly, warm, and inviting school environments is critical to ensuring that all of our schools meet this goal. In order to create this type of environment, schools must work towards integrating services (academic, behavioral, social, emotional, and mental health)
through collaboration using a multi-tiered system of support (Cowan, Vaillancourt, Rossen, & Pollitt, 2013). Schools should strive to increase access to mental health services, increase the number of mental health professionals on staff, and work to ensure a balance between physical safety and psychological safety. To further support student safety, schools must develop effective emergency preparedness and crisis prevention, intervention, and response plans that are coordinated with local first responders (Cowan, Vaillancourt, Rossen, & Pollitt, 2013). However, there are limited data on the effect of armed personnel on the safety of students and faculty or on the possible disruption that armed personnel will have on education (James & McCallion, 2013; Smith & Smith, 2006).

Statement of the Problem

The Columbine High School shooting incident in 1999 has undoubtedly changed the way law enforcement responds to a violent incident occurring inside a school. However, there are multiple views on dealing with the problem of school violence in America, such as requiring armed personnel in schools to neutralize an active-shooter threat. Since the December 2012 mass shooting in Newtown, Connecticut, Washington lawmakers have regained an interest in school resource officers (SROs) (James & McCallion, 2013).

In a Gallup Poll of district superintendents on the topic of “what superintendents really think,” taken on July 10, 2013, one of the issues addressed was school safety, specifically the question of armed personnel within their school district (Maxwell, 2013, p. 1), 62% of the superintendents answered they had no armed personnel; 28% of these superintendents answered “yes,” they were considering armed personnel (Maxwell, 2013, p. 2). Contemporary education has demonstrated that superintendents and principals have to address the concept of school security and, consequently, pursue endeavors necessary to ensure students and faculty feel safe in order to encourage a productive educational
environment. A national survey of schools and law enforcement agencies resulted in principals and law enforcement having different views on the need for SROs. Only 4% answered that violence was the reason for having SROs in schools (James & McCallion, 2013).

In contrast, on June 26, 2013, while giving an interview to NJ 101.5, a New Jersey radio station, Governor Chris Christie was asked by a caller about the decision of the town of Westfield, New Jersey, to hire armed police officers in schools. Governor Christie replied, “I don’t think that we need to have armed police officers in schools, and I don’t think it’s a great atmosphere for children to see an armed person walking in a school.” Governor Christie added that his statement is based on his law enforcement experience (Wright-Piersanti, 2013, p. 1).

However, there are multiple understandings on dealing with the problematic variable of school violence, and the prospect of possessing armed personnel in schools. While Governor Christie is in opposition to arms personnel in schools, President Barak Obama has requested an additional $150 million to be added to the Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) grant to hire more School Resource Officers (SROs), a new type of hybrid police, teacher, and correction officer, with a primary focus on problem solving and crime prevention, as opposed to criminal apprehension. If properly selected and trained, SROs may be effective problem solvers (James & McCallion, 2013). In contrast, the Congressional Resource Service Report on School Resource Officers (2013) reported that administrators were opposed to the SRO program because it cast a negative light on school safety, and interfered with the education process, while police officers saw the SRO program as a tool in public safety.
On the complete opposite end of this spectrum, in Little Falls, New Jersey, the principal at Passaic Valley High School, a retired Little Falls police officer, has been allowed by the board of education to carry a concealed weapon in response to the Sandy Hook Elementary School Shooting (Pappas, 2013). Armed personnel in schools, specifically law enforcement being utilized as such, present an entirely different challenge to administrators, specifically due to the sensitivity of the environment where this research is being conducted. Essentially, the population within this learning environment is comprised of society’s most prized possessions, our children.

Presumably then, states and school districts have some discretion as to which individuals are allowed to possess firearms on a school campus. As mentioned previously, several states and districts have proposed steps to allow, or have already authorized, armed educators in schools (Weiler & Armenta, 2014). At least one school district in Texas now allows teachers to carry concealed weapons (Elderkin 2013), and South Dakota’s governor signed a law into effect that would authorize school employees to carry weapons (Eligon 2013, A1). In a national survey of schools, those with SROs experienced greater police involvement than those without (James & McCallion, 2013).

A separate study found that “schools that added SROs did not have a lower number of reported serious violent, non-serious violent, or property crimes. However, schools that added SROs had a higher number of reported weapon and drug offenses” (James & McCallion, 2013, p. 23). There are other factors that superintendents and principals must address when dealing with school violence and having armed personnel in schools. Just as the school children must feel safe and secure to reassure an educational environment, so must faculty and staff.
A national survey of schools and law enforcement agencies resulted in principals and law enforcement having different views on the need for SROs. Only 4% answered that violence was the reason for having SROs in schools (James & McCallion, 2013). In her review of the literature on school violence, Johnson (2009) found that creating a safe environment through student-teacher relationships, positive school interaction, and an orderly environment with rules perceived by students as fair is more conducive to a secure educational setting than other security methods such as armed personnel. The presence of armed personnel, permeated by school violence, could be perceived by school administrators and principals differently, as it relates to what would be considered safe, as well as conducive to the educational environment.

For instance, some variables contributing to a negative view of utilizing armed personnel in schools are a school’s geographic area, a school’s overall demographic, and perhaps most importantly, the outlook and vision of who is in charge. School leaders who focus on preparations for crisis send a message that procedures are in place, and that the personal safety of students and faculty carry the highest priority. Nonetheless, not all administrators will share this sentiment.

Some of the fundamental ingredients for resolving crises include recognizing the early warning signals, along with practices that protect a school after a crisis is over (Branchfield, 2013). Furthermore, an examination of whether school principals’ perceptions of violence in education settings may impact perceptions of principals’ securing a school with armed personnel. Therefore, would armed personnel in education settings benefit principals in attaining the best security possible for their students and faculty, as well as create an environment that is most conducive to the education setting?
Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the dilemma principals encounter when determining the best approach to offer a safe environment for their students and faculty, while simultaneously creating an environment that is conducive to the education of their students. A multiple-case study was utilized during this qualitative research to determine principals’ perceptions of armed personnel in a specific New Jersey public school district factor group. This researcher was influenced by a previous study conducted in 2014 and chose to replicate this study by utilizing a synonymous design and methodology. However, a different geographical area in northern New Jersey was selected based on socioeconomic status, as well as the overall demographics; i.e., the multiple suburban districts versus an urban district allowed for the decision to select a different district factor group than utilized in the original study. Also in contrast to the original study’s use of a single school identified as urban and low socioeconomically from one particular district, I selected a public school district factor group that possesses not only a smaller population of schools within their districts overall in comparison to the original single district, but a significantly different socioeconomic status within their schools, where the multiple districts participating contain schools located in suburban townships.

In this current study, eight schools were the primary focus within this district factor group, which included a possible total sample population of 46 principals (N=46), who are assigned to lead and manage the faculty, staff, students, and operations of each education setting, respectively. The dilemma for school principals may revolve around the question of whether armed personnel fulfill the needs in the area of security, based on school violence, or if armed personnel create a perception that is not conducive to a safe and secure environment, in this case, an education setting.
The Congressional Resource Service Report on School Resource Officers (2013) added that there are scant data on the issue of utilizing SROs and that the research is limited. The limited available research has also focused on suburban schools, based on the high percentage of rampage shootings that have been occurring predominately in suburban or rural school districts (Newman, Fox, Harding, Mehta, & Ruth, 2004). Hence, the geographic area of a school is often what is taken into account. Urban school shooting research has been limited to the perceptions that school shootings are a result of a violent neighborhood or violent culture (Smith & Smith, 2006), unlike the studies conducted on active shooters or rampage shootings.

After the July 20, 2012, Aurora, Colorado, active-shooter incident, where 24-year-old James Holmes killed 12 people and wounded 58 at a midnight showing of The Dark Knight Rises, a sequel to the Batman movies (Frosch & Johnson, 2012), the U.S. Department of Justice, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, and Johns Hopkins University convened a national summit of law enforcement and academic experts to review “strategic approaches to preventing multiple casualty violence” (USDOJ, 2013, p. 1). Ironically and unfortunately, the summit ended one day before the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting. A recurrent theme among the existing body of research regarding active shooters and rampage shootings is the need for more research on the topic (Booth et al., 2011; James & McCallion, 2013; Newman et al., 2004; NYPD, 2010, 2012; Smith & Smith, 2006; USDOJ, 2013).

Despite the fact that a multitude of experts from the areas of law enforcement, education, and research collaborated to assist in a task to advance in the prevention of violence, in and outside of schools, their results were insignificant. Consequently, even less research exists on school administrators’ decisions, specifically principals, pertaining to
perceived requirements of creating a safe and secure environment, and how these factors affect the learning environment. However, this dilemma will force a principal’s decision making ability regarding the act of school violence into the spotlight should an active-shooter incident occur. An interesting point to make is how assertive behavior can help stress management in schools, both as a prevention and intervention method of leadership (Morrison 2007).

**Research Questions**

1. Do suburban school principals perceive safety threats to come from within the school they operate, or outside of their school?

2. How do suburban school principals in various New Jersey school districts address school safety for the students and faculty?

3. How do suburban school principals perceive the presence, or knowledge of armed personnel as influencing or deterring potential school violence?

4. Do suburban school principals perceive students and faculty to be safer with armed personnel present in the school, or does armed personnel create a threatening environment?

**Conceptual Framework**

This study explored the dilemma school principals face when determining the best approach to providing a safe environment for their students and faculty, while simultaneously creating an environment that is conducive to education. In doing so, multiple theories were reviewed to allow for a purer interpretation of the burden placed on school principals. School safety and an environment favorable to learning are the two most critical issues identified in this study.
Abraham H. Maslow’s hierarchy of needs directly correlates with these critical issues. Maslow believed in order for an individual to reach self-actualization, the individual had to first have acquired four other needs (Mittelman, 1991). Physiological needs are the physical requirements for human survival; safety needs are the state in which their physical needs are relatively satisfied. The individual’s safety needs take precedence and dominate behavior; after physiological and safety needs are fulfilled, the third level of human needs is interpersonal and involves feelings of belongingness. All humans have a need to feel respected; this includes the need to have self-esteem and self-respect. Esteem presents the typical human desire to be accepted and valued by others (Mittelman, 1991).

Maslow’s hierarchy of needs requires basic needs to be fulfilled before moving on to the higher needs, whereas Alderfer’s ERG theory allows for multiple needs to be achieved without one having to precede the other (More, Vito, & Walsh, 2012). Principals must assess the needs of their specific educational environments. Furthermore, principals must determine if the basic needs, as prescribed by Maslow, have been achieved in order to progress to more advanced needs, especially pertaining to students and faculty.

This study demonstrates the importance of viewing issues through the understanding of critical theory and postmodernism. Critical Theory perspectives are concerned with empowering human beings to transcend the constraints placed on them by race, class, and gender (Fay, 1987). Hence, a perspective on suburban schools was utilized, as compared to the original study conducted on urban schools. Urban schools often succumb to constraints simply because of where they are located.

Conversely, suburban schools may often contain stigmas deeper within their infrastructure, some of which are variables that are created far from the educational environment. Critical theory is based on the study and critique of our current institutions
and the knowledge of who has the power in these institutions. Identifying the power and challenging the power is at the very core of critical theory (Webb et al., 2010).

Postmodernism is the belief that there are no constant truths; reality is subjective, constructed by a person’s past and present personal experiences (Webb et al., 2010). Postmodernism is cynical of science and the scientific method as prescribed in the modernist theory (Schmalleger, 2011). Around the world schools are taking a postmodern approach, allowing schools and their curriculums to have a greater understanding and embrace diverse cultures and different point of views (Parkay, Hass, & Anctil, 2010).

Qualitative inquirers use different terms for theories, such as patterns, theoretical lenses, or naturalistic generalizations (Creslow, 2012). Patterns, for instance, could refer to people’s beliefs in certain institutions in different areas of our society, such as education. Regardless of whether existing institutions are political, economic, social, or educational, they need to be critiqued and challenged (Webb et al., 2010, p. 87).

**Design and Methodology**

As part of the research into the perceptions that principals possess in regards to consenting, or not, to the use of armed personnel in an educational setting, the methodology I decided to use in this qualitative study relies on postmodernism and critical theory, with the research focused on individuals that have experienced social inequities (Bogden & Biklen, 2007). I recognize that participants may possess their own perceptions on this phenomenon, including but not limited to the current climate of school safety in this nation and their viewpoints on armed personnel, specifically as they apply to schools, as well as based on their personal experiences.

I conducted in-depth interviews with semi-structured open-ended questions (Bogden & Biklen, 2007). The questions were designed based on the review of the current
literature. A panel of experts, consisting of three principals not included in the original study as participants, was previously assembled to ensure the validity of the questions used in the previous study I am replicating. As a result of the data collected, all questions and answers given during the interviews were transcribed for the participants’ review and approval for validity and to ensure accuracy (Creswell, 2009).

Considering the nature of our target phenomenon, I followed the advice of Strauss and Corbin (1998), who explained that “qualitative research can be used to obtain intricate details about phenomena such as feelings, thought processes, and emotions that are difficult to extract or learn about through more conventional methods” (p. 11). The method used for the present study was the collective case study as described by Stake (2000).

A collective case study involves the study of more than one case in order to investigate a phenomenon, population, or general condition (Creslow, p. 437). This approach assumes that investigating a number of cases leads to better comprehension and better theorizing (Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klingner, Pugach, and Richardson, 2005). For this study, I interviewed school principals within a predominantly suburban public district factor group in New Jersey. Furthermore, I compared the findings from the study conducted in 2014 with the data collected and analyzed in the multiple-case study replication.

The suburban district factor group that was sampled was comprised of 76 total school districts. From this population eight school district superintendents responded to my initial Letter of Solicitation. These eight districts contained 46 principals within the realms of K-12 public schools. These 46 ($N=46$) principals were solicited using an additional approved Letter of Solicitation; 21 ($n=21$) principals responded, who were voluntarily willing to participate in this research study.
The schools within these districts were comprised of 12 elementary schools, five middle schools, and four high schools. This particular district factor group (GH) was selected for its socioeconomic status, and size of school districts, as well as other variables in contrast to the original study, including but not limited to median household income. The original study utilized only elementary school principals, 12 in total, all from urban districts.

The research design was selected to allow me to identify the participants, location, and an area for interviewing to allow for a structured research (Bogden & Biklen, 2007). This research study examined the perceptions of principals as it pertained to the potential or current presence of armed personnel in 21 educational settings, specifically the suburban public schools in the District Factor Group I selected to replicate a previous study, which was conducted in an urban school district in 2014. As a result of the data that were collected through the interviews with the school principals, the data were coded to organize the material by sections that could be identified from the responses (Bogden & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2009). Creswell (2009) recommends that the data are to be organized for analysis and coded by sections, allowing the narrative of the study to convey the findings of the data analyzed to be able to ask, “What were the lessons learned?” (p. 189).

As stated, a letter requesting permission to conduct this research study was submitted to the superintendents’ offices of these public schools in this district factor group. With the approval of the superintendents’ offices, a request for permission to conduct this study was submitted to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Seton Hall University; any research involving human subjects must receive IRB approval (Bogden & Biklen, 2007).

No action was taken in regard to this research without the consent of the IRB at Seton Hall University and the public school districts selected to participate. The principals
selected for the study were chosen from 46 possible schools in the districts that consented to participate voluntarily, representing a total leadership alignment. In turn, it is an acceptable representation from the available crime data from the towns where the schools exist, submitted annually to the Uniform Crime Report (UCR). An Introduction/Consent letter was sent to all elementary, middle, and high school principals who were asked to participate in this study; the Introduction/Consent letter explained the research to be conducted, along with its purpose and the estimated amount of time necessary for completing the study.

The Introduction/Consent letter also supplied the principals with a statement of data confidentiality, which stated participants’ identifying characteristics would remain confidential. Furthermore, only the principal researcher had access to the data, which has remained secured in a locked secured desk at my primary place of employment, Felician University, in Lodi, New Jersey. The Introduction/Consent letters to the participants, along with a cover letter to the public school district superintendents, are included as appendices to this study.

**Significance of the Study**

This study examined the perceptions of school principals pertaining to the presence of armed personnel within their schools, and their perceptions towards how armed personnel impacts the learning environment for both students and faculty. Although there has been much written and researched about school violence, the data on the impact of armed personnel in schools are sorely lacking, specifically as it pertains principals’ perceptions of this phenomenon.

This study examined literature on school violence and the debate on armed personnel in schools. School administrators, specifically principals, have to make decisions that impact the safety of the students and faculty, while also ensuring an environment that is
conducive to learning. Furthermore, this research is being conducted in a contemporary society filled with conflicting beliefs regarding the legal ownership of handguns from a constitutional standpoint versus the threat imposed by these very gun issues as shown in all the school shootings which occurred in pre-9/11 as well as post-9/11 eras. The presence of the philosophical concepts of postmodernism and critical theory were utilized, as this study examined the role of the school principal to ensure that all school cultures are represented in a safe and secure learning environment.

I have reviewed literature on the topic written from the perspective of the school administrators regarding their response to active-shooter incidents, lawmakers’ responses to these events, the psychological profile of the shooters who cause school violence, and the media’s role in reporting events. This research was necessary to enhance a school administrator’s ability to craft policy pertinent to active-shooter incidents in a public school district, while assessing how the presence of armed personnel affects the educational environment, though the perceptions of who is leading, managing, and operating these education settings: the school principal.

**Definition of Terms**

**Active-shooter:** "A suspect’s activity is immediately causing death and serious bodily injury. The activity is not contained and there is a risk of death or serious bodily injury to potential victims" (Borelli, 2005, p. 2.). Active-shooter is the term used for a person who enters into a location where multiple people are assembled and begins to shoot or harm indiscriminately all the people in his or her way.

**Armed Personnel** could be any person or persons authorized by law to carry a concealed or exposed weapon. Armed personnel could be a police officer, an armed security guard, a retired police officer, or an armed teacher/principal.
Critical Incidents: Terrorist activities, hostage taking, mass casualty events, high-risk repetitive crimes, riots, or bombings.

HTV is an acronym for Hybrid Targeted Violence. Due to the recent active-shooter incidents, the term hybrid targeted violence has been used to identify an individual or individuals causing an act of violence upon a specifically identified group with a combination of lethal weapons.

Jurisdiction: The territorial range of authority or control.

Moral Panic is when a substantial portion of society believes that particular evildoers pose a threat to the moral order of society.

Police Officer: Any sworn member of a state, county, city/municipal police department empowered to uphold law and order with the power to arrest offenders for crimes, misdemeanors, and infractions of law.

Principal is the person in charge of the school, responsible for the safety and education of all the students, as well as the safety of the school faculty. The school principal is also in charge of ensuring an environment that is conducive to learning by all the students.

Rampage Shootings are defined by the fact that they involve attacks on multiple parties, often selected at random.

School is defined as a public or private institution of learning, which includes school property, school buildings, school libraries, school buses, and other areas used for learning or associated with an institution of learning.

Suburban is defined as characteristic of the culture, customs, and manners typical of life in the suburbs, as opposed to urban life or life in a city.
**SRO** is an acronym for school resource officer. It is a police officer assigned to work within a school, to work with students and faculty to bridge law enforcement and education. SROs may be funded through a school or police budget or through federal grants.

**Delimitations and Limitations**

There are several delimitations that can be identified in this study:

1. Qualitative research is based on data gathered from interviews of school principals, i.e. the leader of each academic institution.

2. The location of the interviews and the personnel to be interviewed; suburban schools located in the state of New Jersey, a northeastern area of the United States, categorized within a specific district factor group which I chose for this research study.

3. Interview questions based on the conceptual framework of postmodernism and critical theory.

There are several limitations that can be identified in this study:

1. The sample size of 21 principals (n=21) limits the study to the perceptions of multiple educational administrators, nonetheless few in number.

2. Despite the use of multiple school districts, the entirety of the sample is chosen from the same district factor group; this limits the ability to generalize the findings of this study beyond the sample population as it relates to type of school and community.

3. Due to the potentially diverging nature of the discussion regarding the ownership and possession of handguns, hence the impetus of Armed
Personnel, the findings of this study may be limited by participant’s personal feelings on the topic of gun possession.

**Organization of the Study**

Chapter I presented an introduction of the problem behind the study: the background, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, guiding research questions, the conceptual framework as it applies to theoretical perspectives within qualitative research, design and methodology, significance of the study, delimitations of the study, limitations of the study, definitions of terms, and a description of the organization of the study. Chapter II presents a review of pertinent literature and previous and current research and theory, which contains the following: an introduction, background, a historical summary of events, legal mandates for change, problems and related research, and theory related to school administrators, school violence, and additional theoretical framework.

In Chapter III the researcher describes the design and methods of the study by discussing purpose, design, population, methods, instrumentation, and a conclusion. Chapter IV presents the collected data and the analysis of the data, collected by interviews and a demographics survey, as well as the coding of all that is collected from these qualitative instrumentations. Chapter V includes a summary of findings, discussion, conclusions, and recommendations for policy, practice, and future research.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

The question of why mankind is violent to one another has been pondered for generations (Hemphill, 2008). School violence is one phenomenon that may never cease. Therefore, similar events need to be situated collectively to be able to form a proper picture of what could happen at any time. It is important to note a quote from George Santayana that "those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it" (Santayana, 1905, p. 13). Byrne (as cited in Burns & Crawford, 2003, pp. 126-127) commented, “A child’s chances of being struck by lightning are greater than the million-to-one odds of being killed in school. The number of children killed by gun violence in schools is about half the number of Americans killed annually by lightning,” while Cullen (2009, p. 15) referenced the Center for Disease Control (CDC), which estimated that the likelihood of a child dying in school is about one in a million.

There have been some studies that focused on parents’ perceptions of school violence (Bliss, Emshoff, Buck, & Cook, 2006; Hawkins, McIntosh, Silver, & Holman, 2004), as well as studies that focused on the views of students (Hawkins et al., 2004; Hong & Eamon, 2012). Researchers have stated that more research needs to be conducted from the viewpoint of school personnel as an important first step in working to decrease violence on school campuses (Collier, 2006; Finley, 2004; Kelling, 2006; Peterson, 2007; Siaosi, 2007; Smith-Greer, 2001).

However, the school principal is the overall decision maker of an educational learning environment; hence this leader’s presence and authority may change the ability to
implement current research and policies, from a universal perspective, necessary to advance the protection of who is essentially at risk. While a growing number of state legislatures are attempting to pass laws to support the arming of school employees, there appears to be an absence of empirical evidence regarding the issue from the perspective of those who are directly involved in implementing such a policy (Wolfe & Kaminski, 2015).

Anecdotal accounts of individual educators, administrators, and law enforcement personnel no doubt surface during media coverage and political discussions of the issue, but these fail to provide information about the broader sentiments of key school and law enforcement stakeholders regarding arming school employees (Wolfe & Kaminski, 2015). The only research effort related to this issue was a national survey of schoolteachers conducted by the School Improvement Network (2013). The results of this survey indicated that teachers, in general, believe an armed security guard would effectively enhance school safety, suggesting that teachers would be in favor of increasing security or SRO presence in schools. At the same time, the survey also found that teachers do not want to be the ones charged with the responsibility of carrying a weapon at school (School Improvement Network, 2013).

However, there appears to have been little effort to empirically consider the perspectives of those directly impacted by school safety policy decisions. In particular, a gap remains regarding the perceptions of school principals concerning school safety policies and how the attitudes of these key actors compare (Wolfe & Kaminski, 2015). In one of the only surveys of principals regarding this topic, May et al. (2004) analyzed data from 128 Kentucky principals and found that they overwhelmingly supported SRO programs and believed that as a result of effectively fulfilling their expected roles, SROs are able to increase school safety.
Crime and violence certainly do not discriminate; and based on who has become a primary category target of victimization in recent years, violence in schools happens to be prevalent enough to gain major attention. For example, when violence strikes a school, such as in the massacre on December 14, 2012, in a Newtown, Connecticut, elementary school, many of us were affected by our ability to share in the horror, stay informed to the specifics, and to feel torn apart by the implications for our way of life. In trying to understand the question, whether it is possible to reduce violence in our schools, we must first assume the strong connection between violence and the changes made in our society (Blanchfield & Ladd, 2013).

In contemporary society, individuals employed to manage others in one specific workplace, such as principals of schools at the kindergarten to 12th grade levels, are not only designated the decision-makers for their individual academic settings, they must set the overall tone of behavior within the building, while also fostering relationships with the community and other constituents, including people who are in charge of security and safety. However, community providers sometimes lack familiarity with specific processes in teaching and learning and with systemic aspects of schooling (Cowan, Vaillancourt, Rossen, & Pollitt, 2013).

The modern incident that altered the realm of education and school safety for most people, especially principals of schools, as well as how police respond to school shootings, was the catastrophic event which occurred on April 20, 1999, in Littleton, Colorado, at Columbine High School. Two students, 18-year-old Eric Harris and 17-year-old Dylan Klebold, shot and killed 12 students and one teacher before committing suicide (Cullen, 2009). At Columbine High School, police officers responded, assisted the students and staff that were evacuating, secured the scene and remained outside preparing to negotiate, as per
their training (Cullen, 2009). Since the Columbine High School shooting, the education and law enforcement community have come together to address the response to mass shooters by introducing Active Shooter, which redefined law enforcement response to a mass killing (Buerger & Buerger, 2010).

In no other environment are perceptions of the role of law enforcement officers and their authority as convoluted and contested as in the academic setting. Schools on all levels face this phenomenon of the possibility of violence in the academic setting. Campus police officers are viewed as either a necessary evil or as a means of promoting positive relationships with campus constituents and coping proactively with the advancing specter of campus crime (Grant, 1993). However, Rocque (2012) states that researchers have only been focusing on school shootings as an area of study for the last 15 years, and there were relatively few theories that dealt with rampage shootings prior to the 1990s.

When exploring possible remedies to gun violence in schools, there is no shortage of opinions or suggested methods for promoting school safety. The debates are often “emotionally and politically charged” (Steinhauer, 2013, A1). A state lawmaker in Georgia proposed a bill that would allow, with school district permission, the carrying of concealed weapons by school principals (Ferner, 2013).

Although the shooting at Columbine was not the first time a United States school had been the scene of a deadly attack by either a student or an adult, it did have a lasting effect on the educational and law enforcement community. The attack effectively showed principals, to name one major player involved in this type of incident, that they were not sufficiently ready. In fact, history reveals that superintendents and principals in the early to mid-1900s purposely emulated managerial behavior prevalent in private corporations in an effort to brand themselves as managers (Kowalski, 2006).
It also began a resurgence of reasoning for principals, as leaders of individual educational institutions, to perform advanced examinations on security protocol and threats as it pertains to security inside the school and threats from outside of the school. Until the Virginia Tech massacre (April 16, 2007), where 33 people were killed and another 30 were injured (Shapira & Jackman, 2007), the Columbine High School incident was the most deadly shooting to take place in a school setting in the United States, with 15 fatalities (Egan, 1999).

Furthermore, as history may repeat itself pertaining to violent crime, families of victims, as well as politicians, have also led movements pertaining to the prevention and denunciation of school violence. Moms Demand Action, a citizen group created after the Newtown, Connecticut, shooting, as well as Mayors Against Illegal Guns, completed a joint analysis of school shootings that occurred after Newtown from December 15, 2012, to February 10, 2014. They found that during the 14-month period analyzed there had been 44 school shootings throughout the United States (Pilkington, 2014). Nonetheless, the fact that 20 of the 26 people killed were six and seven-year-old schoolchildren seemed to generate emotions in U.S. citizens not seen, perhaps, since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 (Weiler & Armenta, 2014).

Ironically, the much publicized school shooting at Columbine High School was not the first violent school incident in our nation’s history. On May 18, 1927, a school bombing at Bath Township, Michigan, resulted in the death of 38 school children and six adults (Dotinga, 2012). The perpetrator of the school bombing was 55-year-old Bath Township school board treasurer, Andrew Kehoe, who killed his wife, bombed his home, and bombed the Bath school before committing suicide by blowing himself up in his truck (Bernstein, 2009), resulting in becoming the deadliest mass murder at a school
Consequently, school violence is not a category of crime that is improving statistically in modern times. The National Center for Education Statistics has estimated that as of the 2009-2010 school year approximately one-third of all schools had armed personnel (Wilson, 2013). Roxie Alcaraz, Tia Kim, and Erin Wolbeck (2010) of the Southern California Academic Center of Excellence on Youth Violence Prevention found that schools with a zero tolerance policy are shown to be less safe than schools that allow the principals the necessary discretion to handle each incident on a case-by-case basis.

In the decade from 1996 to 2006, there were at least 80 incidents where guns were either brought to schools to take hostages or kill students and/or teachers and principals in the United States (School Violence Resource Center, 2007). In the three years prior to the Columbine tragedy, there were at least 16 school violence incidences, most of which ended with deadly consequences (School Violence Resource Center, 2007). However, this incident highlighted a sense of vulnerability within schools and campuses around the country, especially how school leaders would approach securing their schools from any type of threat. The National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) urged the White House, among other things, to reinstate the assault weapons ban while calling for strengthened background checks for the purchase of firearms (Karhuse, 2013, p. 3).

This research study explored the dilemma that principals encounter when determining the best approach to provide a safe environment for their students and faculty, while at the same time creating an environment that is advantageous to educating students. A review of the current literature was examined to identify the information available to school administrators, principals, and law enforcement to allow all personnel
that may be involved in the realm of school safety to possess accurate and adequate information necessary for sound decision making to occur when attempting to create a safe school environment.

**Literature Search Methods**

A review of the literature regarding school shootings and the perceptions principals’ possess regarding armed personnel within educational settings are included in this study to promote the research and knowledge of school shootings and violence. While conducting the search for information on school shootings, the Seton Hall Library and the world wide web were accessed for online databases to include, but not be limited to, EBSCO, ProQuest, Lexis Nexis, and Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), with the following keywords: school shootings, school principal, school violence, school environment, school resource officers, active shooter, principals’ perceptions, and gun laws. Further information was retrieved through the review of past, present, and pending federal and state laws applicable to this study, as well as news media reports, peer-reviewed articles, books, and updated research on school shootings; principals’ perceptions of armed personnel in the education setting were utilized during this replication of a research study conducted in 2014 as well.

**Criteria for Inclusion in the Search**

The information reviewed for this study was limited to the following literature:

- Federal and state legislation and additional policies that are in place, as well as legislation that may affect armed personnel in schools across the United States
- News media sources used solely for the purpose of presenting the information of incidents, and/or school shootings
Peer-reviewed articles to display academic information regarding school shootings, school administrators’ response to violence, and perceptions of the principals themselves of the presence of armed personnel in schools

- Books written focusing on school shootings, active shooters, and school leadership during crisis management

- Current research that is significant to the subject of school shootings and armed personnel in schools

- Policy papers and government reports related to education, schools, school shootings, school security, law enforcement officers, school resource officers, and school personnel, including school principals

**Relevant Literature**

**Federal Laws and Mandates**

Federal and state laws define student rights and universally unacceptable behavior; statutes pertaining to the treatment of students with disabilities and to bringing weapons to school are examples. State policy (promulgated by state boards of education) and district policy (promulgated by local school boards) reaffirm laws and provide other guidelines for pupil conduct. Community values and beliefs are instrumental in determining how discipline is actually managed by school employees (Kowalski, 2010).

School principals and administrators are guided by federal, state, and local laws when faced with an incident such as a school shooting, as well as employing armed personnel in an educational setting. High profile incidents often promulgate how procedures in such environments as schools will be instituted or be amended by principals in charge of a school. These high profile incidents, fueled by media attention, brought about a national debate on firearms restriction (Mohandie & Hoffman, 2014).
Other laws are in place relevant to this subject and the many variables which encompass schools shootings and armed personnel in schools. U.S. Senator Barbara Boxer introduced separate bills to expand protection to schools via the use of surveillance equipment, secured entrances, and the authority by state governors to use National Guard troops to support local law enforcement in issues related to safety in schools (Karhuse 2013, p. 6). While some states now allow armed educators in schools, does this practice run afoul of federal law?

The idea of keeping firearms out of schools is not a new one. The Gun-Free School Zones Act of 1990 (GFSZA; 18 U.S.C. § 922), part of the Crime Control Act of 1990 (18 U.S.C. 921), made it illegal for a person to knowingly possess a firearm “in a place that the individual knows, or has reasonable cause to believe, is a school zone.” Exceptions are made, however, for individuals who are “licensed to do so by the state in which the school zone is located . . . by an individual for use in a program approved by a school in the school zone . . . by a law enforcement officer acting in his or her official capacity, or by an individual in accordance with a contract entered into between a school in the school zone and the individual or an employer of the individual” (Weiler & Armenta, 2014).

A modified version of the act, the Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994 (GFSA; 20 U.S.C. §7151), requires that each state or outlying area receiving federal funds under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act have a law that requires all local education agencies (LEAs) in these states and outlying areas to expel from school for at least one year any student found bringing a firearm to school or possessing a firearm at school (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools 2006). In 1994 the United States Congress found that violent crime in schools and on school grounds has had
an effect on the quality of education, causing a decline in the educational system (Cornell University Law, 2012). The GFSA seems clearly directed toward student possession of firearms and addresses penalties to be imposed and reporting requirements for states. The GFSZA, however, seems to provide loopholes for allowing guns on campus for certain, authorized individuals (Weiler & Armenta, 2014).

The GFSA states, “. . . school systems find it almost impossible to handle gun-related crime by themselves.” The GFSA required all schools that receive federal funds to have a state law by October 20, 1995, that prohibits any person to be in or on school property with a weapon without having proper legal authorization and requires the law to provide for the suspension for a minimum of a year of any student or students carrying a weapon in a school or on school property; and the student must be referred to law enforcement” (Cornell University Law, 2012; Newman et al., 2004). In 2002 the GFSA was amended under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) to define the term weapon to mean a firearm. The updated GFSA also allowed the zero tolerance provision of the 1994 law to permit the school principals and administrators to modify an expulsion for a student, in writing, on a case-by-case basis (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).

The GFSA does provide for individuals that are qualified under the state law and contracted by the schools to carry firearms; i.e., security personnel, to possess and carry a firearm in schools or on school property under the state statute. This provision of the law also allows for law enforcement officers to be in possession of a firearm when the law enforcement officer is acting in his or her official capacity (Cornell University Law, 2012). However, other state laws have been created to also allow for the use of armed educators within schools in certain states, in contrast to only security or law enforcement personnel being allowed to carry the firearms (Weiler & Armenta, 2014).
At the same time, however, there are a number of legislators, policymakers, and activist groups involved in the nationwide debate about the best strategy for maintaining safe school environments. Among the alternative proposed security measures is the idea of arming schoolteachers and/or administrators. For example, approximately a week after the Sandy Hook tragedy, the NRA proposed the National School Shield Program which includes training guidelines and considerations for placing armed personnel in every school (Hutchinson, 2013). Additionally, eight states across the country (Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Kansas, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Texas) have passed laws to arm school administrators and/or teachers, and a number of other states have proposed similar legislation (Arizona, Colorado, Maine, Missouri, South Carolina, Virginia, Tennessee, Utah) (Flock, 2013; Koppel, 2014; Roberts, 2013).

In a press release by the Office of the Press Secretary of the White House titled “Fact Sheet: New Executive Actions to Reduce Gun Violence and Make Our Communities Safer” (January, 2016), it states that “The president and vice president are committed to using every tool at the administration’s disposal to reduce gun violence. Some of the gaps in our country’s gun laws can only be fixed through legislation, which is why the president continues to call on Congress to pass the kind of common sense gun safety reforms supported by a majority of the American people” (Office of the Press Secretary of the White House, 2016). The primary areas the president and his cabinet are focusing on to combat shootings are multi-dimensional and can be derived from variables that may contribute to school shootings in and of themselves. The current administration has issued the following actions:

1. Keep guns out of the wrong hands through background checks. In 2015, NICS received more than 22.2 million background check requests, an average
of more than 63,000 per day. By law, a gun dealer can complete a sale to a customer if the background check comes back clean or has taken more than three days to complete. However, features of the current system, which was instituted in the 1990s, are outdated (Office of the Press Secretary of the White House, 2016).

2. Make our communities safer from gun violence. The President’s budget for FY2017 will include funding for 200 new ATF agents and investigators who can help enforce our gun laws, including the measures announced today. Strategic and impactful enforcement will help take violent criminals off the street, deter other unlawful activity, and prevent guns from getting into the wrong hands (Office of the Press Secretary of the White House, 2016).

3. Increase mental health treatment/reporting to the background check system. Despite our recent significant gains, less than half of children and adults with diagnosable mental health problems receive the treatment they need. To address this, the administration is proposing a new $500 million investment to help engage individuals with serious mental illness in care, improve access to care by increasing service capacity and the behavioral health workforce, and ensure that behavioral health care systems work for everyone. This effort would increase access to mental health services to protect the health of children and communities, prevent suicide, and promote mental health as a top priority (Office of the Press Secretary of the White House, 2016).

4. Shape the future of gun safety technology. The Presidential Memorandum directs the departments to conduct or sponsor research into gun safety technology that would reduce the frequency of accidental discharge or
unauthorized use of firearms and improve the tracing of lost or stolen guns. Within 90 days, these agencies must prepare a report outlining a research-and-development strategy designed to expedite the real-world deployment of such technology for use in practice. The Presidential Memorandum also directs the departments to review the availability of smart gun technology on a regular basis and to explore potential ways to further its use and development to more broadly improve gun safety. In connection with these efforts, the departments will consult with other agencies that acquire firearms and take appropriate steps to consider whether including such technology in specifications for acquisition of firearms would be consistent with operational needs (Office of the Press Secretary of the White House, 2016).

After a mass shooting in Tasmania in 1996, Australia instituted major federal changes to its gun laws, including banning certain semi-automatic, self-loading rifles and shotguns; requiring nationwide registration for gun ownership; and requiring a 28-day waiting period. Permits for gun ownership were allowed only for a “genuine reason,” such as hunting, but specifically not for “personal protection.” The law included a one-year amnesty for prohibited weapons and a buyback program in which the government purchased 640,000 prohibited firearms. After the amnesty, prohibited guns were deemed illegal. So in that sense, the Australian government did take away some guns; but while Obama and Clinton have referenced Australia’s example, neither has proposed such a sweeping plan (Farley, 2016)

Everytown For Gun Safety conducted a comprehensive analysis of every mass shooting between January 2009 and July 2015 that was identifiable through FBI data and media reports. This report describes the 133 mass shootings, almost two per month that
occurred in 39 states in the nearly seven-year period. Each description includes the location of the shooting, number of people killed and/or injured, and information on the shooter, gun(s), ammunition, and gun purchase, where available (Every Town for Gun Safety, 2015).

The FBI defines “mass shooting” as any incident where at least four people were murdered with a gun. Of 133 examined incidents, in only one was there evidence the shooter was prohibited by federal law from possessing guns due to severe mental illness. In 15 other incidents (11%), there was evidence that concerns about the mental health of the shooter had been brought to the attention of a medical practitioner, school official, or legal authority prior to the shooting (Every Town for Gun Safety, 2015). Five of the 133 shootings (4%) occurred at the shooter’s current or former workplace. Five of the 133 shooting incidents (4%) took place in schools, including primary, secondary, and college campuses (Every Town for Gun Safety, 2015).

State Laws and Future Mandates

In New Jersey, a specific state law has been authorized regarding a person possessing a firearm in or on school property. This law is titled “Unlawful Possession of Weapons” and is affiliated with a mandated code, 2C: 39-5. It requires a person to have written authorization from a governing officer to possess firearms, or other weapons, in educational institutions.

Specifically, this code, in its subsection, states, “Any person who knowingly has in his possession any firearm in or upon any part of the buildings or grounds of any school, college, university or other educational institution, without the written authorization of the governing officer of the institution, is guilty of a crime of the third degree, irrespective of whether he possesses a valid permit to carry the firearm or a valid firearms purchaser
identification card” (Gann, 2014, p. 195). Furthermore, this law even applies to active or retired police officers.

In New Jersey the law restricting firearms in school settings makes it a crime of the third degree; and it specifically states that the sentence “... shall be fixed by the court and shall be between three years and five years” (Gann, 2014, p. 223). New Jersey law gives the school principal or the school district superintendent the legal right to decide, through written authorization, who is authorized to carry a firearm on school property. This authorization, although specified in the state law, does not supersede the federal provision that the person carrying the firearm must be qualified under the state law (Cornell University Law, 2012); in New Jersey the law requires that any person carrying a firearm must have applied to the New Jersey Superior Court with a petition for judicial approval (Gann, 2014). In contrast, Arizona’s attorney general suggested having the principal or other school employee armed (Duke, 2012).

In New Jersey, under the Memorandum of Agreement between Education and Law Enforcement Officials (2011), the Attorney General’s Office specifies the police response: “Except when responding to an emergency, no on-duty police officer will enter any school building without first complying with the procedures established by the school for the reporting of visitors” (p. 111). Federal and New Jersey laws do have exceptions for law enforcement to carry weapons in schools, but both laws address the issue allowing the presence of firearms on school property when the law enforcement officers are on official duty in their law enforcement role (Cornell University Law, 2012; Gann, 2014). However, any New Jersey law enforcement officer, under N.J.S.A 2C: 39-6 Exemptions, is allowed on duty and off duty to carry firearms legally throughout the state, except inside a casino (L. E. Holtz, personal communication, March 19, 2014).
As referred to earlier, the GFSA had a zero policy provision which was amended in 2002 under NCLB, to allow school principals and school administrators to modify the removal of a student on a case-by-case basis (Cornell University Law, 2012). N.J.A.C. 6A:16 creates policies and procedures to comply with the federal law, GFSA, regarding the removal of students for firearm offenses and the reporting of such offenses to law enforcement (N.J.A.C. 6A:16, n.d.). Through the GFSA the federal law requires that in each state in which school districts receive federal funding, the state must pass a law prohibiting firearms on school property, but school administrators can allow personnel that are contracted to carry firearms (USDOE, n.d.); in New Jersey the contracted personnel must have written authorization to carry firearms; therefore, the decision of having armed school personnel—barring politics, local policy, or board of education—is the school principal’s or superintendent’s decision (Cornell University Law, 2012; Gann, 2014).

A bill before the state Legislature would create a new category of police officer, stationing armed, retired police officers under the age of 65 inside New Jersey schools. The bill (S2983) establishes "Class Three" special police officers designated to provide security at both public and private schools. They would not replace school resource officers, who are specially trained full-time police officers stationed at some schools (Sullivan, 2016).

The bill, drafted in the wake of the 2012 attack at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, was approved by the state Senate Law and Public Safety Committee. It is unclear if it will get a full vote before the end of the legislative session. Class Three officers would work during regular school hours and their jurisdiction would be limited to school grounds. They also would not be eligible for the same benefits as
regular police officers (Sullivan, 2016).

"You're not paying the pension benefits and all the other benefits that are necessary to put a police officer full-time," said Senator Anthony Bucco, one of the bill's sponsors. The designation would be open to retired officers under the age of 65 who left a police department in good standing. They would be required to meet the same firearm qualifications as active-duty police officers. Schools across the state have had retired police officers patrolling their halls for several years, often under shared service agreements with local departments. Some schools have also hired private security guards to serve a similar function (Sullivan, 2016).

School Superintendent Joseph Bollendorf of Washington Township, New Jersey, in Gloucester County, explains, "God forbid this school or any school that has police presence becomes victim of some of these tragedies we've seen over the years. We are gonna have a quick and immediate response" (Muchanic, 2016). The school district and the town are splitting the cost of two new special officers who are armed, paid hourly, and receive no benefits. They join Patrolman Tom DiTullio, a regular police officer who's assigned to Washington Township High School. Patrolman DiTullio tells us, "Whether it's an angry parent or somebody who's here for the most horrible intentions, I'm literally seconds and steps away" (Muchanic, 2016).

Using retired police officers in schools became more common after the Sandy Hook Elementary School shootings in 2012. Washington Township Mayor Barbara Wallace says, "These officers went to this school. They grew up here. This is meaningful. These kids relate." Bayley Hart is a student, and says, "It's definitely scary hearing about these things that happen at different schools all around the country. I mean it could happen anywhere, so just being able to know we have police here and security around at
all times, it just helps everyone feel secure" (Muchanic, 2016).

Fulginiti says, "In the back of your mind it's always the security problem. You just want to make sure everything is safe in here. I check all the doors, walk around inside and outside the perimeters." Washington Township Police Captain Dennis Sims says, "It makes sense because there's a large pool of qualified retired police officers out there who still live and spend a lot of time in the community." What will happen to the proposal to create Class Three school officers is unclear, but what is clear is that having experienced cops who know the town and the people here makes everyone feel a bit more secure (Muchanic, 2016).

When evaluating federal and state laws, school principals and school administrators must be conscious of the constitutional human rights that protect students. Students’ rights are protected under the federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and the Health Insurance Portability Accountability Act (HIPAA). FERPA prohibits the release of students’ academic and disciplinary records, while HIPAA prohibits the release of students’ medical information. These student records are limited to only persons that have a legitimate right to know. FERPA and HIPAA do have provisions within the laws that allow for the disclosure of information in an emergency situation or when public safety is an issue (Mohandie & Hoffman, 2014; U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, n.d.).

Several provisions to New Jersey law regarding the disclosure of juvenile information are applicable to how a principal may handle certain elements of an incident within the scope of his or her duties. Holtz (2014) displays that in provision (1) For juveniles that are taken into custody by law enforcement for an investigative purpose, the school principal may be informed of the identity of the juvenile when school order or
discipline is required; however, no written document of the juvenile in custody is permitted (2A: 4A-60e); (4) When a juvenile is charged with a delinquent act, or adjudicated of a delinquent act, law enforcement officers are required, upon request, to provide records of the incident and charges to the parents, guardian, or attorney of the juvenile, as well as the school principal of the school the juvenile attends or where the juvenile is the victim. Furthermore, in regard to a school principal, this provision of the law could be pre-arranged in the memorandum agreement between law enforcement and education (2A: 4A-60c); (5) When a juvenile is charged with a delinquent act, or adjudicated of a delinquent act, law enforcement are required to send a written notice of the juvenile’s identity, incident, and charges to the principal of the school the juvenile attends if the offense was committed on school property, involves a school employee, the arrest was based on information from the school, or if the crime was a first, second, or third degree, involving a death, attempted death, conspiracy, weapons charge, illegal drugs, or bias crime (2A: 4A-60d).

**Constitutional Law- Fourth Amendment**

Conflicts may often exist in modern times for school principals with the need to keep students and faculty safe, coupled with protecting students’ constitutional rights. The Fourth Amendment protects society from unreasonable searches and seizure of property without probable cause, and students are certainly not exempt. Boundaries separating the dynamics of education and enforcing the law can be distorted.

Critical incidents, such as school violence, may cause the most challenges. Trauma can disrupt the climate of a school to the extent that people make such comments as, "The school will never be the same after the tragic accident," or "This school was a safe place before bullying wrecked it." These are statements based on traumatic sets of
circumstances influencing the climate of a school (Blanchfield, 2013)

_The New Jersey School Search Policy Manual_ (1998, p. 13) defines a search as “conduct by a government official that involves an intrusion into a student’s protected privacy interest.” It then defines a seizure as “when a government official interferes with an individual’s freedom of movement (the seizure of a person), or when a government official interferes with an individual’s possessory interests in property (the seizure of an object).”

In _New Jersey v. T.L.O._ (1985), the landmark decision on school searches, the Supreme Court ruled that school officials act in loco parentis and, as such, are only required to have reasonable suspicion, a standard that is less than probable cause but higher than arbitrarily, to conduct a search and to seize any contraband recovered (Holtz, 2014). Furthermore, in order for a search to be reasonable under _New Jersey v. T.L.O._ (1985), “the intended search must be justified at its inception,” and “the actual search must be reasonable in its scope, duration, and intensity” (State of New Jersey, 1998, p. 45). _The School Search Policy Manual_ has identified this practice as the “silver platter doctrine” (p. 9); where police officers use school officials, who are permitted under _New Jersey v. T. L.O._ (1985) to search a student with reasonable suspicion, to bypass the Fourth Amendment requirement of police officers who are required to have probable cause in order to conduct a search.

If necessary, a school official can conduct a search of the student (_New Jersey v. T. L. O.,_ 1985), while a police officer would be limited to conducting a “pat down” of the outer clothing. However, “under no circumstances may a school official or police officer rearrange a student’s clothing or order a student to rearrange his or her clothing so as to reveal or expose a view of the student’s undergarments. This constitutes a “strip search”
and is flatly prohibited by [New Jersey] statute” (State of New Jersey, 1998, p. 147).

Contrariwise, in the State of Florida v. N.G.B. (2002), the court warned against law enforcement using school faculty as an agent for law enforcement to conduct the search of a student in violation of the Fourth Amendment requirement of having probable cause (Mohandie & Hoffman, 2014). These factors may create an image of negativity for educators and students. Schools used to be considered safe havens (Hemphill, 2008) where children could go to learn and teachers could go to work without fear. Curt Lavarello, the executive director of the School Safety Advocacy Council (as cited in Tonn, 2005, p. 19) advised, “In a case where someone could be armed, the only person that you should send in is an armed person.” Gone are the days of the custodial guard-type situations, which used to permeate the role of campus law enforcement (Wilson & Wilson, 2011).

Civil Liability

Civil liability is one of the major issues with which school principals, or any leader tasked with managing people in the workplace, are confronted in an educational setting. The risk of civil liability increases as the potential of school violence heightens. Rules and procedures, set in place by principals, may allow for a more steadfast approach to how liability is handled. Principals establish rules to facilitate the implementation of laws and district policy. Exercising authority in this area should be coordinated with the superintendent (or designee) to ensure that school rules neither violate district policy nor conflict with laws or rules established at a higher level (e.g., by state departments of education). Rules developed by a principal should be congruent with the school’s stated philosophy, mission, and vision. When setting rules, principals should consider the extent to which the discretion of school employees will be restricted.
Some laws and policies identify the principal specifically as the person responsible for managing certain aspects of student discipline. Thus, the school’s disciplinary plan should clearly identify the responsibilities assumed exclusively by administrators (Campbell, 1999). A secure school is a safe school, and a safe school is a quality learning environment. By understanding and practicing the laws and policies associated with school law, the school officials will protect themselves from any litigation associated with the violation of student, parent, or faculty constitutional rights (State of New Jersey, 1998).

In the case of *LaVine v. Blaine School District* (2001), the courts on behalf of the Blaine School District, ruled, “Taken together and given the backdrop of actual school shootings, we hold that these circumstances were sufficient to have led school authorities reasonably to forecast substantial disruption of, or material interference with school activation, specifically that James was intending to inflict injury upon himself or others” (Mohandie & Hoffman, 2014, p. 72). In an environment of school violence, with the potential of school shootings, school principals and school administrators are still concerned with being sued for violations of students’ constitutional rights (42 U.S. Code 1983) federal civil rights law (Holtz, 2014). Some school officials have decided that it is better to do nothing than to make a decision, even in circumstances that require immediate action or law enforcement intervention, even in situations that the courts have decided are permissible under law (State of New Jersey, 1998).

In *Ryburn v. Huff* (2012), police officers responded to a high school on a report of threats by a student (Huff) who was believed to have written a letter threatening to shoot up the school. The principal of the school reported to the officers that he was concerned
for the safety of the students and requested an investigation be conducted. As a result of the principal’s request, the officers conducted a preliminary investigation that revealed that the student (Huff) had been absent for two days; and through interviews of other students, they believed Huff to be capable of carrying out the threats of shooting up the school (Holtz, 2014).

The officers responded to Huff’s home, where at first there was no answer, but were able to reach his mother by phone inside the house who admitted that her son was inside with her. When she finally opened the door, she spoke to the officers outside her house and admitted knowing about the rumors of her son having made a threat to shoot up the school. When the officers inquired about weapons inside the house, Mrs. Huff ran inside the house with the officers in chase. Once the officers were inside the house and had interviewed the student (Huff), they were satisfied that the rumors were false and informed the school of their findings (Holtz, 2014).

As a result of the officers entering the house without a search warrant or consent, Mr. and Mrs. Huff filed a federal lawsuit (42 US Code 1983) civil action for deprivation of rights. The United States Supreme Court ruled as follows: “The officers were ‘entitled to qualified immunity because Mrs. Huff’s odd behavior, combined with the information the officers gathered at the school, could have led reasonable officers to believe that there could be weapons inside the house and that family members or the officers themselves were in danger” (Holtz, 2014, p. 178).

**New Jersey Model School Security Policies**

In 2007, Ann Milgram, the Attorney General of the State of New Jersey, issued a directive to all county prosecutors pertaining to the Model School Security Policies, in conjunction with the organization Securing Our Schools for a Better Tomorrow (SSBT).
The Model School Security Policies from the state of New Jersey, coupled with the First Responder's Guide for School Preparedness from the SSBT, set forth protocols for school safety and security regarding such vital areas as school lockdown, active-shooter response, bomb threats, evacuations, and public information. Furthermore, the directive instructs all law enforcement agencies in the state of New Jersey to have and maintain policies enhancing school security and safety (Attorney General Law Enforcement Directive 2007-1). Through these policies, schools are then authorized to carry out protocols set forth by the state, often in conjunction with law enforcement, or under the supervision of the lead administrator of the institution, the principal.

Essentially, the policies are carried out through a process whereby tabletop exercises are then transformed into real-life scenarios; the prototypical “drill” is then put into action. The drills, which vary and are categorized based on incident, are deemed the closest resemblance to a live version of how A.G. Directive 2007-1 is devised and compartmentalized. Recently, a new challenge for principals was initiated, and it distorts the very goal and significance of the school safety and security policies, including but not limited to Sheltering-in-Place, Active Shooter, Evacuation, Lockdown, and Bomb Threat.

A proposed bill would give parents the option to excuse their child from a safety drill, with the exception of fire drills. The bill also would require schools to notify parents about upcoming safety drills three school days in advance. The proposed bill was introduced by Republican House delegate Patrick Lane. It passed the Senate 85-5. "I think that providing that opportunity to opt out gives parents a little bit of insurance if they're worried about the effects it may have on their particular child," Lane said. Lane said he hopes notifying parents ahead of time, along with giving them the option to opt out of drills, would make it easier for law enforcement to practice school safety drills
with students instead of during the summer. "Of course, that's not the same scenario as when the building is full of children," Lane said. "Hopefully we never have to put this into practice, but unfortunately we live in a time when we have to train for these kinds of things" (Pasinik, 2016).

**Active shooter.** An active shooter is defined as a suspect whose activity is immediately causing death and serious injury. The activity is not contained and there is an immediate risk of death or serious injury to potential victims (Borelli, 2005). The United States Department of Homeland Security (n.d.) defines an active shooter as “an individual actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill people in a confined and populated area, typically through the use of firearms. Klein (2005) asserted that popular discourse addressed school shootings obsessively but continued to omit the role gender plays in these crimes.

New research has suggested that this omission was ignoring a key element: a significant number of boys’ own stated reasons for this violence clearly pointed to premeditated violence specifically involving girls (Klein, 2005). Frazzano and Snyder (2014) argue that the current label of active shooter does not conform to the information learned about active shooters. Schweit reports in her article for the *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin* (2013) that the average active shooter incident lasts 12 minutes, and 57% of the time the police officer arriving at the scene will be in a position to confront the perpetrator; one-third of those officers will be shot. Blair et al. (2014) found that of the active shooter incidents they studied between the years of 2000 and 2012, the median police response was three minutes.

Active shooters typically work within a plan they have developed. These plans are normally tactically laid out and well developed. These plans typically will include
randomly shooting victims, as many as they can, before committing suicide. Not many of these actors are motivated by "getting out alive" or eventually having their day in court; suicide is usually a part of the plan (Scanlon, 2001). There are basically three ways these situations end (a) suicide, (b) surrender, or (c) termination (Borelli, 2005).

The term active shooter has evolved from previous different terms that have been associated with a mass murder incident where one or more perpetrators indiscriminately begin the act of violence against individuals in their presence (USDHS, n.d.). Active-shooter incidents have also been identified as “rampage shootings” (Newman et al., 2004), while in the past it was more commonly known as “going postal” (Carmona & Butler, 2014). Due to the different environments associated with an active shooter, Frazzano and Snyder (2014) suggest that the term is no longer useful, and have suggested the term hybrid targeted violence (HTV), which would take into account an individual or individuals causing an act of violence upon a specifically identified group with a combination of lethal weapons.

The term active shooter gained national acceptance after the Columbine High School shooting on April 20, 1999, (Buerger & Buerger, 2010) when Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris shot and killed 12 classmates and one teacher before committing suicide (Cullen, 2009). The shooting in Columbine High School was over in 16 minutes, more than double the average amount of time these types of situations last, which by some estimates is between 5 to 7 minutes (Wood, 2001). As the incident unfolded, police officers responded to the scene, took the basic approach, what Paterson Police Chief William Fraher calls to isolate, evacuate, and negotiate (personal communication, January 7, 2014) or what Frazzano and Snyder (2014) refer to as “stage until safe” (p. 5), which resulted in law enforcement standing by for 45 minutes while Klebold and Harris
continued their rampage shooting, which concluded with their suicide as law enforcement stood by for an additional two hours and 45 minutes before they were able to remove the last survivor from the school.

This approach, although consistent with the policy and police procedures of the day, resulted in the death of students and faculty because of the delay in getting the injured medical attention (Cullen, 2009). The Columbine High School tragedy took the breath away from the American public, not because they had not seen school violence before. They certainly had; in the three years prior to the Columbine tragedy, there were at least 16 school violence incidences, most of which ended with deadly consequences (School Violence Resource Center, 2007). Certain areas are more subject to crime because they have suitable targets, and offenders subjectively perceive these areas as feasible locations for criminal acts (Knautt & Roncek, 2007). Columbine became a wake-up call for police who need to be prepared for this type of incident (Columbine, 1999).

**Lockdown.** School officials must immediately notify law enforcement and report the reason for the lockdown. Law enforcement has a responsibility to take the necessary actions to address and remove the threat and investigate the situation, taking the necessary action and informing the school officials of their findings (Attorney General, 2007). After the Columbine tragedy, many schools introduced policies or increased existing security measures with the intention of reducing the occurrence of overall violence (Jackson, 2002). For example, many schools began locking doors and restricting access during school hours, conducting video surveillance, and/or installing metal detectors (Jennings, Khey, Maskaly, & Donner, 2011; Myrstol, 2011). The moment that school officials learn that there is a “criminal element” in the school or on school property, school officials are to immediately order a lockdown of the school
After being shot in the leg by Adam Lanza, in Newtown, Connecticut, during the massacre which occurred at Sandy Hook Elementary School, a faculty member [unidentified in the report] managed to get to the intercom and alert the faculty of an active shooter, resulting in a school lockdown. School lockdowns have been observed in several incidents such as in Jacksonboro, Tennessee, when Assistant Principal Gary Seale, although shot by a 15-year-old student, was able to get to the school intercom and order a school lockdown, saving the lives of countless students and faculty (Tonn, 2005). John Hamil, in the Tulsa, Oklahoma, school district (as cited in Totter, 2005) indicated that lockdowns are also used for instances when a criminal element may be in the area of the school and possibly pose a danger to the students as in a pawnshop robbery that had occurred near one of their schools, requiring a school lockdown.

**Bomb threats.** A common weapon used by rampage school shooters are Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs), as was used in Oklahoma City (Mohandie & Meloy, 2014), Columbine (Cullen, 2009), and Bath, Michigan (Bernstein, 2012). According to the Attorney General’s Directive 2007-1, all New Jersey school principals must be prepared to encounter incidents, including but not limited to bomb threats. To display the magnitude of this type of protocol, many states are in alignment with directives such as 2007-1.

On September 16, 2015, Ahmed Mohamed, 14, who was arrested after his teachers in Irving, Texas, mistook his digital invention for a bomb (Golgowski, 2015). Mohamed stated, "I built a clock to impress my teacher; but when I showed it to her, she thought it was a threat to her so it was really sad that she took the wrong impression of it" (Golgowski, 2015). The teacher confiscated the clock before Ahmed was called into a
meeting with the principal and five police officers. All charges in the "naive accident" were dropped and the case has been closed, Irving Police Chief Larry Boyd said at a press conference, noting "the reaction would have been the same regardless" of Ahmed’s race or religion. Earlier, police said it could have been mistaken as an explosive device, prompting them to weigh charges of making a hoax bomb (Golgowski, 2015).

Of the active shooters studied by Blair, Martaindale, and Nichols (2014) between 2000 and 2010, 3% brought with them Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs). When confronted with a bomb threat, school principals and school personnel are to immediately notify law enforcement and report the threat. Along with law enforcement, school officials must notify the fire department, Office of Emergency Management (OEM), and the County Prosecutor (Attorney General, 2007). If a package is located, a request for the bomb squad should be made (Attorney General, 2007).

**Evacuations.** The decision to evacuate a school will be determined by the severity of the threat. For example, if the situation involves an active shooter, placing the school on lockdown may be the appropriate action of the school principal (Attorney General, 2007). However, if the situation is an unconfirmed bomb threat, the school principal or administrator has the authority to decide if he or she wants to evacuate the building (Attorney General, 2007).

Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris were prepared to shoot the students evacuating Columbine High School, when their IEDs exploded, to get a higher death count than Timothy McVeigh. While Andrew Golden pulled the fire alarm to evacuate the school, he and Mitchell Johnson hid in the woods with rifles, shooting at the students and faculty as they exited the building (Newman et al., 2004). Fortunately, the IEDs did not explode, saving more students from being killed (Cullen, 2009).
Nonetheless, where law enforcement learns of a dangerous condition requiring evacuation, or where a suspicious package has been located requiring the need to call for the bomb squad, the authority to decide will be left to law enforcement (Attorney General, 2007).

**Public information.** Under the New Jersey Attorney General’s Directive 2007-1, release of information to the media in an emergency situation resulting in the response of law enforcement, the authority of releasing information to the media is assigned to the Chief of Police, or his designee or the department’s designated Public Information Officer (Attorney General, 2007). Therefore, the release of any pertinent information of a critical incident to the media, even by a school principal, is forbidden. In the past, school violence incidents remained a local issue, with the exception of large mass murders; however, today the media report has expanded to provide information of school violence from across the country (Carmona & Butler, 2014).

With the 24/7 news cycles, the media has put into debate whether school violence is on the rise or if the perception of school violence is on the rise due to the greater amount of national and international news coverage (Carmona & Butler, 2014). In their writings and videotapes (basement tapes) Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris had referenced the 168 people killed in the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building by Timothy McVeigh on April 19, 1995. Klebold and Harris boasted about their plan to surpass McVeigh’s death count through the explosives devices they had strategically placed around Columbine High School and by shooting the students and faculty as they exited the building (Cullen, 2009). Meanwhile, McVeigh acted to bomb the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building as a
retaliatory strike against the federal government for the failed negotiations by the FBI in Waco, Texas, on April 19, 1993 (Mohandie & Meloy, 2014).

The media attention recounting these acts of mass violence created a problem for school officials with the constant interference of the media by their need to get information. It is crucial to assign one person, a Public Information Officer, to deal with the media. Bill Sadler, a member of the Arkansas State Police, recommends that these types of events, with the entire national media and potentially the international media attention, should require members of the media to pool their resources and send one person to represent them (Newman et al., 2004). It continues to be the practice of the media to unintentionally glorify these acts of mass violence; and in doing so, they create false beliefs and assertions about the perpetrator(s), and the circumstances surrounding the mass violence (Booth, Van Hasselt, & Vecchi, 2011).

In 2011, the New Jersey Department of Education’s Office of School Preparedness and Emergency Planning created an additional “minimum” set of requirements for School Safety and Security. New Jersey Administrative Code 6A:16-5.1 School Safety and Security Plans requires each school district to have a school safety and security plan that meets the minimum state requirements. The format and content of school safety and security plans are established by the Domestic Security Preparedness Task Force and the Commissioner of Education. It is specifically stated that (a) Each school district shall develop and implement comprehensive plans, procedures and mechanisms that provide for safety and security in the public elementary and secondary schools of the school district. The plans and procedures, which shall be in written form, and the mechanisms, at a
minimum, must provide for the following:

1. The protection of the health, safety, security, and welfare of the school population
2. The prevention of, intervention in, response to, and recovery from emergency and crisis situations
3. The establishment and maintenance of a climate of civility
4. Supportive services for staff, students, and their families
5. The chief school administrator must consult with law enforcement agencies, health and social services provider agencies, emergency management planners and school and other community resources, as appropriate, in the development of the school district’s plans, procedures and mechanisms for school safety and security

Furthermore, the planning process, which is recognized as a long and arduous ordeal, includes four phases of emergency management (NJDOE, 2011). These phases—mitigation and prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery—help to establish a foundation for planning. The phases are all interconnected impacting the outcomes of each phase (NJDOE, 2011).

Additionally, the following six basic steps may be of assistance to the school district when formulating its Safety and Security plan:

1. Assemble a district-wide planning team, where this team should at least include administrators, parents, teachers, maintenance, transportation, food service, and nursing personnel from within the district. Outside agencies that should be involved include law enforcement, fire, hospital,
and emergency management personnel.

2. Conduct hazard analysis of site and surrounding area, where the identifications of hazards are likely to affect the area in and around your school. Determine the severity of impact of each identified hazard. Local emergency management personnel can assist with this assessment.

3. Eliminate or mitigate hazards.

4. Develop procedures to respond to hazards such as written procedures on how to respond to the hazards identified in Step 2 that cannot be eliminated.

5. Train students and staff in how to use the plan and what their responsibilities will be in a given response.

6. Conduct drills and tabletop exercises to test the plan. All participants should be debriefed at the conclusion of each drill. The feedback provided by participants is used to identify strengths and weaknesses in the plan. The plan is then modified to strengthen any weaknesses (NJDOE, 2011).

Case Law and Relevant Studies

When weighing the importance of a person’s civil liberties with the security and safety of an institution, its students, their parents, and faculty, the courts have ruled students have a constitutional right to freedom of speech and expression as long as the speech does not disrupt or affect the rights of others (Mohandie & Hoffman, 2014).

Katherine S. Newman, a professor at Harvard University Kennedy School of Government, with a team of researchers, Cybelle Fox, Daniel J. Harding, Jal Mehta, and Wendy Roth (2004), studied the rampage school shootings in West Paducah, Kentucky,
and Jonesboro, Arkansas. Katherine S. Newman and her team of researchers (2004), through their study of rampage school shootings, were able to identify five areas of concern regarding the school shooter. However, one of the areas they identified regarding the schools and faculty is the need for the sharing of information of students throughout the educational system, which will help to identify students that have had behavioral and disciplinary problems. Newman et al. (2004) recommends intercepting threats and addressing the threats in a comprehensive manner is the “most promising answer for prevention of school shootings” (p. 288).

In September 2015, a high school student was arrested after school administrators identified an Instagram social media post the student wrote which contained rap song lyrics from the song *I’m Back*, written by Marshall Mathers, also known as Eminem, that contained a reference to a school shooting. The Eminem lyrics in question reference the 1999 Columbine High School shooting (Fleischer, 2015). “I take seven [kids] from [Columbine], stand ’em all in line/ Add an AK-47, a revolver, a nine/ A MAC-11 and it oughta solve the problem of mine/ And that’s a whole school of bullies shot up all at one time/ ’Cause (I’m) Shady, they call me as crazy/ As the world was over this whole Y2K thing” (Fleischer, 2015). The student wrote the lyrics almost verbatim, but did tweak one small portion towards the end, writing, “I’m just like Shady,” rather than “I’m Shady” (Fleischer, MTV News, 2015).

Fresno Police Chief Jerry Dyer initially attributed the first half of the post to Eminem and said that the student had written the second half (Fleischer, 2015). According to Dyer, when authorities searched the student’s home, they found a replica AK-47 Airsoft rifle, a handgun, a .357 Magnum revolver, a 12-gauge shotgun, ammunition, and a bulletproof vest. The weapons were not registered, and both the
student and his father denied knowledge of their existence in the home. “These are really all of the things we look for in individuals that historically have been involved in incidents like Columbine,” Dyer said. “So we’re very fortunate that this was brought to our attention. We have every reason to believe that he was reaching out for help . . . The weapons were present. The ammunition was present. Perhaps even the mindset was present to carry out those threats” (Fleischer, 2015).

The Federal Bureau of Investigation, through their research, identified that the more specific the threat, the more serious is the possibility of the threat being carried out; the more specific the threat, the more dangerous the threat, especially if the information is specific to dates, times, weapons to be used, or person or place targeted (Newman et al., 2004). In United States v. Orozco-Santilla (1990), the courts used the following statements to provide for an objective standard in determining the intent of the communication: (1) “whether a reasonable person would foresee that the statement would be interpreted by those to whom the maker communicates the statement as a serious expression of intent to harm or assault” and (2) “Alleged threats should be considered in light of their entire factual context, including surrounding events and [the] reaction of the listeners” (Mohandie & Hoffman, 2014, p. 72).

In Lovell v. Poway Unified School District (1996), the Ninth Circuit Court ruled that a 15-year-old student from Mt. Carmel High School in Poway, California, who had made threats to shoot the guidance counselor, was not protected under the constitution (Mohandie & Hoffman, 2014). However, in D. G. v. Independent School District No. 11 (2000), where a student had written a poem titled “Killing Mrs. [Teacher]” and the school district moved to expel the student as a result of the poem, the courts ruled that the school district violated the student’s First Amendment rights. Marzano (2003) posits that
providing a safe and orderly school environment is essential to student learning.

In *J. S. v. Bethlehem Area School District* (2002), an eighth-grade student set up a website labeled “Teacher Sux,” where offensive descriptive language was used against the school faculty. Within the website the student had a section called, “Why Should [Teacher] Die?” displaying his teacher with head chopped off and soliciting $20 per viewer to raise money for a hit man to kill the teacher. The principal, after being notified of the website, contacted the FBI and local authorities; as a result, the student was identified and suspended from school.

The court ruled, “It is evident that the courts have allowed school officials to discipline students for conduct occurring off school premises where it is established that the conduct materially and substantially interferes with the educational process” (Mohandie & Hoffman, 2014, pp. 72-73). In *D. G. v. Independent School District No. 11* (2000) the court took up the controversial zero–tolerance policy that had become so popular in school districts throughout the country. The court ruled “on the impossibility of having a no–tolerance policy against threats if the threats involve speech” (Mohandie & Hoffman, 2014, p. 72). In public schools, principals and other administrators are granted authority to develop rules and regulations to ensure that all persons comply with laws and policies. Concurrently, however, they are expected to take a positive approach toward student discipline. That is, they should forge rules and implement them in a manner that is fair, reasonable, and beneficial to student social growth (Kowalski, 2010).

In a research study, *The Fourth R—Revolvers: Principal Perceptions Related to Armed School Personnel and Related Legal Issues*, a survey was sent to over 40 current building principals, and relied on a combination of convenience and snowball sampling measures to collect the reported data (Creswell, 2012, p. 375; Weiler & Armenta, 2014).
Of the 19 respondents, 15 were elementary principals, two were middle school principals, and two were high school principals. With respect to gender, 10 were female and 9 were male. They averaged over 8.6 years in their role as principal. The survey instrument included a combination of Likert-type scales, yes-or-no responses, and short-answer items. While the quantitative data yielded interesting results, it was the comments provided by the principals that shed light on their feelings about armed personnel in schools (Weiler & Armenta, 2014).

Item 6 asked participants to list any disadvantages to having armed educators in the school (Weiler & Armenta, 2014). The general responses focused on concerns such as accidents due to someone getting hold of a weapon, limited training, lack of an adequate place to store the weapon(s), liability issues, establishing a climate of fear, and other such concerns. Some of the representative comments included the following:

“Everyone can have a bad day. I would never want an adult, who is armed, who is having a bad day . . . to use the gun on themselves or any other human. I also don’t feel that, as educators, we are prepared to use a weapon to harm another human. We are more nurturing in nature” (Weiler & Armenta, 2014).

“I believe that students have a way of getting reactions out of some faculty; my greatest fear would be that a staff member would either threaten a student, or parent, with a gun, or even worse” (Weiler & Armenta, 2014).

“Students could get caught in crossfire and become collateral damage” (Weiler & Armenta, 2014).

In a study conducted by Bliss, Emshoff, Buck, and Cook (Bliss et al., 2006), 202 parents in a metropolitan city were interviewed over the telephone and asked to provide their perceptions of both the causations and solutions for school violence. This study
found that 34% of parents felt that their children would be more likely to be harmed on school property as opposed to off and 45% had concerns about even sending their child to school (Bliss et al., 2006). This fear held by parents of schoolchildren is not only incredibly common but tends to dramatically rise following school shootings that have received mass media attention (Altheide, 2009).

Violent video games have been a controversial issue surrounding school shootings. Newman et al. (2004) asked the question, “Are violent video games, lyrics, and movies to blame for the recent spate of rampage school shootings?” (p. 252). Through their study, Newman et al. (2004) identified 16-year-old Michael Carneal (West Paducah, Kentucky), 14-year-old Mitchell Johnson and 11-year-old Andrew Golden (Jonesboro, Arkansas), the three school shooters they studied, as having a strong attraction to violent video games and violent movies. Dr. Marshal Soules, at Malaspina University in Canada (as cited in Grossman & Christensen, 2012), found that for some children video games have become more real than reality in what he refers to as “hyper reality effect.” He compares the playing of these violent video games as equivalent to a child making a puppy cry, or “pathological play” (p. 82).

Lieutenant Colonel Dave Grossman and Loren Christensen (2012) found violent video games can create a “conditioned reflex–stimulus–response” that desensitizes children exposed to the violent games regarding killing (p. 81). Wood and Huffman (as cited in Smith & Smith, 2006) view the future of school safety through a proactive rather than reactive strategy, through education and staff development, “in recognizing and diffusing potentially violent situations, and developing appropriate relationships with students” (p. 41).

A study by Hernandez, Floden, and Bosworth (2010) examined teachers' and
students’ perceptions of safety in schools in relation to incident reports that were filed with law enforcement in the area. The quantitative data gathered for this study from law enforcement showed that the most frequently reported violent acts were serious violence and attacks, minor violence, and other school-related crime such as gambling. Occurrences such as bullying or intimidation and even weapon and alcohol possession were reported less frequently. The qualitative data gathered for this study through focus groups conducted with teachers and students indicated that teachers and students tended to have similar perceptions of safety within their schools. The results also indicated that these feelings of safety did not always correspond to the number of incident reports filed in the school. The only two areas where students’ and teachers’ perceptions correlated were in the areas of illegal drugs and vandalism.

A 2013 to 2015 study in South Carolina utilized data collected from two surveys that were sent to all law enforcement executives (N = 228) and public school (elementary through high school) principals (N = 1,086). Although the questionnaires were similar, each was tailored to the specific group of respondents such that the questions asked of law enforcement executives focused on their jurisdiction and those for the principals focused on their school and district (Kaminski, 2015).

Respondents were asked about their experience with SROs and their perspectives on these officers’ ability to maintain school safety, regardless of whether they currently interact with an SRO on a regular basis. Additionally, South Carolina provides an appropriate and unique context for this research because the legislature has been considering laws regarding the arming of schoolteachers and administrators in the wake of the Sandy Hook incident. Thus, both groups of respondents were also asked about their attitudes regarding arming school employees. A survey of administration took place
between July and October 2013 (Kaminski, 2015).

A vast majority of both the law enforcement executives (97.8%) and school principals (96.5%) agreed with the statement that “SROs should be placed in public schools in your jurisdiction/district.” In fact, nearly 75% of law enforcement executives strongly agree that SROs should be placed in public schools in their jurisdiction while none strongly disagree with the statement. Although less dramatic, a similar trend is noted in the principals’ responses, as almost 65% of principals strongly agree that SROs should be placed in public schools in their district while only eight principals strongly disagree with the statement (1.7%) (Kaminski, 2015).

School Shootings Controversy

Geography has often played a role in the incidence of many crimes from a jurisdictional standpoint, usually from the perspective of urban, suburban, or rural jurisdictions. School shootings are universally perceived as essentially the same thing: as a shocking, brutal, and tragic event (Dougherty 2009) without a clear motive (Minnesota school victims buried, 2005). Nonetheless, considerable dialogue has shifted a bit pertaining to jurisdictional school violence, ironically from inner city school violence to suburban and rural school shootings, for the few recent decades.

Suburban and rural school principals and superintendents may now face a new era of legal challenges, in contrast to the previous abundance of urban school violence. Although the data indicate that school shootings are more prominent in rural and suburban communities (Newman et al., 2004), urban communities cannot ignore the information learned from each tragic event. School administrators must be cognizant of these changes and how it affects their schools and their ability to continue in their roles as educators (Mohandie & Hoffman, 2014).
However, the subject of school shootings is not without controversy. Although there continue to be school shootings, the likelihood of one occurring is still relatively rare (Pittaro, 2007), with schools being safer for children than many other areas in their lives, such as their own homes and other areas within the community (Muschert, 2007). Based on recent research, Burns and Crawford (2003) argue that the response to school shootings has been exaggerated, that juvenile school violence has been decreasing, and that the incidence of juvenile murders in schools is relatively small.

It is further explained that society has reacted to school shootings with moral panic, which is defined by Goode and Ben-Yehuda (as cited in Burns & Crawford, 2003) as “moral panic appears when a substantial portion of society feels that particular evildoers pose a threat to the moral order of society” (p. 123). The reaction to the school shootings has created an environment in which schools are now more concerned with the security of the school than the students, requiring school guards, metal detectors, and active-shooter drills. Although these actions of higher security—metal detectors and armed personnel—had occurred before the rash of school shootings in the 1990s, the security precautions were mainly in the inner-city schools (Burns & Crawford, 2003).

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) found that between the years of July 1, 1992, to June 30, 2000, school children “were at least 70 times more likely to be murdered away from school than at school” (National Center for Education Statistics, 2003). The CDC (as cited in Hankin et al., 2011) reported that approximately 2,500 school children between the ages of 10 and 19 are victims of homicides a year; the School Associated Violent Death (SAVD) study estimated that of the 2,500, about 1% (approximately 25) occur while on school property; and of the 1%, “they involve one victim and one perpetrator, and they are often motivated by a dispute about a romantic
Glassman (as cited in Burns & Crawford, 2003, p. 127) provided the following information: “The United States has approximately 30 million children between the ages of 10 and 17 who attend roughly 20,000 secondary schools. In 1994, there were no school shootings in which more than a single person was killed; in 1997, there were four; and in 1998, there were two.” Alcaraz et al. (2010) of the Southern California Academic Center of Excellence on Youth Violence Prevention found school-related deaths to be rare; a student is fifty times more likely to be killed outside of his or her school than at any time engaged with his or her school.

Johnson (2009) found that schools that had taken some action to secure their school and environment through the security personnel were able to create the perception of safety; however, these measures were found to create a more violent environment. Alcaraz et al. (2010) agree that the security environments in a school do not create a safer environment but have an opposite effect; the students that feel alienated look at the security measures as a process to get attention through a violent act. The Justice Policy Institute has reported that the media focus on school violence has created a perception that schools are a dangerous environment. This perception of magnified school violence has led to new laws regarding schools to include zero tolerance policies, when everyday gun violence outside schools is a much bigger problem (Burns & Crawford, 2003).

It has been the practice of the political establishment to address the fears of society (moral panic) through punitive action, which specifically affects the less fortunate through incarceration and extended sentences, and zero tolerance policies (Burns & Crawford, 2003) that affect individuals that have been “excluded, marginalized, and exploited,” in our society (Webb, Metha, & Jordan, 2010, p. 87). Burns and Crawford
(2003) suggest that politicians, through their desire to increase juvenile punishment, and the media, through their distortion of reality and focus on violent offenses, are the two groups that have made the greatest contribution in creating moral panic concerning school shootings.

Devine (as cited in Smith & Smith, 2006) believes that the paramilitary environment created by the fear of violence through the high security presence of surveillance equipment, security personnel, and metal detectors, creates an environment more conducive to violence than prevention, creating a self-fulfilling prophecy.

After the tragedy of the Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, on December 14, 2012, the issue of guns in schools continues to be controversial. The GFSA requires all schools that receive federal funds to have a state law that prohibits any person to be in a school or on school property with a weapon without having proper legal authorization (Cornell University Law, 2012). State laws that provide for persons to legally carry a concealed weapon do not violate the GFSA; some states have passed legislation that would allow teachers and/or principals to carry concealed weapons in schools (Shah, 2013).

Subsequently, at the conclusion of the tragedy of the Sandy Hook Elementary School, lawmakers throughout the country determined to take serious action in addressing the systemic problem of school shootings. Legislators throughout the country have proposed hundreds of bills associated with school shootings, including arming teachers and school faculty (School Safety Legislation, 2013). Approximately 84 bills were written to enforce legislation pertaining to arming school employees, i.e. teachers, and 101 bills were written to enforce legislation pertaining to placing police in schools (School Safety Legislation, 2013).
In an opposing fashion, the National Education Association (NEA), a national organization that represents more than three million elementary and secondary school teachers, and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), a national organization that represents more than one and one-half million pre-K through 12th grade school teachers, put out a press release (2012) after the tragedy at Sandy Hook Elementary School. In their press release their position was clear: “Our duty to every child is to provide safe and secure public schools. Guns have no place in our schools. Period. We must do everything we can to reduce the possibility of any gunfire in schools and concentrate on ways to keep all guns off school property and ensure the safety of children and school employees” (NEA, 2012). These statements suggest armed teachers and principals “might do more harm than good” (Zubrzycki, 2012). However, after the tragedy at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, some are calling for teachers and faculty to be armed (Wilson, 2013).

In the state of Georgia, the governor signed into law the Safe Carry Protection Act that would allow gun owners, as of July 1, 2014, to carry firearms in bars, schools, churches, and some government buildings that do not have security measures in place banning firearms (Copeland & Richards, 2014). In the state of Utah school officials have been allowed to carry concealed firearms for over ten years, while in the state of Texas there are four school districts that have certain school employees that have been given the authority, anonymously, to carry concealed firearms in the school (Shah, 2013). Ken Trump, President of the National School Safety and Security Services, has expressed that he disagrees with the arming of school officials and that the focus on active shooters, a reactive approach to a school shooting incident, has taken away the proactive practices of securing schools and conducting drills (Shah, 2013, p. 3). The Associated Press (as cited
in *Education Week*, 2014) has done an analysis of school shootings since the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting on December 14, 2012, and the Associated Press has found that “school shootings continue despite the safety emphasis.” Even with the school safety plans, the metal detectors, the surveillance cameras, and identification badges, the number of school shootings has not decreased (School Shootings Continue, 2014).

**School Shootings**

School safety has been an important topic within American society for many years and continues to be one today (Brock, 2009; Dillon; 2007; Rikleen, 2007). According to Brock (2009) and Peterson (2007) the issue of violence within schools is one of the most crucial issues facing the education system within the United States today. Therefore, the amount of information surrounding school shootings exhibits the impact in differentiating between an active shooter, mass casualty, and school violence. When addressing school shootings through the wider lens of school violence, there is the ability to anticipate other areas that may not be included in the current literature.

For instance, teachers have been victims of theft, rape, robbery, and assault (Daniels et al., 2007). Then again, teachers have even been murdered, like Colleen Ritzer, 24, a teacher in Boston, Massachusetts, who was killed in October 2013, allegedly by a 14-year-old student (Ford & Kemp, 2013). Thus, teachers have been victims of serious violent acts. When examining the different types of violence that occur on school campuses, one will find that physical fights between students are the most prevalent type of violence to occur within schools (Hemphill, 2008).

Mohandie and Meloy (2014) have identified some instances of mass casualty in schools that may not have been identified in the past, such as the Oklahoma City Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building bombing on April 19, 1995. Of the 168 people killed, 19 of
them were six-year-old children that were in the building’s day care center. Timothy McVeigh had parked a rental truck with explosives in the front of the Federal Building, aware that there was a day care center inside the building.

The Oklahoma bombing became the country’s worst act of domestic terrorism, an act of school violence, killing 19 six-year-olds from a day care center by a person not affiliated with the school. Timothy McVeigh, during an interview conducted by the FBI, referred to the death of the 19 children as casualties (Mohandie & Meloy, 2014, p. 150).

On April 9, 2014, Alex Hribal, a sophomore student of Franklin Regional High School, located near Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, entered his school slashing and stabbing 21 students and a security officer with two knives before being tackled by an assistant principal. Hribal has been charged as an adult for four counts of attempted murder and 21 counts of aggravated assault in this act of active shooter with two knives with eight-inch blades, instead of firearms. It was reported that Hribal had made plans to kill the students at the school and when grabbed by the assistant principal, had said he had more people to kill (Search for Motive, 2014; Walsh, 2014).

Just as with Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris in Columbine (Cullen, 2009) or Seung-Hui Cho in Virginia Tech (Hong, Cho & Lee, 2010), these acts of mass murder are always planned far in advance. It is a false supposition to believe these perpetrators of mass violence just snapped. Mohandie (2014) identified leakage as “the communication to a third party of intent to do harm to a target,” as one of the most common warning behaviors of an active shooter (p. 131). Newman et al. (2004) chronicled the process taken by Michael Carneal, age 14, in preparing to commit his act of mass murder at West Paducah, Kentucky, on December 1, 1997, and Andrew Golden, age 11, and Mitchell Johnson, age 13, preparing their act of mass murder at Jonesboro, Arkansas, on March
24, 1998, to include how Andrew Golden pulled the fire alarm to evacuate the school so that he and Mitchell Johnson could kill the students and faculty as they exited the building, a scheme planned nine weeks before the incident.

**Inside threats.** Through their research, Newman et al. (2004) found that although the rampage shooter may have specific targets, it is the institution they attack. School shooters identify two types of groups that they perceive as the cause of their marginalization in their school environment. The first group is the adult authority figures, who have disciplined them or failed to protect them. The second group is the students that they perceive as having wronged them. However, both groups are part of and reflective of the institutional environment that school shooters perceive has wronged them to the point of their having to act out (Newman et al., 2004).

The NYPD metadata study on active shooters (2010, 2012) reviewed 93 school shooting incidents and found that of the 93 school shootings, 58 were students of the school and eight were school employees. Hence, many active shooters are indeed an inside threat. Shneidman (as cited in Mohandie & Meloy, 2014, p. 128) identified 10 common patterns of school violence offenders and students that contemplate suicide:

1. Solution-seeking
2. Cessation of consciousness
3. Unbearable psychological pain
4. Frustrated psychological needs
5. Common emotion of hopelessness/helplessness
6. Cognitive state of ambivalence
7. Perceptual state of constriction
8. Common action is escape
9. Common interpersonal act is communication of intent

10. Consistency of life-long styles

The incidence of school shootings undoubtedly specifies that school principals have to be concerned with threats to students, parents, teachers, faculty, and the institution itself (Newman et al., 2004).

**Outside threats.** The NYPD metadata study on active shooters (2010, 2012) reviewed 93 school shooting incidents and found that of the 93 school shootings, 15 were former students, 11 had no ties to the schools, and two were former employees. School principals and school officials must also be concerned with outside threats from former students, parents, and disgruntled employees (Mohandie, 2014).

These are prime examples of outside threats, a reminder of the threat and danger to faculty and administrators as represented in the outcome of the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting, where school principal Dawn Hochsprung and school psychologist Mary Sherlach confronted Adam Lanza as he entered the school shooting his automatic rifle, resulting in their deaths while trying to protect their school and students (Sedensky, 2013).

**School Preparedness**

In 1988 the state of New Jersey created the Memorandum of Agreement between Education and Law Enforcement Officials, which has gone through several revisions in 1992, 1999, and 2007 to its most recent form in 2011, to provide a statewide policy that will ensure cooperation between law enforcement and schools to protect the educational environment. The agreement requires a school liaison to be assigned from the law enforcement agency to work together with the schools to ensure the proper implementation and adherence to the memorandum of agreement between education and
law enforcement officials (Holtz, 2014).

The National School Safety Center (as cited in Booth, Van Hasselt, & Vecchi, 2011) found that schools need to develop a close relationship with their law enforcement agency, where they can work together on the multiple and complex issues of school violence. In Article 8 of the New Jersey Memorandum of Agreement between Education and Law Enforcement Officials (2011), the state of New Jersey acknowledges that “recent tragic events in the nation’s schools highlight the need for developing and maintaining up-to-date school-based safety and security plans” (p. 132). The school safety plan, which must include law enforcement in its development, should include a provision for a Threat Assessment Team (TAT), to be used to evaluate any and all reports of a threat by a student, parent, or faculty member (Memorandum of Agreement, 2011). Booth et al. (2011) recommends the school safety plan must have provisions which include the policy by the school administration for discipline to include the process of detention, suspension, and expulsion of a student if it is found that such action is necessary, and the statutory requirements to involve law enforcement if necessary.

However, prior to police arrival, school officials are the first responders and need to be prepared to deal with the circumstances at hand (Tonn, 2005). Throughout the United States there are 114,000 schools with 50 million students and 6 million schoolteachers; all will have some involvement in school violence (Hankin et al., 2011). It is not only students and faculty with whose safety the school principal must be concerned; on any given school day one out of five American citizens will be in a school (Hankin et al., 2011).

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has reported that death by injuries remains the Number 1 leading cause of death for children between the ages of
five and 18 (NHIS, 2013), while homicide is the second leading cause of death; and of
these deaths, less than 2% occur on school property (CDC, 2014). The CDC 2012 fact
sheet on school violence reported that 20% of school children reported being bullied at
school; 16% reported cyber bullying; 12% reported having had physical fights during the
school year; 7.4% reported being threatened or injured with a weapon at school; 5.9%
reported missing school because they felt unsafe in the school; and 5.4% reported having
carried a weapon onto school property (CDC, 2012).

The NYPD metadata study on active shooters (2010, 2012) reviewed 93 school
shooting incidents and found that of the 93 school shootings, 44 were stopped by lethal
force, 35 committed suicide, and one attempted suicide. In their review of school
shootings, the Secret Service identified bullying as one of the factors that create isolation
and fear among certain students, which, if not properly addressed by school officials, may
lead to behavioral problems for the student and school violence (Wilson, 2013, p. 2).
Newman et al. (2004) found that school shooters tend to be suicidal and turn their
suicidal motivations homicidal, outward towards the group, specifically institutions that
they perceive have made them an outcast.

Schools need to focus on preventive measures of school safety that address the
issues of bullying, harassment, and assaults that are indicators of troubled students and
can be addressed to prevent a school shooting (Trotter, 2005). Teachers have indicated,
“Student disruption, tardiness, lack of attention, disrespect, bullying and violence can ruin
a healthy learning environment that teachers depend on to effectively do their job” (Liu,
2007, p. 2). The National Center of Education Statistics (as cited in Hankin et al., 2011)
reported that in the 2003/2004 school year, 9% of teachers said a student had threatened
them, while 4% said a student had assaulted them.
School resource officers. Although it is unclear exactly how many SROs are currently stationed in schools, it is estimated that there are about 17,000 to 20,000 SROs across the nation, a majority of which are in middle and high schools (Brown, 2006; James & McCallion, 2013; Raymond, 2010). However, according to the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), less than one-half of the nation’s public schools had one or more SROs stationed in their school during the 2009-2010 school year (NCES, 2012). As previously identified, the National Association of Secondary School Principals and the National Association of Elementary School Principals are opposed to school personnel carrying firearms in schools; however, they support funding for school resource officers (Zubrzycki, 2012).

Even in the massacre at Columbine High School, the Jefferson County Sheriff’s Department had an SRO, Deputy Neil Gardner, assigned full time to Columbine High School, where the shooters, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, were aware of his presence; but that did not prevent them from their planning and following through their act of violence (Cullen, 2009; Totter, 2005). School resource officers are trained police officers that are required to follow policies established by their law enforcement agency and trained to carry firearms, but they are only one part of the security plan of any school (Totter, 2005). Accordingly, any policy that aims to place an SRO in every school would require the number of SROs in the United States to be doubled. The push for SROs emphasizes the need to further explore the impact of SROs on school violence and the costs associated with such a policy.

Despite this, the extant literature on SROs is limited and generally describes the nature of SRO programs rather than evaluating their impact (Brown, 2006). Booth et al. (2011) identified three areas where law enforcement officers can be influential in
reducing violence in the schools: having an open line of communication with teachers and administrators, having the ability to make their own judgment regarding the students’ behavior, and developing relationships with the staff and students so that the staff and students have another resource where they can go to report issues and concerns. Booth, Van Hasselt, and Vecchi (2011) in their article in the *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin*, identified the SRO program as an intricate part of school safety, with the ability to have a police officer in the school at the time of an incident. They further found that the SRO program is effective in creating a positive relationship between law enforcement and school officials, as well as law enforcement and students.

The existing body of research regarding SROs primarily involves efforts at defining the SROs’ roles, duties, and daily activities (Coon & Travis, 2011; May, Fessel, & Means, 2004; Shuler Ivey, 2012). The duties of the SRO are most commonly understood through the “triad model” (Canady et al., 2012). SROs may serve as counselor/mentor, teacher, and law enforcement within a school and are expected to complete duties associated with each of these roles.

Recently, Na and Gottfredson (2011) compared schools that had increased their use of SROs to those that had not. Their results provide no evidence that increasing police presence reduced violence in schools. Other research has found similar results, suggesting SRO presence does not predict total arrest rates in a school (Theriot, 2009) nor reduce students’ victimization risk while at school (Tillyer, Fisher, & Wilcox, 2010). In contrast, one of the earliest examinations of SROs’ impact found the introduction of an SRO into a school decreased crimes in both middle and high schools (Johnson, 1999). Similarly, a study which utilized the 2006 School Survey on Crime and Safety found a negative relationship between SROs and serious school violence (Jennings et al., 2011).
In short, the evidence concerning SRO effectiveness and increased school safety is mixed.

Another strategy for evaluating SRO effectiveness is to focus on the impact of SROs on student and school faculty/staff perceptions of school safety. Importantly, SRO presence appears to reduce students’ fear of crime and increase their feelings of safety while at school (Brown & Benedict, 2002; Tillyer et al., 2010). Furthermore, research reveals that principals and teachers tend to have positive attitudes toward SROs and believe that their presence deters student misconduct and reduces school crime, regardless of whether an SRO was stationed in the respondents’ schools during survey administration (Brown, 2006; Johnson, 1999; Myrstol, 2011; Travis & Coon, 2005).

Risk vulnerability and organizational response. When multiple agencies or multiple jurisdictions are involved, they should adopt a unified command. Both are proven frameworks for emergency response (National Commission, 2004, p. 397). The 9/11 Commission wrote, “Emergency response agencies nationwide should adopt the Incident Command System (ICS). The purpose for the ICS is to prepare first responders to work within a unified emergency response system during a crisis situation (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2013). The 9/11 Commission (2004) found that first responders had an inability to communicate with responders of other agencies or jurisdictions; this was found to be true at the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and at Somerset County, Pennsylvania. As a result of all that was learned after 9/11, ICS focuses on ensuring that first responders, law enforcement, fire departments, emergency medical services, and other crucially important agencies have common policies and procedures to the response of a disaster (National Commission, 2004).

Booth, Van Hasselt, and Vecchi (2011) in their article in the FBI Law
Enforcement Bulletin, addressed the issue of school violence through the identification of warning signs available to school officials to identify violent students that can become shooters if not identified and prevent their violent act.

Booth, Van Hasselt, and Vecchi (2001) describe four main areas of examination:

1. Family Dynamics: Family’s thinking, traditions, beliefs, and patterns of behavior

2. School Dynamics: School’s customs, beliefs, and behavioral patterns (e.g., bullying treatment of students, some individuals receiving more/less attention, school activities)

3. Social Dynamics: Students’ beliefs and attitudes toward drugs, friends, weapons, entertainment, and other activities (e.g., violent video games)

4. Characteristics/Personality: Leakage, depression, verbal expressions, bizarre actions, thoughts/obsessions, and physical behaviors

Teachers who have the closest relations with their students are at a vantage point to recognize behavioral problems and should be encouraged to bring their concerns to the administration (Newman et al., 2004). Alcaraz et al. (2010) suggest schools that encourage and “set high standards for interpersonal behavior” create a positive environment between the students and faculty, which in turn creates an environment of less violence.

Children that are exposed to violence, even at a low level, have a higher probability of expressing themselves through violence, are known to do poorly in school, and have difficulty trusting others (Hankin et al., 2011). Newman et al., (2004) suggests that the hiring of young teachers that are current with the young culture is a way to allow for students to open up and discuss problems with someone whom they may feel would
have a better understanding of them, as well providing positive role models. Faculty that engage students to discourage teasing and bullying throughout the school create a culture conducive to a safe educational environment (Wilson, 2013).

Johnson (2009) suggests “school principals and school superintendents rethink what ‘security’ means in schools” (p. 464). By improving the school environment and placing a stronger emphasis on student-faculty relationships and positive classroom interactions, the student, the faculty, and the school will get better results in preventing violence. Threat assessment teams should be created, and routinely meet, to discuss and make recommendations regarding student behavior (Newman et al., 2004) just as a teacher meets with school principals regarding student academic problems.

The U.S. Secret Service and Department of Education study (as cited in Wilson, 2013) identified that most school shooters had confided in another student of their plans to commit the violent act. Without the confidence of adult role models, students will continue to remain silent about information they have regarding potential school violence, including school shootings (Wilson, 2013). While the United States Secret Service final report and findings of the school safety initiative, Implications for the Prevention of School Attacks in the United States (2002), provided 10 key findings to school shootings; Key-finding 4, was clear in indicating that “there is no accurate or useful profile of students who engage in targeted school violence” (p. 33).

Bloom (2008) in her article “Why Shy Pupils Become School Killers” reviewed personality traits taken from FBI reports, which identified three specific traits in rampage school shootings that are associated with what has been referred to as “clinically shy.” The first trait was isolation and total withdrawal; the second trait was a history of being bullied or of bullying others; and the third trait was a very low tolerance of frustration.
Bloom (2008) identified school shooters as isolated and totally withdrawn when rejected by a group, manifesting anger, dehumanizing others, and developing a lack of empathy. The clinically shy student that develops these traits has a strong hatred of others and develops feelings of superiority that allow the student to act out his or her plans of committing a rampage school shooting.

One of the key factors identified by the United States Secret Service Report (2002) and Newman et al., (2004) was the fact that many of the attackers had felt they had been bullied and/or abused. Booth et al. (2011) described bullying as part of the school dynamics in addressing school violence. Bloom (2008) identified school shooters as having been victims of bullying but also as taking their revenge out by bullying others.

Newman et al. (2004) found two-thirds of the individual shooters coming from two-parent homes, which is contrary to most criminologists’ expectation of criminal behavior. However, 85% of the shooters studied by Newman et al. (2004) were found “to come from dysfunctional homes, were suicidal, depressed, or suffered from a major mental illness” (p. 245). Blair, Martaindale, and Nichols (2014) conducted a metadata analysis of active shooter events between 2000 and 2010. Their findings were reported in the FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin on January 7, 2014, which revealed that during this period of 2000-2012, active-shooter incidents have been on a steady rise; these events “went from approximately one every other month between 2000 and 2008 (five per year) to more than one per month between 2009 and 2012 (almost 16 per year)” (p. 4). Their study further identified that 29% of the active shooter incidents occurred in schools, and in 45% of the attacks the perpetrator did not have any connection with the victim (Blair et al., 2014).

Newman et al. (2004) identified “threats and escalating commitments” (p. 251) as
the process of the perpetrators advertising their intent beforehand and having to escalate their actions to prove their commitment. School shooters that have survived their act of rampage shooting have claimed they had notified adults of the bullying and abuse and that at times adults had witnessed the bullying and abuse and did not address it (Newman et al., 2004). School shooters use this act of violence to target the hierarchy of the school that they perceive is the cause for their marginalization and, as a result, gain fame (Newman et al., 2004).

Newman et al. (2004) found school shooters reported having felt trapped, needing what they described as a “manly exit” (p. 248), a way to show their masculinity as portrayed in the popular culture. The study learned that many perpetrators of rampage shootings had considered committing suicide or attempted to commit suicide before they acted on their school shooting. Rampage shooters know they are not going to get away with the shootings and plan to commit suicide by their own hands or by that of the authority, “suicide by cop.” Part of the cultural script of a rampage school shooter is to send a message, “send a final, powerful message, not only to their tormentors but to everyone who hurt or excluded them” (Newman et al., 2004, p. 249).

The United States Secret Service (as cited in Newman et al., 2004) confirms the importance of the commitment of the shooters: “Nearly half of the attackers were influenced by other individuals in deciding to mount an attack, dared or encouraged by others to attack, or both” (p. 252). Newman et al. (2004) highlight that after the potential shooter has boasted about the act of violence that they intend to commit in order to attract attention and change their social status within the school hierarchy, it causes them to be boxed in and be further ridiculed if they don’t follow through. The United States Secret Service Report’s (2002) Key-factor 1 identified that incidents of targeted violence at
schools are rarely sudden or impulsive; instead they are planned, often for many weeks and months. Newman et al. (2004) identified this cultural script and identifies it as “designing a rampage,” which is organized and practiced (p. 252).

The United States Secret Service (as cited by Newman et al., 2004) identified that “nearly two-thirds of the attackers had never been in trouble or rarely were in trouble at school” (p. 254). Newman et al. (2004) identified the downward spiral of a student to be a warning sign that the student needs help. The Secret Service Report (2002) identified that “nearly all students engaged in behavior, prior to their attacks, which caused concern to at least one person, usually an adult, and most concerned at least three people” (p. 34). In their report, the Secret Service cautioned school officials to address these disciplinary issues carefully so as not to alienate or stigmatize the student. The Secret Service Report recommends the use of Threat Assessment Teams to properly identify potential problems and potentially problem students.

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has reported (as cited in Newman et al., 2004) that school counselors were unaware of students with serious problems, and only one-quarter of the offenders had received psychological counseling through the school. Newman et al. (2004) further found that most school shooters had no history with law enforcement; and when they did, such as in Columbine High School, the law enforcement officers were unable to share the information with the school due to the law. In Columbine the SRO was aware of an investigation involving Eric Harris (shooter) threatening another student on his web page and complaints made by the student’s parents to the police; however, the SRO assigned to Columbine High School and aware of the threats was not legally allowed to share the information with the school (Cullen, 2009).
Summary

A multitude of literature was reviewed throughout this chapter to explore the major challenges principals face when determining the best approach to provide a safe environment for their students and faculty while simultaneously creating an environment that is conducive to education.

The literature used in this study consisted of federal and state legislation to recognize the current laws and policies that affect school principals and their choice to keep their school environment safe. The current literature on school violence, school shootings, and principals’ responses to these incidents are separated into areas such as preventing school violence and responding to school violence and/or school shootings.

Additional quantitative and qualitative studies were included to include the contrasts and comparisons within this research study.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the quandary that principals engage in when determining the best approach in providing a safe environment for their students and faculty while simultaneously formulating an environment that is conducive to an educational setting. School leaders who focus on preparations for crisis send a message that procedures are in place and that personal safety becomes the first criterion for intervention (Blanchfield, 2013). School principals are accountable for the safety and security of their students and faculty, as well as parents that visit each school. However, there is very little research available on their position, concerns, or recommendations on having armed personnel in their schools (James & McCallion, 2013; Newman et al., 2004; Smith & Smith, 2006).

For today’s schools, violence becomes a larger social problem that goes beyond education and includes public safety, community resources, criminal justice, and the family (Blanchfield, 2013). Nonetheless, in the review of the literature on school shootings, information on the perceptions of school administrators or school principals in regard to having armed personnel in the schools is somewhat scarce. Several states and individual school boards have already taken steps to begin arming educators, but there is no indication that the perceptions of building-level principals have been documented related to this proposal (Weiler & Armenta, 2014).

Pertaining to my research of school shootings and principals’ perceptions of armed personnel in an educational setting, I chose to conduct a multiple-case study of
school principals (elementary, middle, and high school) within a particular public school district factor group in New Jersey. More so, I chose to replicate a study in an area of interest which will attempt to validate, as well as exhibit any contrasts between my current research replication and the previous study. The multiple-case study design, or collective case study, investigates several cases to gain insight into a central phenomenon (Creswell, 2002; Stake, 2006; Yin, 2003). This multiple-case study is a replication of a study conducted in 2014 within the public school district of the City of Paterson, New Jersey, which I have received written permission to conduct.

Case studies are “an exploration of a ‘bounded system’ of a case, or multiple cases over time through detail, in depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context” (Creswell, 1998, p. 61). However, whereas the City of Paterson school district is significantly more populated with students per school, as well as the number of schools within their public school district as compared to the current public school districts being explored in 2016, the previous study focused on a total sample population of elementary schools, and also included vice principals, along with principals. Contrariwise, based on the overall number of leadership positions within the school districts under current examination, I chose to solicit and utilize all of the principals from the schools that operate within these districts who were willing to be participants to be the case studies for this research. Last, the conceptual design in the original study included a district factor group categorized as low socioeconomic. I chose to select and differentiate from the previous study by focusing on suburban public school districts, as opposed to urban, that are assigned to a district factor group GH, which is considered to be much higher in the area of socioeconomic status, as opposed to the original study whose public schools were categorized within district factor group A.
A systematic analysis of open-source information, as well as the interviews of the principals that work within these school districts who participated, allowed for the dissemination of evidence encompassing the demographics and socioeconomic status of these schools within the district factor group. In turn, this information provided the information used to answer the research questions. Within this chapter, the process I utilized to conduct this research, including my background in law enforcement and as a professor coupled with my own education, which led to the reasons that I became interested in this topic of research, is thoroughly divulged.

Furthermore, I explain why I specifically selected this district factor group (GH) and the challenges this district may or may not face as it pertains to school violence. I will explain the design of the study, how the data were collected and analyzed, and identify the procedures which were necessary to ensure that the information and results were gathered in a reliable and valid manner throughout the entire process.

**Background**

As a former police officer, corrections officer, and investigator from Essex County, New Jersey, where I completed 10 years of employment before retiring due to disability, as well as my current career as a university professor and researcher, I am fortunate to have gained experience that is vital to the exploration of this study.

I am presently a full-time Assistant Professor of Criminal Justice at a university in Lodi, New Jersey, where I am assigned to instruct a multitude of course curriculums that cover genres including law enforcement components, sociological aspects of crime and causation, and political science and law. Conversely, I am involved with not only the academic advisory of students but also their safety while students are under my supervision in a classroom.
Furthermore, regarding the selection of the public school district factor group located in suburban New Jersey where I chose to conduct my research, this decision was rather simple: I am a lifelong resident of one of the townships whose public school districts agreed to participate in this study, and I am a product of suburban public schools from kindergarten to 12th grade. However, I do not know the identity of any current educators or administrators in any of the districts who voluntarily participated, nor do I possess any affiliation to this school district, or any of the school districts, by way of any friends or relatives working in any school. Nonetheless, increasing the sample size from one school district who originally granted consent (I first chose to conduct research in the district in which I was educated), to multiple public school districts was not only recommended by my dissertation mentor and committee, it allowed for a more robust multiple-case study.

During my career in law enforcement, I worked in the realms of corrections and police investigations, where I formed a specialization in background due diligence investigations of employees and criminal offenders, as well as offenses related to fraud and financial crimes. I have also been trained and certified as a tactical operator, where I have responded to incidents such as escaped felons, hostage situations, street and prison gang suppression, and the execution of search warrants for apprehensions. I also possess a skill-set where behavioral analysis and body language were utilized in the scope of public sector employment and which in some cases I still use today in the private sector. Most importantly, as it relates to this subject matter as the focal point of this research study, behavior and observation remain a key for the sample population.

As an educator, I have been employed as a college professor in the capacity of adjunct professor, instructor, and full-time assistant professor. From 2004 to 2008, I was
an adjunct professor at such academic institutions as Gibbs College, Union County College, Fairleigh Dickinson University, and Caldwell University, where I taught the following courses: Juvenile Delinquency, Criminal Law, Civil Law, and Police in Society, as well as courses titled Cybercrime, Police Leadership, and Corrections in America.

In 2008, I became an instructor at the Essex County College Police Academy on a full-time basis, where I served as a coordinator for corrections curriculum and a police training advisor. I instructed over 1000 police and corrections recruits in various areas of law enforcement subject matter, including Suicide Prevention for Police Officers, where I was one of the first trainers certified in New Jersey to instruct officers on issues pertaining to the stresses with which police are confronted in their careers, including the epidemic of stress-induced police suicides, a phenomenon in and of itself which softly parallels the mindset of an active shooter’s mentality.

In 2011, I was hired at the rank of Assistant Professor to teach in a Department of Criminal Justice, where I currently am in my fifth year of service. In this capacity, I teach Constitutional Law, Terrorism and Political Violence, Criminology, Criminal Law, Cybercrime, and many other courses. As a result of my background in law enforcement and in my current position at a university as a professor, as well as a position I hold in the private sector as an owner of a licensed security agency where my retired law enforcement status allows me to maintain licensure through the New Jersey State Police, I am assigned to instruct the course “Terrorism and Political Violence” during each academic year. This course covers concepts on international and domestic preparedness in relation to terror attacks, crisis intervention, and active shooter incidents. When addressing criteria pertaining to active-shooter incidents, lessons are planned and
facilitated to include campus violence, including documented school violence on the K-12 levels from a historical standpoint, as well as at universities.

In addition to the motivation in pursuing this research study topic, another major impetus for my desire to pursue this specific area of research is based on events during a class I was teaching in 2007, which happened to be focused on campus violence. However, whereas my lesson plan was already set into motion and a lecture was in progress, the ever-present world of real-time technology reared its head, and a student announced that a shooting massacre, which was later classified as a rampage shooting on a college campus, where the lone shooter later committed suicide, had taken place at Virginia Tech University. There were 32 victims who were killed. This event definitely impacted my psyche as an educator, then and now.

Last, in regard to the selection of this research study and how it correlates alongside my personal background, I am a father of a 21-month-old daughter who was born in 2014. With this said, I observe this era to be quite challenging in many ways. Whereas a parent I will strive to instill every bit of positivity and motivation in my child, and hopefully there will be more children in the future for my wife and I, certain events may pose themselves beyond my control, where I will not be present every waking moment of my daughter’s life span. Furthermore, when it is her turn to become a student within an institution of learning, I can only pray that she is protected accordingly.

However, our society does not provide a bulletproof bubble to step into to protect us from negative events. A lack of research on active-shooter incidents in relation to school principals’ perceptions of armed personnel throughout the review of the literature has been addressed and is often overshadowed by media coverage of these events. Furthermore,
coupled with current legislative mandates relative to gun laws and the mere opinion on school security, challenges are at multiple crossroads.

Due to a lack of scholarship on this topic, especially in the area of principals’ perceptions of armed personnel in schools, school safety should not be directly correlated with media attention to active-shooter incidents. Therefore, incorrect reports of this concept can lead to improper perceptions and ineffective prevention. Nonetheless, from a research perspective, one cannot project the results from a single research study but merely collect and analyze data at the proper juncture to make determinations to the best of one’s ability.

Despite choosing the participants of this study to be principals from one of the public school districts located within the public school district factor group in which I was a student from K-12, my first contact with any of the participants was a result of this study. I have no affiliation with any of the school districts in any of the townships at this current time.

**Design**

This study is a multiple-case study which is designed to gather data from several subjects who serve as school principals. Qualitative data were collected from interviews of principals of public schools located in specific public school districts, categorized in a specific district factor group (GH), in northern New Jersey. This research study focused on public school districts, which included 12 elementary schools, five middle schools, and four high schools, creating a total sample population of 21 (n=21) principals who are assigned to lead and manage each education setting.

To ensure that the research was conducted in accordance with the National Institute of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research (2011), a letter of solicitation (Appendix A) was sent to each superintendent of each public school district in the...
district factor group selected (GH). With the permission of various superintendents of schools who responded to me in regard to this research study, I submitted the parameters of the research to the Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board (IRB) for their approval (Appendix B). All information was kept confidential in a secured location at in my office in Kirby Hall at Felician University, Lodi, New Jersey, and no identifying information was released.

As part of the research, each principal from the public school districts where I received approval to conduct the research study received a letter of solicitation (Appendix C) from the researcher, explaining the parameters of the study. Each principal also received an Informed Consent Letter (Appendix D) for his or her review if he or she decided to participate in the study (NIH, 2011). One district superintendent granted permission to solicit principals within that district; however, those particular principals did not respond to the solicitation letters. Therefore, that district was merely documented as one of the eight public school districts out of 76 statewide schools from New Jersey District Factor Group GH who responded but did not participate in the qualitative study.

The main purpose of the face-to-face interviews was to collect data on the specific perceptions the principals possessed regarding the concept of armed personnel in an educational setting, which was used with the official documents collected, crime statistics, and demographics (Bogden & Biklen, 2007), consistent with the purpose of this study. The researcher’s data results sought to validate a previous study from 2014 which I have been given permission to replicate. Principal’s perceptions can create themes which could support, or not support, any trends on a local, state, or national level, which are directly correlated with school violence.

The interviews that were conducted allowed the participants to give firsthand
accounts of their experiences and insights. The questions were developed on the theoretical framework of this study, postmodernism and critical theory (Creswell, 2009). As this was a qualitative study, the data were gathered through interviews using open-ended questions, reviewed and approved by a panel of experts. The interviews conducted lasted approximately 25 minutes. The interviews were conducted at each principal’s school, which was mutually agreeable to the participant and researcher (NIH, 2011).

With the permission of the participants, the interviews were recorded with an audio recording device (Bogden & Biklen, 2007), and note taking as part of the research process ensured proper collection of data in the case of equipment malfunction, or if the participant did not want to be recorded (Bogden & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2009). Only two principals did not allow their interview session to be audio recorded.

At the conclusion of the interviews, transcripts were produced based on the interview recordings, and the notes taken to ensure accurate data for the study (Bogden & Biklen, 2007). The recordings, notes, and transcripts are “helpful to comment on the reliability and value of the data source” and used for coding the responses (Creswell, 2009, p. 183). The process of transcribing allows the researcher to become acquainted with the data (Reissman, 1993). The researcher created Microsoft Word files for the interviews and field note journal entries which were hand-written. All files were protected by setting a password, and the electronic files were saved in the researcher’s portable computer to which only he has access.

The qualitative data for this study will also include official documents (Creswell, 2009). A portion of resources, by way of open source documentation, was utilized to collect data for this study. Public databases were made available through the United States
Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), as well as the New Jersey Open Public Records Act (OPRA). Demographic data from the United States Census Report, and public school data made available from the school districts that participated, including the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE), was also contributory to this chapter of the study.

**Settings**

The public school districts that granted me permission to conduct this study within their districts were located in NJ District Factor Group GH. The school districts from GH who granted me permission were West Orange, Fairfield, Edgewater, Frelinghuysen, Springfield, Paramus, Fair Lawn, and Roxbury.

**Public School District Participants (Townships)**

Facts below are included to describe suburban attributes such as population, median salary, and geographic size:

- **West Orange**: A township which is in the state of New Jersey, with a population the U.S. Census (2014) has estimated at 46,995 residents. As per its geographical size, the township is 12 square miles (U.S. Census, 2014). A median salary for each household within this township is $90,031 (U.S. Census, 2014).

- **Fairfield**: A township which is in the state of New Jersey, with a population the U.S. Census (2014) has estimated at 7,466 residents. As per its geographical size, the township is 10.296 square miles (U.S. Census, 2014). A median salary for each household within this township is $99,147 (U.S. Census, 2014).

- **Edgewater (Permission only—did not participate)**: A township which is in the
state of New Jersey, with a population the U.S. Census (2014) has estimated at 12,148 residents. As per its geographical size, the township is 2.421 square miles of land and 1.486 square miles of water (U.S. Census, 2014). A median salary for each household within this township is $99,350 (U.S. Census, 2014).

- Frelinghuysen: a township which is in the state of New Jersey, with a population the U.S. Census (2014) has estimated at 2,230 residents. As per its geographical size, the township is 23.566 square miles (U.S. Census, 2014). A median salary for each household within this township is $94,688 (U.S. Census, 2014).

- Springfield: a township which is in the state of New Jersey, with a population the U.S. Census (2014) has estimated at 15,817 residents. As per its geographical size, the township is 5.193 square miles (U.S. Census, 2014). A median salary for each household within this township is $86,129 (U.S. Census, 2014).

- Paramus: a township which is in the state of New Jersey with a population the U.S. Census (2014) has estimated at 26,342 residents. As per its geographical size, the township is 10.520 square miles (U.S. Census, 2014). A median salary for each household within this township is $104,986 (U.S. Census, 2014).

- Fair Lawn: a township which is in the state of New Jersey, with a population the U.S. Census (2014) has estimated at 32,457 residents. As per its geographical size, the township is 5.201 square miles (U.S. Census, 2014). A median salary for each household within this township is $92,727 (U.S.
- Roxbury: a township which is in the state of New Jersey, with a population the U.S. Census (2014) has estimated at 23,324 residents. As per its geographical size, the township is 21.888 square miles (U.S. Census, 2014). A median salary for each household within this township is $95,676 (U.S. Census, 2014).

According to the Uniform Crime Report for New Jersey, each public school district that participated in this research study possessed a particularly low volume of violent crime. This is a consistently traditional attribute for suburban townships, despite varying populations amongst the districts. For instance, no township where a school district participated had a shooting in any of their schools (New Jersey State Police, 2014), and only two of these districts that participated were located in townships in New Jersey where a murder had occurred (New Jersey State Police, 2014). Specifically, the murders occurred in the towns of West Orange and Roxbury Townships.

Table 1

*Grid of designated NJDFG(s) - Total districts within each DFG*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>CD</th>
<th>DE</th>
<th>FG</th>
<th>GH</th>
<th>I</th>
<th>J</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(39)</td>
<td>(67)</td>
<td>(67)</td>
<td>(83)</td>
<td>(89)</td>
<td><strong>76</strong></td>
<td>(103)</td>
<td>(25)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(NJDOE, 2013)
As part of this study, the researcher reviewed the demographics of the townships provided by the United States Census Bureau and then gathered other relevant information provided by the New Jersey Department of Education, and by each public school district. This information was utilized in correlation with the criteria for the interviews with the principals. The interview questions, which I received permission to use for this research study, were originally used for a previous study conducted in 2014. The previous study focused on a similar area of exploration; however, this examination was within a different public school district factor group (GH), including but not limited to additional disparities between the district factor groups and the studies themselves.

Participants

The participants of this study were principals that were tasked with endeavors that not only focus on the realm of leading and educating elementary, middle, or high school students and staff within a multitude of school districts, but also ensure the safety of the students, parents, faculty, and all persons visiting, employed, or contracted by their schools.

I chose principals as the participants because of their responsibility and personal connections to each of the groups of individuals they, as a population, are in contact with each day. Principals, by the nature of their administrative titles and duties, are in a position to make the necessary decisions pertaining to whether using armed personnel in an educational setting is feasible and conducive to the education setting. From the 46 potential participants (N=46), eight superintendents out of a possible 76 superintendents granted me permission within New Jersey District Factor Group GH. I then utilized total population sampling for my study, as it is a purposive sampling technique (i.e. non-probability sampling), making it impossible to make statistical generalizations about the
population being studied (Zhi, 2014).

The district factor groups (DFGs) were first developed in 1975 for the purpose of comparing students’ performance on statewide assessments across demographically similar school districts. The categories are updated every ten years when the Census Bureau releases the latest Decennial Census data. Since the district factor groups were created, they have been used for purposes other than analyzing test score performance (NJDOE, 2013).

In particular, the district factor groups played a significant role in determining the initial group of districts that were classified as Abbott districts. Additionally, subsequent to the Abbott IV court ruling, the district factor groups were also used to define the group of school districts on which Abbott v. Burke parity remedy aid would be based (NJDOE, 2013). The district factor groups represent an approximate measure of a community’s relative socioeconomic status (SES). The classification system provides a useful tool for examining student achievement and comparing similarly situated school districts in other analyses (NJDOE, 2013).

The district factor groups do not have a primary or significant influence in the school funding formula beyond the legal requirements associated with parity aid provided to the Abbott districts. In updating the district factor groups using the data from the most recent Decennial Census, efforts were made to improve the methodology while preserving the underlying meaning of the district factor group’s classification system (NJDOE, 2013). New Jersey district factor groups were calculated using the following six variables that are closely related to SES: (1) percentage of adults with no high school diploma, (2) percentage of adults with some college education, (3) occupational status, (4) unemployment rate, (5) percentage of individuals in poverty, and (6) median family
income (NJDOE, 2013).

Table 2

*New Jersey District Factor Group GH*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>2000 DFG</th>
<th>1990 DFG</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Atlantic</td>
<td>Linwood City</td>
<td>GH</td>
<td>GH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bergen</td>
<td><em>Edgewater Boro</em></td>
<td>GH</td>
<td>FG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bergen</td>
<td>Emerson Boro</td>
<td>GH</td>
<td>GH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bergen</td>
<td><em>Fair Lawn Boro</em></td>
<td>GH</td>
<td>FG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bergen</td>
<td>Hillsdale Boro</td>
<td>GH</td>
<td>GH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bergen</td>
<td>Leonia Boro</td>
<td>GH</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bergen</td>
<td>Midland Park Boro</td>
<td>GH</td>
<td>FG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bergen</td>
<td><em>Paramus Boro</em></td>
<td>GH</td>
<td>GH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bergen</td>
<td>Rutherford Boro</td>
<td>GH</td>
<td>FG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bergen</td>
<td>Teaneck Twp</td>
<td>GH</td>
<td>GH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bergen</td>
<td>Waldwick Boro</td>
<td>GH</td>
<td>GH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bergen</td>
<td>Westwood Regional</td>
<td>GH</td>
<td>GH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burlington</td>
<td>Chesterfield Twp</td>
<td>GH</td>
<td>FG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burlington</td>
<td>Lenape Regional</td>
<td>GH</td>
<td>GH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burlington</td>
<td>Riverton</td>
<td>GH</td>
<td>GH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burlington</td>
<td>Shamong Twp</td>
<td>GH</td>
<td>GH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burlington</td>
<td>Tabernacle Twp</td>
<td>GH</td>
<td>GH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burlington</td>
<td>Westampton</td>
<td>GH</td>
<td>GH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camden</td>
<td>Cherry Hill Twp</td>
<td>GH</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camden</td>
<td>Eastern Camden County Reg</td>
<td>GH</td>
<td>GH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camden</td>
<td>Haddon Heights Boro</td>
<td>GH</td>
<td>GH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essex</td>
<td><em>Fairfield Twp</em></td>
<td>GH</td>
<td>GH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essex</td>
<td><em>West Orange Town</em></td>
<td>GH</td>
<td>GH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gloucester</td>
<td>Harrison Twp</td>
<td>GH</td>
<td>FG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hunterdon</td>
<td>Alexandria Twp</td>
<td>GH</td>
<td>GH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hunterdon</td>
<td>Bloomsbury Boro</td>
<td>GH</td>
<td>DE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>County</td>
<td>School District</td>
<td>Type 1</td>
<td>Type 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>--------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hunterdon</td>
<td>Delaware Twp</td>
<td>GH</td>
<td>GH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hunterdon</td>
<td>Delaware Valley Regional</td>
<td>GH</td>
<td>FG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hunterdon</td>
<td>High Bridge Boro</td>
<td>GH</td>
<td>GH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hunterdon</td>
<td>Lambertville City</td>
<td>GH</td>
<td>FG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hunterdon</td>
<td>South Hunterdon Regional</td>
<td>GH</td>
<td>FG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hunterdon</td>
<td>Union Twp</td>
<td>GH</td>
<td>GH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hunterdon</td>
<td>West Amwell Twp</td>
<td>GH</td>
<td>FG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mercer</td>
<td>East Windsor Regional</td>
<td>GH</td>
<td>GH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mercer</td>
<td>Lawrence Twp</td>
<td>GH</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middlesex</td>
<td>Edison Twp</td>
<td>GH</td>
<td>FG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middlesex</td>
<td>Highland Park Boro</td>
<td>GH</td>
<td>GH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middlesex</td>
<td>Piscataway Twp</td>
<td>GH</td>
<td>FG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monmouth</td>
<td>Atlantic Highlands Boro</td>
<td>GH</td>
<td>FG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monmouth</td>
<td>Brielle Boro</td>
<td>GH</td>
<td>GH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monmouth</td>
<td>Freehold Regional</td>
<td>GH</td>
<td>GH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monmouth</td>
<td>Freehold Twp</td>
<td>GH</td>
<td>GH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monmouth</td>
<td>Manalapan-Enlishtown Reg</td>
<td>GH</td>
<td>GH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monmouth</td>
<td>Manasquan Boro</td>
<td>GH</td>
<td>FG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monmouth</td>
<td>Middletown Twp</td>
<td>GH</td>
<td>GH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monmouth</td>
<td>Monmouth Regional</td>
<td>GH</td>
<td>GH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monmouth</td>
<td>Roosevelt Boro</td>
<td>GH</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monmouth</td>
<td>Sea Bright Boro</td>
<td>GH</td>
<td>GH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monmouth</td>
<td>Shore Regional</td>
<td>GH</td>
<td>GH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monmouth</td>
<td>Tinton Falls</td>
<td>GH</td>
<td>GH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monmouth</td>
<td>Upper Freehold Regional</td>
<td>GH</td>
<td>FG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monmouth</td>
<td>Wall Twp</td>
<td>GH</td>
<td>FG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morris</td>
<td>East Hanover Twp</td>
<td>GH</td>
<td>GH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morris</td>
<td>Hanover Park Regional</td>
<td>GH</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morris</td>
<td>Jefferson Twp</td>
<td>GH</td>
<td>GH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morris</td>
<td>Morris Hills Regional</td>
<td>GH</td>
<td>GH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morris</td>
<td>Morris School District</td>
<td>GH</td>
<td>GH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morris</td>
<td>Mount Arlington Boro</td>
<td>GH</td>
<td>FG</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Profiles of the Participants

In order to protect the confidentiality and anonymity of the 21 candidates that agreed to be part of this study (n=21), the participants are not identified by name when referring to emerging themes, as well as to specific answers from the interview questions which are documented and transcribed. Therefore, pseudonyms were chosen to protect their anonymity.

The pseudonyms that were created are partially based on the eight public school districts which granted me permission within this district factor group; i.e., Districts 1 through 8, coupled with the number of principals (8) who responded to me. An example of the pseudonyms is D (for District), the number 1 (chronologically the first district that responded to me), adjoined by P (for Principal), then the number 1 (chronologically the
first, or only, principal from that district who agreed to be interviewed by the researcher); i.e., “D1-P1.”

Categories, by way of figures (five in total), are displayed within this section of the study below and include participants’ age, years in education, years as a principal, years in their current school district, and gender. This particular information was gathered by collecting demographic surveys completed voluntarily by each participant. A sixth figure appears in Chapter IV to exhibit the emergent themes.

Qualitative researchers try to develop a complex picture of the problem or issue under study. A visual model of many facets of a process or a central phenomenon aids in establishing a holistic picture (Creswell, 2014).

Figure 1. Age of participants.
Figure 2. Gender of participants

Figure 3. Total years in education.
As discussed previously, each of the participating principals were assigned a pseudonym, as it applies to their responses from the interviews I conducted. To ensure anonymity, the public school district received a number (one through eight), as well as

---

**Figure 4.** Years as a principal.

**Figure 5.** Years in school district.
each principal from that district having his or her own designated number. However, the public school district name associated with the number assigned was not divulged, nor was the principal himself or herself, based on the pseudonym used in the narratives.

Validity and Reliability

To ensure that the data collected throughout the study were valid and reliable, I adhered to specific steps to verify that validity and reliability had been maintained throughout the study. Previous to this multiple-case study, a panel of experts consisting of principals, who were not participants in the previous case study I am replicating, was selected because of their experience and knowledge.

These principals reviewed and revised the interview questions used in this study to provide the best possible information from the participants. An example of the changes made included working to ensure the anonymity of the participants, as well as ensuring the questions were relevant to the subject matter, including but not limited to any references to generalizing any schools in this district as “urban.” Whereas the current research study includes various suburban public school districts, as opposed to one specific public school district researched previously, whose participants may or may not possess similar viewpoints nor know the identity of one another, ensuring anonymity was paramount.

Creswell (2009) wrote in his book Research Design on qualitative reliability, “The researcher checks for accuracy of the findings,” while on qualitative validity, “The researcher’s approach is consistent across different researchers and different projects” (p. 190). Bogden and Biklen (2007) wrote in their book Qualitative Research for Education, “Qualitative researchers tend to view reliability as a fit between what they record as data and what actually occurs in the setting under study, rather than the
consistency across different observations” (p. 40).

I ensured the validity and reliability throughout this qualitative study by having taken certain steps, as recommended by Creswell (2009). I reviewed all the transcripts and notes taken during the interviews to ensure that any mistake was corrected before proceeding. I then reviewed the coded material to ensure the codes were consistent with the data collected and that there were no alterations amongst the codes or themes established. “Good qualitative research contains comments by the researchers about how their interpretation of the findings is shaped by their background, such as their gender, culture, history, and socioeconomic origin” (Creswell, 209, p. 192).

Data Analysis

The research consists of a qualitative multiple-case study in which the researcher examined the descriptive data, interviews, transcripts, field notes, and demographic data collected throughout this study and compared the data with the review of the literature, as well as the original study this researcher is replicating.

The research sought to answer the research questions presented in Chapter I:

**Research Questions**

1. Do suburban school principals perceive safety threats to come from within the school they operate, or outside of their school?
2. How do suburban school principals in various New Jersey school districts address school safety for the students and faculty?
3. How do suburban school principals perceive the presence, or knowledge of armed personnel, as influencing, or deterring, potential school violence?
4. Do suburban school principals perceive students and faculty to be safer with armed personnel present in the school, or does armed personnel create a threatening environment?

Using the research questions as a basis, coupled with the review of the literature, a School Principals’ Demographic Data Sheet was created. This six-question instrument, not used in the original study, was then implemented as a precursor to the actual field interviews with the principals. Its results allowed me to formulate additional data regarding principals’ perceptions of armed personnel. Ancillary variables such as age, gender, and race were extracted in part with the other answers provided by the principals on the demographic data sheet.
Table 3

**List of Survey Questions: School Principals’ Demographics Sheet**

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Your title is school principal:</td>
<td>Yes ___ No ____</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Your age is:</td>
<td>Response:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Your gender is:</td>
<td>Response:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. How many years do you possess in the area of education?</td>
<td>Response:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. How many years do you possess as a school principal?</td>
<td>Response:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. How many years do you possess within your school district?</td>
<td>Response:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Using the research questions, a series of interview questions were developed for this study, reviewed by a panel of experts who provided input to further this study and then, with permission, utilized to continue to replicate the study as accurately as possible. As a result of the review of the literature and the research questions, the following interview questions were developed for the purpose of this study.
Table 4

List of Interview Questions Developed Based on the Research Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Interview Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Do suburban school principals perceive safety threats to come from within the school they operate, or outside of their school?</td>
<td>1. What are your concerns regarding a student being a victim or perpetrator of a violent act in your school?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. What are your concerns regarding a faculty member being the victim or perpetrator of a violent act in your school?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. What are your concerns with an outsider coming into the school to commit a violent act against a faculty member or student (e.g. parent, etc.) in your school?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. How do suburban school principals in various suburban New Jersey school districts address school safety for the students and faculty?</td>
<td>1. What safety measures have been instituted to provide for a safe school?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. What training has been provided for teachers to protect themselves and their students in the case of a perpetrator committing an act of violence?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. What education has been provided for students to be part of creating a safe environment in school?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Are mental health initiatives part of your strategy to create a safe school?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. How do suburban school principals perceive the presence, or knowledge of armed personnel, as influencing, or deterring, potential school violence?</td>
<td>1. What personnel should be armed, if any?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Does the presence of armed personnel in your school have a positive effect in resolving issues of school violence, or would it escalate the issues of school violence?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. What options are available for a safe school, other than armed personnel?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Do suburban school principals perceive students and faculty to be safer with armed personnel present in the school, or does armed personnel create a threatening environment?</td>
<td>1. Have you received comments from faculty about armed personnel in the school?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Have you received comments from students about armed personnel in the school?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The research was guided by the problem statement described in Chapter I, coupled with the limited information on school shootings and the perceptions of principals on possessing armed personnel in an educational setting (James & McCallion, 2013; Smith & Smith, 2006). This research allowed for an analysis of the data by coding the data and providing comparisons or contrasts with other information provided by the participating principals. A separate analysis was conducted comparing the original study conducted in the City of Paterson, and the school districts who participated in this study, which replicated the 2014 New Jersey District Factor Group A multiple-case study.

Upon recovering data through participants’ interviews, the researcher continued the process of analyzing the data. Creswell (2009) wrote that the process of data analysis begins while the data are being collected, with the researcher beginning to make interpretation of the data. As the data were gathered and analyzed, the researcher began to get a better understanding of the information. “Some qualitative researchers like to think of this as peeling back layers of an onion” (Creswell, 2009, p. 183).

Bogden and Biklen (2007) recommend that analysis of the data should begin in the field, gathering information that will help develop analytical questions and develop appropriate themes for the study. The collected data, interviews, transcripts, and field notes were thoroughly reviewed in preparation for the coding of the data, which resulted in the development of themes and descriptions that assisted the researcher with the interpretation of the information gathered for this study (Creswell, 2009).

I used the meaning of analysis context as the unit of analysis or coding and also description. This study followed the multiple-case study design where the data are analyzed case by case through thematic analysis and later by cross-case analysis (Stake, 2006). Therefore, interviews, documents, and field notes were analyzed for each case.
Following the case-by-case analysis, all themes were used to conduct the cross-case analysis (Stake, 2006). For the thematic analysis, the researcher followed Braun and Clarke’s (2006) step-by-step guidelines.

The authors used the word guidelines to highlight the flexibility of this qualitative analytic method. These guidelines are (1) familiarizing yourself with your data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) The researcher reads through each transcript to immerse in the data, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the report. I utilized this format despite replicating a study from 2014, where original codes were stipulated.

Stake (2006) describes three different cross-case procedures for a multiple-case study. For this qualitative study, I followed “merging findings” procedure. According to Stake, the researcher whose priority is to merge the findings across cases should use this particular method (Stake, 2006).

**Summary**

The research is a qualitative multiple-case study, which includes face-to-face interviews with principals from within a specifically and strategically selected public school district factor group. The data were collected, coded, and analyzed.

An Introduction/Consent letter had been previously sent to all principals who were identified as able to participate in this study, based on permissions received from superintendents who were also solicited. The Introduction/Consent letter explained the research to be conducted, along with its purpose and the estimated amount of time necessary for completing the interview portion of the study.

The Introduction/Consent letter further provided the participants a statement of data confidentiality and assurance of anonymity. Only the principal researcher had
access to the data, which is locked in a secured desk in my office at Felician University.
CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Introduction

The findings of this multiple-case research study are presented within this chapter. Public school principals were interviewed from New Jersey District Factor Group GH, and their answers were collected, coded, and analyzed to provide vital evidence pertaining to their individual perceptions concerning school shootings, as well as armed personnel within schools. Charmaz (2001) describes coding as the critical link between data collection and their explanation of meaning (Saldana, 2013).

Attributive coding was utilized for this research study. Resulting from these interviews, various themes emerged that were relevant to this study. A theme is an outcome of coding, categorization, or analytic reflection, not something that is, in itself, coded (Saldana, 2013).

The themes presented in this study display many strataums that are associated with the perceptions that a principal possesses in regard to armed personnel in his or her school. Creswell (2009) writes, “Qualitative researchers can do much with themes to build additional layers of complex analysis” (p. 189). These themes included elements, based on the principals’ perceptions, which combined to formulate the best environment within an educational setting to procure safety and security, as well as place an emphasis on the foundations and traditions of a positive atmosphere of learning.
Table 5

List of Codes Used in the Research Study—Primary Themes and Sub-Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Sub-Code</th>
<th>Sub-Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AP</td>
<td>Armed Personnel</td>
<td>tea</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>apo</td>
<td>Active Police Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>rpo</td>
<td>Retired Police Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>non</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>adm</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PS</td>
<td>Physical Security</td>
<td>cam</td>
<td>Cameras</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>dls</td>
<td>Door Locks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>buz</td>
<td>Buzzer / Bell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>sec</td>
<td>Security Guard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PP</td>
<td>Policy and</td>
<td>acp</td>
<td>Active Shooter Procedure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Procedures</td>
<td>ldp</td>
<td>Lockdown Procedure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>shp</td>
<td>Shelter in Place Procedure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>smo</td>
<td>Sign in to Main Office Procedure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>drl</td>
<td>Drill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CM</td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>hib</td>
<td>Harassment, Intimidation and Bullying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>pbs</td>
<td>Positive Behavior and Socialization in Schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>beh</td>
<td>Behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>tru</td>
<td>Trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MH</td>
<td>Mental Health</td>
<td>cdt</td>
<td>Current Data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>ssw</td>
<td>School Social Worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>sgc</td>
<td>School Guidance Counselor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>cst</td>
<td>Child Study Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>sac</td>
<td>Substance Abuse Coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CO</td>
<td>Concerns</td>
<td>par</td>
<td>Parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>sub</td>
<td>Substitutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>mhc opd</td>
<td>Mental Health Counseling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>bul</td>
<td>Open Doors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>out</td>
<td>Bullying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Outsider</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
During the interviews conducted of the 21 principals (n=21), who lead the specific public school districts within New Jersey District Factor Group ‘GH’ that participated in this research study, the principals’ responses and perspectives based on their schools’ needs were enlightening and enriching. Their information, experiences, and overall knowledge allowed for a current revelation of their perceptions as they pertain to the safety needs of the staff and students in their schools, coupled with what practices they perceive to best fit the environment in which they are in charge each day of their lives.

Common methods to present themes are based on the unit of analysis. For example, a unit of qualitative measurement could be leadership traits and organized into major patterns (Yin, 2004). In Chapter III, Methodology, this researcher discussed the backgrounds of each participating principal, including but not limited to age, total years employed in education, total years employed within current school district, and years as a school principal.

Within this chapter, I disclose various elements pertaining to the research participants, such as the race and gender of each principal, represented with a pseudonym, as well as any gender and racial differences which appeared within the emerging themes that transpired after the collected data were analyzed. Please note, differences in principals’ perceptions of armed personnel and other responses are not necessarily based on gender and race, nor could I correlate those variables during this study.

Furthermore, this study exhibits an additional parameter in contrast to the previous study I am replicating. The original study, as stated, utilized principals of elementary schools only, which were located in one urban public school district. I chose to solicit school districts possessing high schools and middle schools, as well as elementary schools, all located in suburban public school districts, as stated.
Table 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principal Demographics</th>
<th>Total Number per Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Principals</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Males</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Females</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Over 30 Years Old</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Over 40 Years Old</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Over 50 Years Old</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Over 60 Years Old</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Years in Education (≥ 15)</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Years in District (≥ 10)</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Years as Principal (≥ 5)</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Caucasian Males</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Caucasian Females</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• African-American Males</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• African-American Females</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Hispanic Males</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Hispanic Females</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Other Males</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Other Females</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Emergent Themes

Research Questions

1. Do suburban school principals perceive safety threats to come from within the school they operate, or outside of their school?

2. How do suburban school principals in various New Jersey school districts address school safety for the students and faculty?

3. How do suburban school principals perceive the presence, or knowledge of armed personnel, as influencing, or deterring, potential school violence?

4. Do suburban school principals perceive students and faculty to be safer with armed personnel present in the school, or does armed personnel create a threatening environment?

Figure 6. Emergent themes—Numeric responses.
Based on the responses from the interview questions directed at the principals, the research study identified six emergent themes. Of the 21 interviews conducted, Policy and Procedures was identified as the number one issue relevant to school shootings and safety, as well as what may be considered in this multiple-case study the primary component necessary to maintain a safe and secure learning environment. The school principals referenced this crucial theme 212 times.

Armed Personnel, was referenced 189 times, following Policy and Procedures as the second most dominant theme which emerged during the research study. Other Concerns and Physical Security followed sequentially and were referenced 141 times and 129 times, respectively. Consecutive to these themes was Mental Health, which was referenced 84 times. Communication, which concluded the main themes, emerged the least, yet was referenced 46 times.

![Figure 7. Previous emergent themes–Numeric responses.](image)

As compared to the original study relevant to school shootings and principals’ perceptions of armed personnel conducted in 2014 within one large urban public school
district categorized within New Jersey District Factor Group A, the previous research identified Communication as the number one issue from 12 interviews conducted. Communication, referenced 57 times by those school principals, was recognized as the most important issue in regard to the safety of their students and faculty. Communication was followed by Policy and Procedures, which was referenced 42 times. Physical Security and Concerns were referenced 27 times. Armed Personnel was referenced 24 times, and Mental Health followed, being referenced 23 times (Reyes, 2014).

Throughout each interview for this multiple-case study, the principals reverted to their policy and procedures to highlight the degree of significance that they place on the safety and security of their students and faculty. Policy and Procedures became the primary emergent theme on which they concentrated when answering questions about their faculty and students, as each related to the central focus of this study. Their answers concerning having armed personnel in their schools, or not, were also clear and decisive.

As I conveyed previously in my efforts to procure the confidentiality and anonymity amongst the participants within this study, pseudonyms were utilized. Each pseudonym was created to represent each of the eight public school districts, as well as each of the 21 principals who participated; and when combined, a unique pseudonym was formulated in which only the researcher can identify the code representing the research participant.
Conversely, each district represented contains a different amount of principals who participated, whereas not every school within each district participated, which also allows for the maintenance of anonymity. I did not abbreviate any particular school’s name, using an acronym for its actual title, within any specific district, nor did I use abbreviations of names of principals. Coding is the process of organizing the material into chunks or segments of text and assigning a word or phrase to the segment in order to develop a general sense of it (Creswell, 2014).

Nonetheless, due to the genre of the narrative stemming from this type of research, the procedures I used were effective. I speak of hand coding. Hand coding is a laborious and time-consuming process, even for data from a few individuals (Creswell, 2014).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Sub-Theme</th>
<th>Sub-Code</th>
<th>Number of Participating Districts/Principals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>District</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>D1; D2; D3; D4; D5; D6; D7; D8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(n=21)</td>
<td></td>
<td>P1; P2; P3; P4; P5; P6; P7; P8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 8

List of Codes Used in the Research—Personnel Codes, Race, and Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Race/Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>D1-P1</td>
<td>Caucasian/F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D1-P2</td>
<td>Caucasian/M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D1-P3</td>
<td>African-American/M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D1-P4</td>
<td>African-American/M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D1-P5</td>
<td>African-American/M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D1-P6</td>
<td>Caucasian/F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D1-P7</td>
<td>Caucasian/M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D1-P8</td>
<td>Hispanic/M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D2-P1</td>
<td>Caucasian/M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D2-P2</td>
<td>Caucasian/M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D3</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D4-P1</td>
<td>Hispanic/M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D5-P1</td>
<td>African-American/M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D5-P2</td>
<td>Caucasian/M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D5-P3</td>
<td>Asian/F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D6-P1</td>
<td>Caucasian/F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D6-P2</td>
<td>Caucasian/F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D6-P3</td>
<td>Caucasian/M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D6-P4</td>
<td>Caucasian/F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D7-P1</td>
<td>Caucasian/M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D7-P2</td>
<td>Caucasian/M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D8-P1</td>
<td>Caucasian/M</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Policy and Procedures

The uniting theme of all the principals in this research study is the policy and procedures of their public school districts and New Jersey Department of Education. Each principal was unwavering about the staff and students being prepared by conducting active shooter drills, lockdown drills, and shelter in place drills, bomb drills, and fire drills. D1-P1 stated about her staff preparation, “Sometimes I’ll pull a teacher and say, okay call a lockdown, or I’ll call an aide, or I’ll call a cafeteria worker, call an active shooter drill, call from here, call from there; call from wherever” (February 22, 2016).

D1-P1 further identified a fact all teachers have to be cognitive about during a drill, which is to prepare the faculty to react in the event of an actual incident. “And so we tried all different ways and all different people, and we have drills at lunchtime, and drills when it’s not convenient, and drills in the rain. I have people that are not happy about that” (February 22, 2016).

D1-P2 echoed the sentiment that all the principals said about their staff, “We do that, you know, once a month we have to by law, it’s a statute that we conduct lockdown drills. So there’s a variety of situations. They’re defined for lockdowns; but here, and I figure I can speak for the rest; we take every lockdown as a lockdown in which it’s extremely serious. The kids are well practiced at what they’re doing. The teachers know exactly what they’re doing; and, you know, no room is cleared until I, the principal, walk in and clear that room. I do that for every area, so that’s one” (February 23, 2016)

D1-P8 also echoed the sentiment. “And where we’re located, we tend to have a lot of foot traffic. So we want to make sure that our kids are always safe, so it’s a serious concern. We have safety drills in place. We have tabletop procedures where the police are
involved. And recently, we had NBC News come to our school – I think it was maybe two years ago, doing safety checks on different schools. And we passed with flying colors” (March 15, 2016).

Another principal, D2-P2 addressed the importance of not only his faculty and students being prepared for the designated and described drills, but also safeguarding that the security personnel are properly trained and comprehend their responsibility. D2-P2 said, “I'm pretty confident with our procedures in place because our school resource officer also works for the Department of Homeland Security under the Department of Education. Actually, he worked for the Department of Education under the Department of Homeland Security. He is the one that actually was part of the team that would go out into the state and monitor the drills. So, he would walk in with the state police. They would call lockdown. He would observe and then they would debrief with the superintendent and principal of those districts. So, we have the benefit of all of that knowledge. You know, he worked on writing those plans for the state and then observing them in practice, so I'm pretty confident that we're in good shape” (March 11, 2016).

D5-P1 emphasized the importance of procedures to provide safety. “Every year, there's just a reminder, or refresher course, during the opening faculty meetings, district-wide or usually just building-wide, where you go over the emergency response plan, whether it's what to do for fire drills, or evacuating the building, or what to do in the case of an intruder when there's a lockdown. So, at the beginning of the year that's covered and then two times a month we go through drills. So, throughout the year you're constantly reminded of what to do in case of one of these situations” (March 2, 2016).

The principals emphasized the significance of possessing the knowledge of who wants
to enter their building and for what reason. D6-P4 explained how she articulates this in her school. “We have the protocol of they have to state their business, state if they have an appointment, and we confirm whether or not they have an appointment. We have the staff members; if anyone is coming to visit, they have to let us know. If the staff member has a visitor coming for them. For a conference or anything, they have to give us their schedules so we know who to let in the building. The most liberal that we are is parents dropping off lunches. But, we usually—we always know who they are. If we don’t know who they are, we ask why are you here? Who are you here for? What do you have? What’s your business here? By now we know all the people who drop stuff off. Every once in a blue moon, an aunt will come by and we’ll sort of drill them until we feel comfortable” (March 11, 2016).

The process of having all persons sign in before entering the building is a policy that has been followed by all principals and their security staff. The significance of policy and procedures cannot be understated, and the principals interviewed were adamant about the importance of following the drills and conducting their safety plans. However, the most important issue that arose from the interviews regarding policy and procedures came from instances that had actually occurred, where outsiders attempted to enter the building.

Many principals interviewed identified having a security guard at the front door as crucial to school safety. D1-P5 explained, “We also have in place an hourly door check for the security personnel. He has to go to, him or the head custodian, will go and check each door on an hourly basis; and they have to write it down what doors are left ajar if there are any or if there is anything that's broken. In the morning, the security guard does a perimeter check” (March 4, 2016).

D7-P1, similar to other principals interviewed, identified the importance of having all
exterior doors monitored and the challenges that accompany that. “We also have greeters who are at the desk. They sign everybody in and out. We have only two entrances open. We have 36 exterior entrances and exits in this place so we only have two of them that are open. The rest are locked. So, we have four greeters actually, so they split the day. We have two security guards. We don't really call them guards—security personnel that walk through the building all day long. They escort kids back and forth. If we need to bring somebody out of class, we'll call them with their radios and we have full, you know, our radios are fully—everybody in the building that has got any kind of administration or [is] responsible for safety has got a radio. Custodians, we make sure everybody communicates when they need to communicate; and if something happens, you know, you've got five people there in an instant” (March 14, 2016).

D1-P3 explained the daily procedure in his school, and at this time is available to all the schools in his district. D1-P3 stated, “We have a lot of workers that come in and out of the building. Vendors and custodians. We go out there and meet them or whatever the case may be. So when we do have people who are unfamiliar, they could very easily infiltrate any kind of building by using a simple I’m here for my child, or I’m here to drop something off. But we have to take necessary measures to make sure we’re not just inviting someone into this environment that could in fact mean someone harm or not be here for the purpose that they’ve identified. We actually did take some additional measures with our current superintendent. He made sure we all had passkeys. All staff members were to have passkeys to enter the buildings. So we no longer have to necessarily buzz in staff throughout the course of the day. And what was happening is you would leave a door unlocked in the mornings so the staff can constantly come in, or whatever, or staff would keep a door ajar or jimmy a door to some degree to make sure that it stayed open. Now, the need for that is no longer. We have three
doors, four doors actually that can be accessed through the staff’s passkeys” (March 2, 2016).

D5-P2, in similar fashion, explained, “We have the bell system and we have the intercom in the office for when a visitor comes to the door. They ring the bell. There’s a camera and whoever answers the phone asks who it is and asks them if they’re not already in front of the camera to step in front of the camera so that we know who—we can identify the person before letting them in” (March 9, 2016).

The principals interviewed experienced satisfaction in the vigilance through their policy and procedures. Most principals acknowledged all, and implemented within the scope of their authority, additional policies that allowed each of them to advance the security of their school, specifically regarding identification upon admittance into the school.

**Armed Personnel**

The participants for this study, principals of public schools within New Jersey District Factor Group GH, were all informed of the title of the study, K-12 and the Active Shooter: Principals’ Perceptions of Armed Personnel in New Jersey District Factor Group GH, as well as all additional parameters of the study. Categorically, these educational settings in district factor group GH are designated as such when identified as being primarily suburban environments with low crime and higher socioeconomic status. However, most of the 21 principals paused temporarily when asked, “What personnel should be armed, if any?”

D5-P3 paused, thought about the question and stated, “No portion of the personnel should be armed. We don’t want to live in fear. Our children will feel they need to rely on gun safety; it’s about education. And I believe it would have a more negative effect overall and would send a different kind of message” (March 17, 2016).
D1-P5 simply said, “None. I think it would have a negative effect. I think it has a negative connotation to it, and I don't necessarily worry about the connotation. I worry about the safety of the personnel with the gun or with the weapon. What if that weapon is taken off that person? What if that person isn't 100% stable, you know, gets mad and decides to go off and they have access to everybody and everything in this building?” (March 4, 2016).

D5-P2 said, “I would say no one. I don’t think any school personnel should be armed. If I could elaborate or if we were going to have armed personnel in the school, I would only want it to be a police officer.” (March 9, 2016).

D2-P2, when asked who should be armed, answered, “I believe there should be someone armed. It does make a statement when I walk into my daughter’s school. She’s in middle school” (March 11, 2016).

D4-P1 voiced his perception of armed personnel whereas he stated, “I think if you had some kind of SRO or any kind of Resource Officer, maybe them. I don't think any school personnel should ever be armed. Not even the administrator. There's too many things that can go wrong with that. That's just my personal feeling” (March 8, 2016).

From the total sample population, 17 of the 21 participants believed only a police officer, or a retired police officer, should be allowed to be armed in their school. One principal, D6-P1, was adamant that at this time, having any person in a school carrying a weapon is vital. D6-P1 said, “I'm all for armed personnel, including a principal, if need be. Obviously a full-time cop would be a perfect scenario, and I definitely think it would have a positive effect. I believe security without a weapon is a waste” (March 3, 2016).

Another Principal, D2-P2, said he felt comfortable with an administrator being armed with a firearm for security reasons. “I'd really like to talk about my view of a principal being able
to carry. I've had many discussions with the police department on this because as a principal, you know, you really feel responsible. I have little ones here. I mean, I have three-year-olds in preschool and I go up to nine-year-olds. So, when you think of it, I feel responsible. I have 400 kids and 100 staff members because, you know, with the little ones we have a lot of aides, and then I have my lunch aides, my recess aides, my people in my cafeteria that are cooking. I feel very responsible” (March 11, 2016).

When the question came up of whether having armed personnel in a school is a positive or negative, 17 of the 21 principals found that it would be a positive experience, reminding the researcher that the armed personnel would be a police officer or retired police officer. One principal, D6-P3, said “I don’t want to ever carry a gun, that’s not me, that’s not my thing” (March 9, 2016).

D7-P1 enforced his perspective for having armed police officers or retired police officers in schools: “Well, No. 1, we have an SRO. That's the No. 1 safety factor. Full time. I guess we brought him in about eight years ago. We split the cost. The Board of Education pays half his salary and the police department pays half his salary. It's a real good deal and he's been—to me, he's another—we have five administrators here and to me, he's the sixth administrator. We got the right person. You have to have the right person and that's our number one thing. What comes with that, which people don't realize, is the fact that he's walking around in full uniform, armed. You know, we don't —this is really a good school. It's a calm school. Kids are respectful. It's that kind of place, you know. It could easily go in the other direction if we let it happen. We’re on top of it. I have two assistant principals who basically take care of all the discipline and everything. They're on top of it, you know. We don't put up with anything and you're kind of like, okay, but kids all know and it's a respectful community. We don't have a lot of problems
but having him in the building and having him armed—the extra thing that we get. We've had incidents. We've had things that have happened. If we need police right away, he's like that. He's right on his little radio, which is right on his shoulder. He calls for help. We have police—we have seven or eight cars here in 30 seconds. It's unbelievable. We have a great relationship with our police department and part of it is through the SRO but it's also our attitude here. The principal before me, she didn't like them. With our SRO here, we have even—it's just quicker communication. I don't have to pick up a phone. He just—Mark, boom, he radios. He calls and everybody is here” (March 14, 2016).

D1-P1 found that police officers and retired police officers are positive for the school. “You would not want me armed and I can't get the safe open if they wanted the principal armed. I wish we had like a retired police officer who is trained to know when and how to protect people. I went to school to be a teacher; I am not trained in the psychology or the use of a weapon. This is not something I can learn now. I absolutely would want armed personnel here. If it got to where teacher needs to be armed, then the student is seeing a teacher as what? You would then have two roles. Are you a police officer, or are you my teacher, or are you a cop?” (February 22, 2016).

Conversely, D1-P2 was clear in his stance, “I don't want armed personnel in the building, but I do want to be working in concert with law enforcement. I am not convinced yet that armed personnel is going to be the solution to violence inside the schools by being assigned in the schools. So many factors that come to play in the tragedies is the speed at which they unfold and the unpredictability they unfold in, the general nature they fall into place and where in the context of America as a principal before bringing armed personnel into a school. What does that say and tell the children?” (February 23, 2016).
D1-P4 added, “We have an SRO, and he is a great resource that allows for the presence to be like a faculty member; and he’s an everyday fabric of our school. We eventually may need personnel to be armed and him regarding the teachers and administrators would be a tough call to sell. Times have changed. I am happy to see an armed presence because it goes over well. SRO is trained. There’s always a stigma of violence, but having a full-time SRO allows a chance of saving more people. After the shooting occurred [Sandy Hook Elementary, December 14, 2012], there were a lot of meetings that occurred because of safety and fear. They [faculty] are in favor of armed security in the school; 90% were in favor of armed security in the school. So, yeah, it’s a priority. Having an armed police officer, an SRO, I would not want to ever change that. That is a perception of safety which I would not want to let go of, and also I think in many respects it's a deterrent to perhaps the sick students that would think of a senseless act, you know, to know that that's in the building and there's a chance that they could be thwarted” (March 3, 2016).

D1-P8 found police officers and retired police officers as positive. However, he added, “So I think just having the—honestly thinking about this, I really haven't thought about it in a while, but I would say that having a police presence, having one of these auxiliary cops in place might be the way to go. Unarmed, yeah, would certainly be helpful.” (March 15, 2016).

By majority, the principals interviewed found that having armed personnel in an educational setting is acceptable as long as the armed personnel are either police officers or retired police officers. Several principals did not want any presence of armed personnel at any time, other than responding to an emergency at the school. Many principals previously possessed armed personnel during their tenure as a principal within their school; yet due to budgetary constraints, they are no longer are afforded this resource.
Concerns

As mentioned earlier, although the title of the study is *K-12 and the Active Shooter: Principals’ Perceptions of Armed Personnel in New Jersey District Factor Group GH*, the school principals interviewed by this researcher found a large concern was not an outside active shooter like Adam Lanza, who killed young children and teachers at the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting on December 14, 2012, in Newtown, Connecticut, (Barron, 2012). Nor was it a large concern regarding the probability of an inside active shooter like Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris, the student shooters from Columbine High School (Cullen, 2009). A top concern pertaining to the safety and security of their students, teachers, and staff were the parents of their students assigned to the schools they lead.

D6-P2 commented on this concern: “There have been cases where I’m worried about a parent; I take extra precautions. For example, I had a father whose son was accused of being a bully and when we met, the child—it came out that he wasn’t a bully—but when we met, he wanted a meeting afterwards and he was screaming and pointing in my face and I ended the meeting and I was fearful in that meeting. He was ridiculous, but like I told my secretary, if he comes to the school, I will not meet with him” (March 3, 2016).

To clearly depict other major concerns of principals regarding parents of students, one of the principals, D1-P1, emphasized specific criteria when speaking of an incident in the school: “Well, we actually did have an incident where it was a parent that came in, and the parent happened to have a job working in one of the prisons. So the parent had a right to come to the school. The parent came into the school, and the parent was very angry about something that had occurred. That situation could have gone south very, very quickly. He came in to get his son; he came in and he was in uniform, obviously armed and very angry. Fortunately, law
enforcement was also here, for another reason, and was able to competently de-escalate the situation. But it could have been a situation that ended very, very poorly; and here was a person who technically had a reason to be here because he does have a child in the building” (February 22, 2016).

The principals that were interviewed also addressed their additional concerns with the bullying aspect within the school. **D4-P1** expressed the concerns for bullying, in this fashion: “My first year ever as an administrator was the first year that the anti-bullying law came out. So, my first year I did 80 cases of bullying. I was a vice principal—I mean, all vice principals are made anti-bullying specialists. So, when the law came out in 2011, people were so afraid of anything that was bullying. Nobody wanted to get sued so you said the word bullying you had to investigate it. It's like an incident form has to be filled out. Filled out and then I had to investigate the kids. That was the worst phone call to the parents. I mean, can you imagine calling a third grader's parents and saying, oh my gosh, your child has been accused of bullying. No, I can see the conflicts all the time. It's been going down. I mean, the biggest thing about that is educating the parents that not everything is bullying. Some of it is conflict. But that doesn't mean bullying doesn’t exist, but it's a lot of education with that. So, now we're down to—I mean, we have a small school here but even in my last few years in the bigger school districts, by the third year of the law we were down to like maybe a quarter of those cases, maybe 20 in the year. The teachers too—a lot of them were scared to—when they heard the word bully, they just filled out the form and gave it to you” (March 8, 2016).

**D1-P3** expressed his personal concerns with extreme emotion: “My concerns? Well, as a building leader, I feel that parents have entrusted the safety of their children to me. So I want to make sure I do everything I can to, basically, uphold that responsibility. I wouldn’t want any of
my children to be a victim, and for that matter, even a perpetrator in any type of violent act. Again, I take very seriously my role in protecting, basically, our world’s most prized possession, which is our children. So I want them to feel safe and comfortable when they come to school, and part of that safety is making sure that they’re not victimized in any way, shape, or form, especially to be victimized in a violent act.

I mean, honestly, every component of the school community I feel the same for.

I feel partially responsible if not completely responsible for their safety. So would that be the case; now, granted when we start talking about a faculty member, we’re discussing grown adults. However, they’re still within the comfort of this building or still within what I would consider my home away from home. So just the same as you’re welcoming friends and family to your house—you don’t want them to be victimized. It’s the same type of feeling here. I feel responsible for their safety and their well-being here and want to make sure that everything is where it needs to be to be sure that that is upheld” (March 2, 2016).

Physical Security

When the principals were interviewed for this study, each was asked about the safety of their school, students, and faculty, as well as in what areas they needed to ensure school safety. One topic that was prodigious was physical security, which included security guards, surveillance cameras, doors and their locks, and a buzzer or bell for the front entrance.

The research interview question asked, “What options are available for a safe and secure school other than armed personnel?” D2-P2, in answering this question said, “We're fortunate to have metal doors, metal doorframes . . . steel doorframes and we have the magnets so every door is locked at all times. All the teacher has to do—you don't have to fumble for a key. Just slide the magnet. And now we're in the process of—these shades are a nightmare and we haven't
found a shade that works effectively. They keep breaking and we're spending all kinds of money, so what we've moved to now and we just ordered but not installed yet. They will—not my door—my door is a little different; every classroom door they will frost from here down so you will not be able to see in at all. We have one I can show you before you leave. Then from here up it's just a piece of heavy duty black canvas or felt that has a snap so it snaps up so you just snap and let it go. So, no more rolling the shades because they're all breaking” (March 11, 2016).

All the principals interviewed in this study were very serious and concerned with the physical security of their schools. D5-P3 said, “We have a card system to access the building. If someone got access to the key card I could deactivate the whole building with my master key card. We have surveillance; we were given a grant to update all cameras we try to educate the parents” (March 17, 2016).

Another area where principals expressed concern was the ability to have a surveillance system in their school. D4-P1 said, “Well, what we're looking towards right now—we only have one camera and it doesn’t even archive. This is my first year here so that's something we're addressing over the summer in our budget—to make sure there's cameras throughout the building and even internally. The problem with cameras too is it's more just, like I said; it's almost like a false sense of security for families because I mean the police can tap into it. So, if there were a hostage situation or something of that nature, they could use it to identify; but the problem is with these shootings, they're so quick. They're not sitting there for hours holding anybody hostage or sitting there blowing people away. So, I mean, the community wants the cameras and I understand why but it's, again, it's kind of like a false sense of security. It helps us immediately identify people who want to come in but I think if someone wants to come in with bad intentions,
they're going to come in regardless. So, we're addressing that. We're also addressing some of the PA systems to make sure that if we call—we have pretty big grounds here. You know, we're rural. So, we make sure our PA systems can reach everybody, especially when the kids are outside for recess. We do have to do a reverse evacuation and bring the kids in or lockdown to make sure the kids come in so they can hear it. We're exploring those lights that show up too, like some of those blue lights that kind of if they went off, the police would know that there's something going on. Even a panic button has been brought up. Then the capability for our teachers to be able to call a lockdown because right now they're not able to. Only I could. So, if something were to happen to me, nobody else could call lockdown” (March 8, 2016).

Regarding additional security options, as well as the recognition of an imperfect situation, D6-P2 mentioned, “They've added some kind of a shield, like a bullet proof—you know what I mean? They've reinforced the glass in the front. After that terrible shooting in Connecticut, they reinforced the glass in the front vestibule there. The camera systems are all new. All of the schools have like—we have like a monitor now where—like this incident that I told you about with this lady, that whole thing we can see it on film. You can see it on film, but what else? The doors are locked. The doors are manned. As best as we can, people are not allowed in the school; but the problem is sometimes at dismissal, and at arrival” (March 3, 2016).

Another issue that brought concern to the school principals was money allotted for security in their school. D7-P2 noted, “It would be nice to be able to have a double entry system with somebody who is set at the second door checking IDs. I know a couple of years ago, I read about a school in Chicago. They actually have a police scanner system so that they take the ID through like a bank teller window. They run it through the scanner. It runs through the police records and it identifies whether or not they have a criminal record or anything. I think it was
something like $700,000 a year to operate. That’s a pipe dream; but if there were some type of capability where we could have that double-entry system with bulletproof glass, where we could be able to identify through their identification whether or not there’s a record on them or at least keep a record of them in the building so that should anything happen, we know who that perpetrator or the aggressor is. I would also love to be able to alarm every set of doors that we have in the building. Again . . . it would be multiple purpose. One is you know that if it’s left open, that the alarm is going on so you know the door is open, but we also have a large autism population in the building. So if we do have somebody who flees and gets out a door, we now know where they left from. So I think that for something like alarming all of the doors, that would be a multiple benefit” (March 15, 2016).

All of the principals interviewed placed great importance on the proper physical security in the schools and that it is modernized. Throughout the interviews, the principals spoke of physical security as a top priority for the security and safety of the students and faculty, whereas this theme was third in “most emerged.”

Mental Health

As part of the research, the principals were asked, “Are mental health initiatives part of your strategy to create a safe school environment?” Some of the principals were very candid when addressing this sensitive issue, yet added to the study with their responses.

D5-P1 answered, “Yes, so our student assistance counselor is key to all the, you know, when we’re trying to look at mental health, she definitely pairs up with our school psychologist and our school counselors. We work with a group that’s called the Municipal Alliance. It is a group that comes in and provides support money for different types of funding and it’s made up of the police department, different businesses in town, and other mental health associations and
merchants that come in; and the primary goal is healthy choices, anti-drugs, healthy alternatives for teens” (March 2, 2016).

Although mental health initiatives were not identified by the principals, or by the NJDOE, as a part of policy or procedures of the school districts, this study has identified the school principals’ use of the school child study team, school psychologist, school substance abuse coordinator (SAC) and guidance counselors to address student behavioral problems.

D5-P3, during her interview, answered the question in this manner: “Not aware of any other mental health initiatives. But, we have a child study team; we also have an intervention and referral services committee concerned with behavior and academics in the wind. Yesterday we had a child who said, “I want to kill myself,” so we had a counselor meet with the kids, call families. The child was in therapy and our counselors are on top of it. In the school our youngest are three and oldest are eight. Only our most severe behavioral problems get the child study team for evaluation” (March 17, 2016).

Another principal, D5-P2, added: “Since we’re an elementary school, through our special services and our programs for special needs students, the process allows for us to identify students who might have emotional needs. It starts from before students are accepted into our special services program. We have a program where we can identify students who we feel are at risk. It’s not only the academic side; it’s the behavioral side and the emotional side, so that we can identify students who we feel have, maybe, anger issues. I think at our level it really—a common phrase, I think, with students that are having behavioral issues, it’s kind of phrased in a way where they’re identified as having anger management concerns. More often than not, that’s where it is, and we provide counseling for those concerns. But every once in a while, you come across a student who may be—we’re a little bit more concerned than just the basic counseling,
and we feel there’s more of a need for deeper counseling and outside counseling, in which case we’d consult with the parents, have meetings with the parents to talk about our concerns; and it needs to be stepped up to another level of counseling and therapy in order to avoid any violent issues in school” (March 9, 2016).

D7-P2 went on to add to this subject: “As far as the emotional piece, I think that that’s a tough piece to do. You hope that your child study teams are expert enough in their field that they can turnkey what to look for, what the signs are and we do have them talk about it, not in terms of this is the type of behavior that we would see in somebody who’s going to do this, but what are the signs of depression, what are the signs of mental illness, what are the signs of anxiety, what are the signs of—so that at least staff is aware that, hey, there’s a kid who’s having some type of an issue to turn around and turnkey that” (March 15, 2016).

D6-P1 explained the resources she can utilize if a mental health concern arises, which she feels is very realistic: “We have a flight team assembled. So if there is a crisis, the flight team consists of people who are trained in crisis response and specifically attending to the social and emotional needs of the school community during a crisis. In terms of mental health to prevent problems or identify problems, we just this year—and it was such a wonderful gift to our school district hired a guidance counselor at the elementary level. And I felt that was really, really critical because we know the kids who are troubled or the kids who were demonstrating those risk factors or indicators that they might become disengaged with the school community, if they have social difficulties, if they—some of them start to show signs of it when they’re quite young and when you have a guidance counselor who can intervene, perhaps you can help the child or at
least you can alert the adults in the community that this is a child who needs supervision” (March 3, 2016).

D1-P8 immediately addressed this issue prior to the actual question being asked, as it pertains to mental health initiatives: “Well, certainly, I mean, we want to make sure that all of our staff certainly are well balanced and certainly are not unhinged, in that we want to make sure that they are at the top of their game when they're interacting with our kids. So I think certainly ensuring that there are procedures in place to be able to identify these types of situations if they should ever arise. And just to be able to provide support in the event that a teacher does experience a loss or has somehow become unhinged. Some sort of an employee assistance program I think would be something that the district should offer school districts. And I know that we offer that in the private sector but not so much in education. So with children it's another story. I mean, we're very limited in terms of what we can require our kids to have when they come to us. There have been instances where we have had children go out of our school for psych evaluations because they presented restive behaviors. And so we take that very seriously. And when we send children out, when we send students out, they are not allowed to return until they have been cleared medically” (March 15, 2016).

All principals understood the importance of mental health intervention with students and faculty, as well as using any and all of their available resources to address any behavioral problems.

Communication

Throughout the interviews, principals referred to being able to communicate with the students and faculty to create a safer educational environment and to provide guidance for students to communicate with their parents. The school principals explained that students
and faculty members were able to cultivate a dialogue vital to building trust between the students and faculty members. The importance of communication in the building of trust between the administration and faculty was a focus as well. The principals recognized the importance of trust between faculty and students in keeping a safe and secure school.

D8-P1 explained, “Yeah, so we try to make sure that the assistant principal and I have a really good grip on the kids. You know, as for a big school I will brag about us. We really have a good relationship. Well, we have a really good relationship with the kids, you know. We have 600 kids and I would say I probably know 450 of them. I can see their faces and say hello and talk to them and, you know, I just saw another girl today, "Hey, Molly." "You know my name?" I said, "Molly, I've known your name since September." "Wow!" Yeah, that means a lot to these kids” (March 11, 2016).

D7-P1 added to this point and explained the importance of trust between the faculty and students, “You know, we don't—this is really a good school. It's a calm school. Kids are respectful. It's that kind of place, you know. It could easily go in the other direction if we let it happen. We're on top of it. I have two assistant principals who basically take care of all the discipline and everything. They're on top of it, you know. We don't put up with anything and you're kind of like, okay, but kids all know and it's a respectful community” (March 14, 2016).

Student trust is a major component in creating a safe educational environment. The sentiments of the teachers were similar in the area of trust between faculty and students.

D1-P4 expressed this as follows: “Now, the only problem with that is, you know, if we could've done it outside before you walk through the door that's probably more safe, but we still are a school and it is also important for my students to understand that humanity does exist.
Through all this, you know, this confusion and this violence and these protests and all the things that go on in society that they have in social media that are embodying what the kids are made up of now. You know, this is what they take in. I still need to send a message that—and that's why Ms. Doris is coming in. You see, Ms. Doris, Ms. Doris has a friendly word for you. It's a hello. Even though we're still going to check you out and we're still going to take your license and we're still going to make sure and if you don't have it, we're going to call security. We want our kids to understand that there is still humanity involved and I think that's important because I love my job and one of the things is I have the best commodity in the world. I have the future. Kids are the future, dude, and if I can't get this group of mountaineers to understand—hey, you know what? Even with all this, you still got to be a little cool. So, you still got to, you know, because there's too many positive people that you're going to encounter that you want to be decent with . . . So, there's a lot to it and, I mean, it all comes into play in how we do our business” (March 3, 2016).

The principals further emphasized the importance of training and education for both staff and students. They were clear in their understanding that identifying behavior that may be of concern was not easily identifiable, but could be learned.

D1-P6 went further into the need to identify behavior that may require an intervention: “I said we're very good with that knowing, as long as the parents let us know, and usually they're very good to say, this is what's going on. So we're careful with that, with anybody trying to get in. You know, if somebody wants to get in, they're going to get in. And it's just—you know your hotspots and do they concern me? Yes, but that's where you tell staff members all the time, you have to just watch” (March 9, 2016).
Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine the dilemmas principals encounter when determining the approach in their efforts and duties in providing a safe environment for their students and faculty, while simultaneously creating an environment that is conducive to education. The study interviewed 21 principals from various elementary, middle, and high schools, ranging from grades kindergarten to 12th grade.

The interviews were conducted to identify themes that would promote the understanding of the principals’ perceptions on school shootings and the concept of having armed personnel in a school setting. This research study’s total sample population was comprised of 15 male principals, and six female principals, all of whom lead public schools within New Jersey District Factor Group GH, as well as being in assigned districts that are considered geographically suburban in nature. Furthermore, from the male principal population, there were nine Caucasian principals, four African-American principals, and two Hispanic principals. The female principal population was comprised of five Caucasian principals, and one Asian principal.

The interviews conducted with the principals within this research study allowed for the spawning of six emergent themes developed to further the study: (1) policy and procedures, (2) armed personnel, (3) concerns, (4) physical security, (5) mental health, and (6) communication. Of the six themes identified by the principals for this study, the number one theme every principal identified with in providing a safe and secure environment for the students and faculty was Policy and Procedures.

Furthermore, all 21 principals, 15 males and 6 females in total, agreed based on the thematic analysis, that Policies and Procedures was the primary factor that could contribute
towards a safer and more secure school, as well as eventually lead to, if not already exhibited, a better trained faculty and staff and better equipped student population.

The principals identified the knowledge and practicing of policies and procedures on active shooter, lockdown procedures, shelter in place, fire drills, and bomb threats, as valuable tools in providing a safe and secure environment for the students and faculty, on all levels of education pertaining to this study, kindergarten to 12th grade. All principals interviewed further included procedures on the concept of allowing outside personnel into the schools that would control and identify all persons systematically and securely in an attempt to prevent, combat, and control school violence, specifically a shooting on school grounds.

This research focused on school shootings and principals’ perceptions on having armed personnel in schools. The subject of armed personnel was a dominant factor during the interviews, specifically due to the fact that it was a central phenomenon that stood as a focal point in the interview questions. Most principals identified only police officers and retired police officers in a positive light in regard to armed personnel in the schools. Specifically, six of the 21 principals felt that no person should be armed in any school. This included two female principals, each of differing race, and four male principals, each of a different race.

The principals identified physical security of the school as a major component in keeping the students and faculty safe and secure. Physical security of the building, specifically door locks and buzzers/bells, became a recurring theme in the interviews that would provide a safer environment for school students. The entire total sample population (21) endorsed the current physical security they possess and would welcome even more, if budgetary constraints did not exist.
Of the emergent themes identified in this study, communication with the students and faculty was the least prominent of all, despite the need to have effective communication when adhering to the implementation of Policy and Procedures. Nonetheless, all 21 principals identified the importance of having open communication between the students and faculty, as well as between faculty members and the administration.

The principals further identified the importance of being able to identify the behavior of the students and faculty members who needed assistance and the importance of having training to develop the skill to identify behavioral cues of troubled students or faculty. Specifically, all four African-American male principals who participated strongly agreed with the identification of emotionally disturbed children or troubled youth.

Another emergent theme that was revealed in this study was the mental health aspect. The principals interviewed identified school personnel such as the guidance counselors as a major school resource regarding mental health. Although the principals admitted needing access to mental health professionals to be able to deal with identified behavioral problems, they have been resourceful to use the personnel available to refer and assist students with behavioral problems. Ten of the participating principals possess their own in-house child study team (on premises), who are educated and skilled specifically in regard to identifying mental health issues in students.
Finally, all principals identified their concerns regarding a safe and secure educational environment. All principals interviewed acknowledged that anything could happen virtually at any time. Some of the principals believe the probability is extremely low for something violent to occur in their public school, specifically three male principals, all of which were Caucasian and over the age of 40. Each felt his or her school was so safe that a school shooting was perhaps unfathomable.

Nonetheless, most principals, specifically 16 of the participants, identified parents as their major concern when providing a safe and secure environment. Additional outsiders (non-parents)
were the other area of concern for the remaining five principals, based on personal experience in their schools.

Table 10

*Average Age: Racial Breakdown*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age C</th>
<th>Age AA</th>
<th>Age H</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>51.7</td>
<td>43.8</td>
<td>42.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Endorsed Armed Personnel: Race*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>AA</th>
<th>H</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>85.7%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AA</td>
<td>60.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Average Age: Gender Who Endorsed Armed Personnel*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age/Gen-F/EAP</th>
<th>Age/Gen-M/EAP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52.5</td>
<td>47.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49.0</td>
<td>44.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Last, six principals vehemently did not want any armed personnel to be present in their public schools. Of the six interviewed who did not support armed personnel in schools, two were female principals, one Caucasian female and one Asian female.

Eleven male principals endorsed the concept of armed personnel within their schools. Out of the four males who did not support the idea of equipping their schools with armed personnel, two were Hispanic, one was African-American, and one was Caucasian. Based on this information documented above and within this study, as well as the type of sampling utilized and the sample size who responded, it would be difficult to derive an answer as to whether principals’ perceptions of armed personnel could be based on a specific race or gender. However, based on the findings and the demographics of the participants, age of the principal, years in
education, and years as a principal may in fact play a stronger factor in possible support of having armed personnel in suburban public schools as opposed to gender or race, despite the use of a small sample size of only 21 \((n=21)\) principals in one small region of one state in the nation.

In conclusion, the previous study included 12 participants who were principals of only elementary schools. These 12 principals were also designated to all urban districts. The 21 principals from the suburban districts who participated in this research study were divided amongst the following grades levels: elementary, middle, and high schools. This diversified grouping, in comparison to just the elementary level, may add to the possibility of a more robust understanding of positive attitudes toward armed personnel by specific administrators and demographics. Hence, despite studying the same amount of elementary schools as the original study, which displayed mixed feelings regarding armed personnel across the board, at this level (12 in total), the five middle schools and four high schools displayed interesting results. These results were that four of the five middle school principals endorsed armed personnel \((EAP: D1-P3, D1-P7, D7-P2, D8-P1)\), and all four high school principals who participated in this study endorsed armed personnel \((EAP: D1-P4, D5-P1, D6-P3, D7-P1)\). As stated, due to the sample sizes of the above school levels being small, it may be impossible to derive an answer as to whether upper-level administrators endorse armed personnel more than elementary school principals.
CHAPTER V
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This study explored the perceptions of K-12 principals employed by suburban public schools, specifically within District Factor Group GH in New Jersey. This exploration of their perceptions pertained to the presence of armed personnel within their schools, as well as whether armed personnel affect the learning environment of the institutions they are in charge of each day.

This study referenced school shootings throughout the United States and how unfathomably the chaos and misfortune echoes throughout the communities and educational institutions within this country. Through the use of case studies, it is hoped that readers will develop an understanding of the subtleties and nuances of violence beyond the drama of tragic and dramatic violent events such as school shootings (Blanchfield, 2013).

Uniquely, the first highly publicized one was the Columbine shooting, which occurred in a high school in Littleton, Colorado, where Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, two students of Columbine High School, planned and executed a horrific shooting spree, killing 12 students and one teacher before they committed suicide (Cullen, 2009). During more recent times, in Newtown, Connecticut, the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting was discussed, where Adam Lanza, who was not a student, killed 20 first grade students and four faculty members before killing himself (Sedensky, 2013).

This research study assessed literature involving school shootings and other ancillary research studies which displayed similar variables, yet is not an exact qualitative replica which investigated principals’ perceptions of armed personnel only but also the
possibilities available to principals within the realm of safety and security, who are indeed at the epicenter of this study. The interviews conducted with the principals who comprised the total sample population within this suburban district factor group allowed for the emergence of themes which systematically formulated information regarding point of view on school safety and security, specifically ideologies of whether or not armed personnel should be allowed in schools.

Summary of Findings

This research considered the school shootings controversy which exists within current literature. The review of the literature additionally acknowledged the controversy of employing armed personnel in schools within the United States. It seems the connection between violence and crisis intervention has received media attention through numerous school shootings, weapons found in schools, and even cyber violence (Shariff 2009).

The controversy, in and of itself, revealed that the literature bridged a multitude of attitudes ranging from the concepts that exhibited such variables as (1) most school faculty and staff should be allowed to be armed in a school to (2) no employee be allowed to carry a gun in a school. These attitudes also were demonstrated in a similar fashion beyond the literature; however, this is in reference to data collection and analysis of this particular study.

Burns and Crawford (2003) identify an area of controversy, moral panic. Burns and Crawford describe that when society as a whole feels threatened, society may overreact to the events. A portion of the total sample population’s responses vividly displayed this concept of moral panic as well, specifically when they referenced parents’ reactions to certain events and their own staff conversing the same way.

The literature deliberated the varieties of threats an educational environment has to be
primed for, such as *inside* threats that involve students and faculty members, and *outside* threats that involve categories of human dangers such as previous students who are troubled, emotionally disturbed, or angry and emotional parents, abusive spouses, or stalkers. Such acts are usually associated with law enforcement where students, parents, staff, and strangers may be charged with a crime; and many learning institutions rely on law enforcement to protect school safety (Blanchfield, 2013).

This study allowed the researcher to interview 21 kindergarten to 12th (K-12) school principals from New Jersey District Factor Group GH, comprised of suburban school districts in New Jersey, which contain low levels of crime in comparison to a study conducted in 2014 in Paterson, New Jersey, as well as a much higher socioeconomic status than the original study conducted in 2014. New Jersey District Factor Group GH is third from the top in socioeconomic status (median salary, etc.), as it pertains to the ranking structure of all district factor groups in New Jersey.

The data collected during all interviews were imperative in fostering the research into school shootings and principals’ perceptions of armed personnel in an educational setting. The principals who agreed to be questioned for this study were frank in their answers to the interview questions as well as blunt.

As a result of the interviews conducted for this study, the research has identified six emergent themes in a specific ranked order as they appeared and occurred, based on the principals’ perspectives: (1) policy and procedures, (2) armed personnel, (3) concerns, (4) physical security, (5) mental health, and (6) communication.

Despite their schools being located in suburban communities of high socioeconomic status, each of the 21 school principals representing the public school districts that
participated was aware of the challenges that a school could face on any scale, as well as the personal trials which their students must deal with on and off school grounds. As Blanchfield states (2013), “The school climate became more resilient when the superintendent created a sense of optimism where solutions were possible and had a purpose and reward and punishment were not the only options available in school conflicts.” During the field interview process of data collection, this researcher detected a sense of just that from each principal, despite his or her overall views on armed personnel.

During this multiple-case study, the interviews which were conducted with the participating school principals resulted in the following: 15 of the 21 school principals who work in suburban school districts, as designated by New Jersey District Factor Group GH, support the presence of armed personnel, based on their responses to the interview questions, which exhibited only the perceptions of these participating school principal.

Research Questions

Research questions were generated to accurately conduct this study, as well as to formulate the compulsory data for analysis, despite this research being designated a replication of a multiple-case study. Dialogue, in support of the outcomes for each research question, follows below:

Research Question 1

Do suburban school principals perceive safety threats to come from within the school they operate, or outside of their school?

As this research indicated through interviews, the principals overwhelmingly have identified their greatest risk of a safety threat to come from outside the school, specifically from the parents, if anyone. Principals cited specific examples such as parents acting in a fashion
which created a reason for concern.

**D8-P1** said, “So, again, as far as people coming in from the outside, personally I try and I'm very involved with the community as far as the parents. So, we get to see a lot of people that come in. A lot of times when people are coming in, we kind of know in advance who they are; but ultimately, the bottom line would be if someone came in with a semiautomatic weapon. They'd be able to shoot right through those windows. You know, we'd be trying to get on there to call our code gold, so it's always a concern. Like I said, although the percentages—you know, I'd almost have a better chance to win the lottery. It's still something that's in the back of my mind, and I'm a former Marine so—and then there's things that I see. Like this would be a really bad thing; this would be a really [bad] situation to be in so if we're doing a drill or something, I don't like that. I don't like having the kids positioned over here. Let's move them a different way and shift the light, whatever. Like little silly things, but they don't mean stuff to other people. So, I invited the dad in. He was expecting to pick the child up. He was still red-flagged to us (March 11, 2016).

During the study, the principals credited crafting a safe environment within their schools through enforcing policies and procedures with the faculty, staff, and students. The study revealed policies and procedures as the most prominent emergent theme. The principals were consistent on the significance of maintaining trust with the students and staff through their ability to appropriately interconnect with them, where consistent training for a worst-case scenario is a necessity.

The principals moreover acknowledged that the students and faculty communicate effectively through their behavior each day, regardless of the scenario. Furthermore, being
able to identify troubled students, as well as troubled faculty, was imperative. Most principals displayed a desire for their students and staff to address their problems before they escalate as being a crucial part of school safety.

**Research Question 2**

How do suburban school principals in various urban New Jersey school districts address school safety for the students and faculty?

The principals in this study have recognized both policy and procedures and the allowance to have armed personnel as their chief concern in providing a nonviolent school for their students and faculty. Many principals also placed significance on ensuring their schools maintained properly operating cameras, door locks, buzzer/bell systems, and a human presence if possible. Most of the principals preferred security personnel to interact spontaneously with people from the outside attempting to enter the building rather than worry about an active shooter.

An emphasis was obvious in most interviews that each principal was not unaware of the vulnerabilities of an active shooter. The principals depend on their policies and procedures and drills, mandated and otherwise performed through consistent training: active shooter, lockdown, and shelter in place.

The policy that was most important to all principals interviewed was warranting that any person entering their school be escorted to the main office after signing in, as well as being photographed, a procedure that this researcher, no matter what my credentials, had to follow every time I entered a school or school facility.

**D2-P1** said, “Annually we have a security procedure meeting and webinars regarding best practices for security mandates. We create unpredictable scenarios for students where we practice
routinely and make them at inconvenient times during different times of the day, shelter in place drills, etc. We continue to have joint efforts with police” (February 26, 2016).

Regarding their policies and procedures, every principal used his or her ability to follow the policies of the school district in which they are employed and NJDOE policy and procedure on active shooter, lockdown, shelter in place drills as mandated. Some principals were given the authority to amend and implement additional policies for their schools.

D6-P1 said, “Absolutely. And I have raised it to—and I don’t know if that was just my involvement on the—I spent a lot of time and effort writing these procedures. People better follow them.” (March 3, 2016).

Research Question 3

How do suburban school principals perceive the presence of armed personnel as influencing, or deterring, potential school violence?

The public school districts located in this district factor group utilized for this research study currently have two categories of armed personnel within their districts. First, there are the active police officers of the local jurisdictional police departments that are assigned to schools during their on-duty tours. Some officers’ salaries are paid by the school districts, and some officers’ salaries are continued to be paid by their authorized departments who employ them.

One participating district, District 7, employs an active police officer, on a full-time basis; his salary is paid in an agreed-upon split between his department and the school district in which he is employed. Nonetheless, any presence of these police officers in any of the districts who participated in this study is assigned by their departments, based on availability and if a budget allows for it. Approximately five of the districts possess a part-time on-duty police officer, or an officer who floats among multiple schools in the district, which would essentially be deemed a
The second category of armed personnel in the public school districts represented in this study is a retired police officer. Any district that currently employs a retired officer must be paid by the school district, which is at their request. As stated previously, Federal Law 18 USC 926C authorizes retired police officers to carry firearms. However, retired police officers that are allowed to carry firearms are allowed to do so with the permission of the district superintendent. Another parameter which must be met includes the retired officer complete school resource officer training in the state of New Jersey.

Despite the fact of who is actually allowed to carry firearms and act in the capacity of what is considered to be armed personnel, three of the 21 participants expressed that other personnel, outside the scope of law enforcement, should be allowed to be armed in their school.

D2-P1 said, “As stated with police personnel, a school safety security officer, a retired police officer. I don’t feel teachers should carry firearms. Police who were trained or retired police carry firearms 24/7, so that’s why they’re there with the educator as a separate and specific standard, where I don’t believe they (teachers/administrators) should carry a firearm” (February 26, 2016).

**Research Question 4**

Do suburban school principals perceive students and faculty to be safer with armed personnel present in the school, or does armed personnel create a threatening environment?

Despite the majority of the school principals endorsing armed personnel (15 of the 21 total participants), regardless of the level of school within K-12 (elementary, middle, or high school), the response from the principals regarding any comments of students and/or faculty
pertaining to armed personnel was narrow. Only five of the 21 principals interviewed had dialogue exchanges with faculty members regarding retaining, or the possibility of employing, armed personnel in their school. Conversely, these discussions occurred immediately after the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting, when the tragedy was extremely fresh in the minds of many people, especially educators. The five principals who stated that teachers had brought this topic to their attention responded that the teachers had questioned the absence of armed personnel. Furthermore, these faculty members felt that it would be positive, as it pertains to the safety and security of their schools.

In terms of students, only three of the 21 principals interviewed had exchanges with students regarding needing, or the possibility of retaining, armed personnel in their school. Three of the four principals did respond that the students had indicated employing armed personnel would be positive, yet most who stated that they as administrators endorse armed personnel felt that students within their schools enjoy the presence of law enforcement overall, on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis.

D5-P1 said, “We don't have DARE, but we do have an assigned juvenile officer. I think they still have DARE at the elementary school. That's correct. We have an assigned juvenile officer that comes in and does programming. Not an SRO, we don't have one in the building. For all purposes, they are that person but they're out. That's how we do it. So, and I would say on a daily basis, they're somewhere on our campus. So, really in terms of our plans that we have, we've worked very, very close with the officer in emergency management ” (March 2, 2016).

**Discussion**

The title of this study is *K-12 and the Active Shooter: Principals’ Perceptions of*
Armed Personnel in New Jersey District Factor Group GH. The purpose of the study was to explore the dilemma principals encounter when determining the best approach to provide a safe environment for their students and faculty, while simultaneously creating an environment that is conducive to education. This researcher studied the related literature on this subject, and conducted interviews with 21 suburban school principals within the district factor group GH to further the research and knowledge on school shootings and armed personnel in K-12 schools.

Despite focusing this research study on school shootings, coupled with the examination of one specific and dynamic variable to combat school shootings, armed personnel, the principals I interviewed took a more logical approach to their responsibilities and concerns for the security and safety of their students and faculty. All principals were aware of the dangers of an active shooter, but the conversation regarding an active shooter revolved around school preparedness through drills and ensuring that the policies and procedures of lockdowns are properly followed.

Scanlon (2001) described the premise of an active shooter who is seriously wounding and/or killing people and the need for the first responding officers to make a rapid assessment of the incident and make entry to stop the suspect[s]. Nonetheless, principals are charged with ensuring these drills, and other consistent training, continues in the area of school violence prevention.

The principals interviewed explained that their policies do not necessarily bow to the existing concept of moral panic. Leaders seem to adhere to the concept of possessing empowerment and instilling this in others. In the field of education, empowerment is not viewed as giving people power, but as providing opportunities, resources, and support so that they can
empower themselves (Azaiza 2011). Empowerment is a process that allows students, faculty, and other staff members to take action and make decisions in autonomous ways, where people feel a sense of control over their future in the school (Blanchfield, 2013).

Subsequently, a major incident captured the nation’s attention, the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting; the public outrage necessitated an instant response to deal with the dreadful event. Burns and Crawford (2003) refer to this response as moral panic, which is defined by Goode and Ben-Yehuda (as cited in Burns & Crawford, 2003): “Moral panic appears when a substantial portion of society feels that particular evildoers pose a threat to the moral order of society” (p. 123). Moral panic causes a reaction, specifically through the political establishment, to take action through punitive action, incarceration, extended sentences, and zero tolerance policies, (Burns & Crawford, 2003). Burns and Crawford (2003) found that many schools are more concerned with school security than the students are.

School security experts caution school officials and law enforcement from placing all their concentration on active shooters and not having an all-inclusive program that deals with school violence, including active shooters and suicide (Ujifusa, 2012). The principals interviewed throughout this study had specified that the processes used in their schools remain wide-ranging when ensuring that their students are safe from an active shooter, an irate parent, custody issues, etc., to the best of their abilities. Nonetheless, each expressed that his or her role has transformed a bit since being hired as a principal, where 20 of the 21 administrators held the title of principal prior to the school shooting massacre at Sandy Hook Elementary School, an event that once again altered the way school districts approach security measures. Each principal admitted when discussing these events that they felt anything could occur, specifically referring to something violent in nature. Conversely, only one principal, D7-P1, held the title of
principal during the school shooting massacre in 1999 at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado.

Resulting from the interviews this researcher conducted, all of principals focused on security problems that were of practical concern, especially in a suburban school. The principals interviewed were more inclined to speak of the physical security of the buildings when ensuring the safety of the students and faculty. When asked about their concerns, the principals overwhelmingly were most concerned with irate parents that may affect the students and faculty.

Furthermore, additional elements exhibiting human error, such as faculty and staff not securing each and every door during different points of the school day were demonstrated as a major discussion point. Some principals cited that teachers and staff have been reprimanded for such mistakes, especially if deemed repetitive.

Through the examination of the emergent themes, an image developed based on the principals’ focus on the safety and security of their schools. The principals identified the importance of policies and procedures 212 times; when attributed to security itself, people and property are only as safe as the protocol written is followed. The subject of armed personnel was indeed discussed by the principals 189 times; it is indeed a variable to keep their schools safe and secure, provided the resources are present, and there are no budgetary constraints. Furthermore, a willingness and agreement to utilize firearms in an educational environment proved to be significant based on principals’ perceptions, no doubt. The principals interviewed recognized the prominence of needing a trusting rapport with the students and faculty. Wilson (2013) found that school principals must encourage an environment where the students develop a relationship with all members of the faculty and staff.
The Center for Disease Control (CDC) has estimated that the likelihood of a child dying in a school is about one in a million (Cullen, 2009). These are real numbers with real school children that cannot be ignored. Sanchez (as cited by Burns and Crawford, 2003, p. 126), studied school shootings between 1992 and 1998 and found an average of 38 shootings per year. In their research on rampage school shootings, Newman et al. (2004) found school shooters to be suicidal and that they turn their suicidal motivations homicidal, specifically outward towards the group and the institution they perceive made them an outcast. D6-P1 stated, “So if there is a crisis, the flight team consists of people who are trained in crisis response and specifically attending to the social and emotional needs of the school community during a crisis. In terms of mental health to prevent problems or identify problems, we just this year—and it was such a wonderful gift to our school district—hired a guidance counselor at the elementary level. And I felt that was really, really critical because we know the kids who are troubled or the kids who were demonstrating those risk factors or indicators that they might become disengaged with the school community; if they have social difficulties—some of them start to show signs of it when they’re quite young—and when you have a guidance counselor who can intervene, perhaps you can help the child or at least you can alert the adults in the community that this is a child who needs supervision” (March 3, 2016).

Identifying school children who are susceptible to suicide would be an incredible resource for their mental health and overall stability, while at the same time helping the rampage shooter before he or she is marginalized and made an outcast looking to commit suicide through homicide or suicide by cop (Newman et al., 2004). Just as the principals of the public school district have stated, faculty and students need to build trust to be able to identify when there is a problem. Schools need to be proactive through the education of their faculty “in
recognizing and diffusing potentially violent situations and developing appropriate relationships with students” (Smith & Smith, 2006, p. 41). Trotter (2005) found that in order to prevent school shootings, schools have to focus on preventing school violence by addressing bullying, harassment, and assaults. He added the need for schools to focus on the real issue of school bullying and harassment as a way to prevent school violence.

The principals interviewed for this study agreed that students that are identified as bullying another student have to be referred to proper personnel immediately, as well as the student who is being bullied. **D6-P1** stated, “Yes and bullying begins to swing into full force, more so in the middle school than in the elementary school, not that it doesn’t happen in elementary. It does. When kids transfer from elementary to middle school, if they—like in our district, the elementary counselor is also their counselor when they get to the middle school that first year. So there’s that continuity frankly. So having an adult in the school community who knows you and can connect with you and can help you navigate that transition is really important and I hope these data—this district is tracking the data since we’ve gotten our guidance counselor. I’m actually going to bring that up at administrative council. Have the incidents of bullying or have the transition issues from four to five reduced since we put the counselor in place? I’d be curious to know that myself” (March 3, 2016).

The United States Secret Service has identified bullying as a factor that creates “isolation and fear” and could lead to behavioral problems (Wilson, 2013, p. 2), while Bloom (2008) found isolation and bullying or being bullied the leading traits in rampage school shootings. Crimando (2014) in his article “From ‘Shots Fired’ to ‘Shooter Down’ and Beyond” in the *Disaster Resource Guide*, recommends a comprehensive approach to active shooters called Comprehensive Active Shooter Incident Management (CASIM). This
comprehensive approach involves four phases: (1) prevention-mitigation—to reduce the likelihood of an event; (2) preparedness—training and drills; (3) response—active shooter, lockdowns; and (4) recovery—psychological first aid, employee assistance program.

Grossman and Christiansen (2012) found that violent video games are desensitizing groups of young people that have been marginalized and isolated. Violent video games are creating a virtual reality in which people are killed for points, and children playing this game are less likely to empathize with others.

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to explore the dilemma principals are entangled with when determining the best approach to provide a safe environment for their students and faculty, simultaneously creating an environment that is conducive to education. The study found that the principals of the public school districts in New Jersey District Factor Group GH did not adhere to the concept of moral panic, an outcome of the national media attention to school shootings. However, these principals seemed to have taken an all-inclusive approach to the safety and security of the school children and faculty in their schools, despite some disparities amongst the total sample population regarding the utilization of armed personnel in their schools.

The school principals prioritized their school safety essentials through a series of processes which were based on mandates and years of experience: (1) ensuring that the policy and procedures of their school districts and the NJDOE are monitored, especially the conducting of drills; (2) determining whether armed personnel is conducive to the educational environment; (3) ensuring that physical security, cameras, door locks, buzzers, bells, mobile escorts, and possible security personnel, are present. (all buildings
had some version of necessary physical security, whereas the previous study conducted in Paterson, New Jersey, in 2014, did not); and (4) Safeguarding that any student or staff member with mental health concerns is guided to the proper personnel and/or program. Although the study focused on school shootings, armed personnel, in totality, was not the topmost priority regarding school safety. The principals directed their responses to school safety to developing trust with the students and staff, adhering to the safety policies and security-related procedures, performing the appropriate drills, and guaranteeing the building is physically secured to the best of their abilities and the authority which is granted to each principal based on the job specifications in their school districts.

This study identified that 15 of the 21 principals interviewed were supportive of having armed personnel in the schools. However, the armed personnel they supported were police officers or retired police officers, by and large, but not in totality. There were mentions of specific desires to carry a firearm within the scope of one’s employment, as well as the absolute fear of being mandated to ever having to carry a gun as well.

The six principals that did not support possessing any armed personnel in the schools did not want any personnel armed in the school, including law enforcement or retired law enforcement. However, the school principals that did endorse the consistent company of police officers and retired police officers in the schools were very supportive of them as professionals and found these officers to be better utilized as first responders who would have more of a positive effect on the safety and security of the schools and towards students.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

The information acquired from this research may contribute to administrators and educators, specifically in large suburban school districts, when addressing basic and more
advanced reasons associated with school shootings and the dilemma school principals are challenged with regarding the issue of utilizing armed personnel within their schools. This research can provide a basis for future research into school shootings and the perceptions of principals regarding armed personnel.

Within the conclusion of this particular study, future research should be directed towards the following ideologies:

1. Are schools becoming more militarized, despite the geographic area and jurisdiction of each school district? If so, how does that affect the educational environment?

2. Are police officers or retired police officers assigned to a specific public school properly trained to deal with school children with behavioral and/or emotional problems, as well as events of a catastrophic nature in which violence is present?

3. Should the principal of a particular suburban public school district be given the overarching authority; i.e., decision-making ability to choose whether or not to utilize armed personnel within the school he or she leads?

4. Should a teacher or principal be allowed to carry a firearm within the scope of his or her employment, concealed or otherwise?

5. Could unarmed canine teams be an option to combat school violence?

**Recommendation for Policy**

As a result of the research conducted for this study and based on prior research, the following policies are recommended:

1. All personnel within the United States, authorized by law to be armed with a
firearm in an educational setting, should be required to obtain at a minimum, the training received by law enforcement officers across the nation. This training should include firearm preparation and training the initial mandated amount of hours each state dictates, with semi-annual qualifying time periods, six months apart, as well as training in working with students and faculty members who exhibit signs of emotional and/or behavioral problems.

Research has shown that school resource officer (SRO) training is highly suggested by personnel in law enforcement, as well as by administrators.

2. The United States and the New Jersey Departments of Education should consider implementing policies that would require the hiring of full-time mental health professionals in all schools.

Research has revealed that children with behavioral problems that are not dealt with effectively are more likely to be involved in violent acts that will impact their education.

3. Administrators and faculty should receive advanced training in properly identifying and collaborating with students and/or faculty members who display emotional and/or behavioral problems affecting proper operation of an educational institution.

Research has revealed that students and faculty members who exhibit signs of emotional and/or behavioral problems can be helped if recognized during earlier stages, wherein counseling and therapy is more apt to be facilitated positively.

4. All schools should be mandated by the federal government to employ an active
school resource officer from within their jurisdiction’s police department; conversely, if their jurisdiction does not contain a local police department, the school district will then acquire, by federal law, a law enforcement officer who will assume the duties of an SRO at the next highest jurisdictional level; i.e., county, state, etc.

Research has revealed that a trend in schools displaying the presence of armed personnel is not only occurring at a more rapid pace, but the presence of armed personnel allows for a quicker response time to active shooters, whether the threat is from the inside or outside; proof of deterrence is limited at this time.

**Recommendations for Practice**

The interviews conducted in this study by this researcher, as well the review of the policies and procedures of the New Jersey Department of Education and the policies and procedures of the NJDFG GH public school districts, can allow principals to possess a clearer vision of their role of being prepared for a shooter emergency.

**Public School Districts 1-8 (DFG GH)**

1. Establish the following parameters in all districts that participated and otherwise noted:
   - Training of teachers in identifying behavioral problems
   - Training of teachers to address troubled students and/or parents
   - Training of security officers, police officers, and retired police officers in identifying behavioral problems
   - Training of security officers, police officers, and retired police officers in
the handling of troubled students and/or parents

2. The school districts should ensure that district staff members will assist a faculty member who has been a victim of a crime through the process of the criminal justice system.

3. The school district should have mental health professionals available for counseling for students and faculty that may have been a victim of a crime, horrific or otherwise, which has occurred in the school, or to any person affiliated with the school.

**Police Departments 1-8 (DFG GH Jurisdictional Agencies)**

1. Police departments, through their liaisons, and consistent with the Memorandum of Agreement between Education and Law Enforcement Officials, should provide training to police officers specifically assigned to these schools in the identification of behavioral problems and understanding of troubled students and their parents; the larger dilemma requires more than simply assigning a police officer to sit and wait for an armed intruder.

2. Police departments, through their liaisons and consistent with the Memorandum of Agreement between Education and Law Enforcement Officials, should notify the school district liaison of every shooting or homicide within these jurisdictions to ensure that the students that may or may not be affected by the incidents that occur are provided with necessary assistance.

3. Canine teams should be obtained and deployed, when necessary, in conjunction with SRO training, as an available option to their department when confronted with various scenarios which may occur within schools.
Reflections

Whereas this research study was limited to principals within only one New Jersey district factor group possessing a specific set of attributes, coupled with the dynamic variable of being geographically suburban in nature in totality, research has displayed that most active shooter or rampage shooting incidents do in fact occur in suburban or rural communities. The principals who participated in this specific study are cognizant of the dangers of an active shooter in their school and do prepare for the likelihood of such an outcome. Although they recognize that the problems affecting schools within a suburban public school district may vary, this researcher perceived that approximately one-seventh (three) of the principals possessed either no knowledge of the magnitude in which active shooter scenarios occur within suburban school settings, or were in complete denial. Overall, the principals were primarily concerned that the issues of school safety are characteristically day-to-day difficulties with multiple variables affecting the students, parents, and faculty.

A significant characteristic of being a retired law enforcement officer, an educator, and a parent is the fact that I became concerned with the issue of school shootings primarily after the massacre at Virginia Tech University in 2007. Although I was very familiar with previous school shootings, including the high-profile incident at Columbine High School in 1999, the Virginia Tech event, including the shooter’s profile, impacted me specifically because I am a college professor and that event occurred on a college campus, not within a K-12 facility. Although equally horrifying, the overall planning of the Columbine shootings by the perpetrators, along with the age of the shooters, changed my perspective on school shootings.

Further research after the Columbine incident displayed that shooters in K-12 environments occur quite often, even in comparison to college campuses. An even more
disturbing element is the motives, or lack thereof at times, for such a young population in suburban school environments to commit such acts. In urban environments, gangs are often a cause of school violence, often stemming from street incidents outside of their schools. As a result of this dreadful event, I initiated my efforts to follow and study this phenomenon of rampage school shootings more thoroughly.

A significant characteristic of this study that was enlightening to me, as it pertained to school violence and consequently led to knowledge of school shootings based on research, is a more thorough grasp that districts may need for mental health professionals to be accessible as a resource for school principals. The ability to immediately refer a student or staff member to a proper mental health professional is vital in the prevention of school shootings and potential school violence.

Research on school shootings has acknowledged suicide as a shared denominator in most school shootings. However, school shootings are such a rare occurrence overall in the category of crime in the United States, the CDC estimates a child having a greater chance of getting struck by lightning (one in a million) than being shot in a school (Cullen, 2009). The CDC estimates that 16% of school age children contemplate suicide, 13% plan to commit suicide, 8% attempt to commit suicide, and approximately 4,600 school age children commit suicide annually (CDC, 2014).

Furthermore, since firearms can land in the hands of anyone of any age in this country, specifically those who have bad intentions, emotionally disturbed or not, jurisdictions, school districts, and law enforcement agencies must place political views aside and determine what is best to protect lives. Based on training, research, and professional experience, I acknowledge the many resources these stakeholders have available to them to prevent and combat this
phenomenon of school shootings.

Is a firearm the dominant resource to defend an attack inside a school? Perhaps, if armed personnel possess the proper training to actually be considered armed personnel in an official capacity. Nonetheless, human error can occur in any case, whether holding a firearm to protect a child in a school or failing to identify the individual who may need help the most.
References


University of Michigan Press.


supports for active shooter events. *The Tactical Edge.*


Florida school board shooting: Gunman opens fire during meeting. (2010, December 14).


Liu, X. S. (2007, November 2). What is the most effective way to keep teachers? *Academy of Educational Leadership Journal, 11*, 113-120.


Hoffmann (Eds.), *International handbook of threat assessment* (pp. 67-79). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.


Pasinik, A. (2016, March). Bill would allow students to opt out of safety drills.


Appendix A

Letter of Solicitation – Superintendents

October 15, 2015

Attn: Superintendent of Schools

Superintendent __________.

My name is Brian Kelly, and I am a doctoral degree candidate at Seton Hall University, in the College of Education and Human Services. I am preparing my dissertation research study titled “K-12 and the Active Shooter: Principals’ Perceptions of Armed Personnel in New Jersey District Factor Group ‘GH’ Public School Districts. This research topic has been approved by Seton Hall University.

I am writing to request your permission for me to interview school principals within your school district. This study is of a qualitative design, which would require these interviews of the school principals. All data and interview responses will then be coded and analyzed. The purpose of this study is to explore the dilemma school principals encounter when determining the best approach to provide a safe environment for their students and faculty, while simultaneously creating an environment that is conducive to an educational setting.

Each interview will take approximately 25 minutes. The interviews can be conducted at the principal’s school or at a location mutually agreeable by the participant and myself, the researcher. The questions which will be used for the interviews have been previously approved by a panel of experts. Upon being granted permission by you to conduct this research in your district, each principal will receive an Informed Consent Letter explaining the research, the parameters of the study, as well as a demographic questionnaire.

The participants will be informed that this study is voluntary, that they may withdraw at any time during the study, and that their participation will be anonymous, with no information recorded identifying the participant within the data. Only the principals that return the Informed Consent Letters agreeing to participate in the study will be interviewed, with their names and schools withheld. All of the subject’s data will be confidential, and securely stored on a USB in a locked secure site within the College of Education and Human Services at Seton Hall University.

If permission is granted by you, to conduct the study within your district and the Waldwick School District, I will submit your consent letter, and the parameters of the research, to the Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board (IRB) for their approval. I would like to thank you in advance for your consideration with this request.

If you have any questions, please feel free to call me anytime at 201-349-0016, or by email at brian.kelly2@student.shu.edu. The Institutional Review Board requires that I receive permission in writing from the Superintendent. You may also contact my IRB Director, Dr. Mary Ruzicka by email at mary.ruzicka@shu.edu, or my Dissertation Mentor and Academic Advisor, Dr. Daniel Gutmore, at 973-275-2853, or by email at daniel.gutmore@shu.edu.

Respectfully Submitted,

Brian P. Kelly, Ed.S
Appendix B

Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board Letter of Approval

February 10, 2016

Brian P. Kelly
26 Wellington Avenue
West Orange, NJ 07052

Dear Mr. Kelly,

The Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board has reviewed the information you have submitted addressing the concerns for your proposal entitled “The Active Shooter and K-12: Principals’ Perceptions of Armed Personnel in New Jersey District Factor Group ‘GH’ Public School Districts.” Your research protocol is hereby approved as revised through expedited review. The IRB reserves the right to recall the proposal at any time for full review.

Enclosed for your records are the signed Request for Approval form and the stamped original Consent Form. Make copies only of this stamped document.

The Institutional Review Board approval of your research is valid for a one-year period from the date of this letter. During this time, any changes to the research protocol must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to their implementation.

According to federal regulations, continuing review of already approved research is mandated to take place at least 12 months after this initial approval. You will receive communication from the IRB Office for this several months before the anniversary date of your initial approval.

Thank you for your cooperation.

In harmony with federal regulations, none of the investigators or research staff involved in the study took part in the final decision.

Sincerely,

Mary F. Ruzicka, Ph.D.
Professor
Director, Institutional Review Board

cc: Dr. Daniel Gutmore
Please review Seton Hall University's Policies and Procedures on website (http://www.provost.shu.edu/irb) for more information. Please note the following requirements:

**Adverse Reactions:** If any untoward incidents or adverse reactions should develop as a result of this study, you are required to immediately notify in writing the Seton Hall University IRB Director, your sponsor and any federal regulatory institutions which may oversee this research, such as the OHRP or the FDA. If the problem is serious, approval may be withdrawn pending further review by the IRB.

**Amendments:** If you wish to change any aspect of this study, please communicate your request in writing (with revised copies of the protocol and/or informed consent where applicable and the Amendment Form) to the IRB Director. The new procedures cannot be initiated until you receive IRB approval.

**Completion of Study:** Please notify Seton Hall University’s IRB Director in writing as soon as the research has been completed, along with any results obtained.

**Non-Compliance:** Any issue of non-compliance to regulations will be reported to Seton Hall University’s IRB Director, your sponsor and any federal regulatory institutions which may oversee this research, such as the OHRP or the FDA. If the problem is serious, approval may be withdrawn pending further review by the IRB.

**Renewal:** It is the principal investigator's responsibility to maintain IRB approval. A Continuing Review Form will be mailed to you prior to your initial approval anniversary date. **Note:** No research may be conducted (except to prevent immediate hazards to subjects), no data collected, nor any subjects enrolled after the expiration date.
REQUEST FOR APPROVAL OF RESEARCH, DEMONSTRATION OR RELATED ACTIVITIES INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS

All material must be typed.

PROJECT TITLE: "The Active Shooter and K-12: Principal’s Perceptions of Armed Personnel in New Jersey District Factor Group "GH" Public School Districts"

CERTIFICATION STATEMENT:

In making this application, I (we) certify that I (we) have read and understand the University's policies and procedures governing research, development, and related activities involving human subjects. I (we) shall comply with the letter and spirit of those policies. I (we) further acknowledge my (our) obligation to (1) obtain written approval of significant deviations from the originally approved protocol BEFORE making those deviations, and (2) report immediately all adverse effects of the study on the subjects to the Director of the Institutional Review Board, Seton Hall University, South Orange, NJ 07079.

Brian P. Kelly
RESEARCHER(S)

**Please print or type out names of all researchers below signature. Use separate sheet of paper, if necessary.**

My signature indicates that I have reviewed the attached materials of my student advisee and consider them to meet IRB standards.

RESEARCHER’S FACULTY ADVISOR
(for student researchers only)

**Please print or type out name below signature**

The request for approval submitted by the above researcher(s) was considered by the IRB for Research Involving Human Subjects Research at the __________ 2016 meeting.

The application was approved ___ not approved ___ by the Committee. Special conditions were ___ were not ___ set by the IRB. (Any special conditions are described on the reverse side.)

Mary J. Puglisi, Ph.D.
DIRECTOR,
SETON HALL UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR HUMAN SUBJECTS RESEARCH

Seton Hall University 3/2005
Appendix C

Letter of Solicitation to Participating Principals

Dear Principal:

My name is Brian Kelly, and I am a doctoral degree candidate in K-12 School Administration at Seton Hall University’s College of Education and Human Services, Department of Educational Leadership, Management, and Policy. I am preparing my dissertation which is entitled “K-12 and the Active Shooter: Principals’ Perceptions of Armed Personnel in New Jersey District Factor Group ‘GH’ Public School Districts.” At this time, you are invited to participate in this research study I am conducting.

The purpose of this study is to explore the dilemma school principals encounter when determining the best approach to provide a safe environment for their students and faculty, while also creating an environment that is conducive to an educational setting.

All principals employed in New Jersey District Factor Group ‘GH’ are eligible to participate, and the expected duration of participation in this study is approximately 25-30 minutes. Each participant will be asked to complete a short demographic survey, and a face to face interview. During the interview, I will ask you questions about your perceptions of armed personnel in the educational setting, a concept spawned based on school shootings. The questions which will be used for the interviews have been previously approved by a panel of experts. The interview will be conducted at a place and time that is convenient for you.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you grant permission, I will request that the interview be audio recorded with a digital voice recorder; this is merely a request, and is not mandatory for the research, as it is optional. Information from this research will be used solely for the purpose of this study, and any publications that may result from this study.

All conversations will remain confidential. Your name, as well as other identifying characteristics, will not be used in reports and/or any presentations. Only I will be aware of the identity of the participants, and this procedure will be enforced using pseudonyms and codes during this study to procure further anonymity to anyone other than myself, the researcher. As all of the subject's data will be unspecified and confidential, any and all data that is collected will be securely stored on a USB drive, then locked in a secured site at Felician University, Lodi, New Jersey, where I am employed.

Thank you in advance for your time and consideration regarding your participation with this study. If you have any questions or would like to participate, please contact me by Friday, March 25, 2016, at brian.kelly2@student.shu.edu, or at 201-559-6000 ext. 1147.

Sincerely,

Brian P. Kelly, Doctoral Candidate

Seton Hall University College of Education and Human Services
Appendix D

Informed Consent Letter to Participants
Preservation of Confidentiality: All interview responses will remain confidential. Participants’ replies to interview questions will not be revealed in preliminary and final reports, or in published materials. Audio files (described as optional) will be kept confidential on a separate, password protected USB memory device transferred from a digital audio recorder. Only the researcher will have direct access; however, the dissertation mentor and committee members will have the right to access the data files upon request. The USB memory device and transcripts will be stored in a locked file cabinet in the possession of the researcher until the study is completed, and thereafter, at Felician University, Lodi, NJ, where the researcher is employed. After the research is completed, the audio files, transcripts and printed materials will remain protected for no longer than five (5) years, and then be destroyed. Participants will have access to their interview data upon request.

Research Records/Access: During the study, the dissertation mentor and committee members will have access to the coded information, through the researcher only.

Anticipated Risks: There are no foreseen risks or discomfort involved in the completion of this study.

Benefits: There are no direct benefits for participating in this study.

Participant Compensation: There will be no monetary compensation provided in this study.

Contact Information: At any time during the study, or after the study is completed, any questions regarding this research and research participant’s rights can be directed to the principal researcher, Brian P. Kelly at brian.kelly2@student.shu.edu, or at 201-559-6000 ext. 1147. The Dissertation Mentor, Dr. Daniel Gutmore can also be reached at daniel.gutmore@shu.edu in the Department of Education Leadership, Management and Policy at Seton Hall University. If you have questions about your rights as a Human Research Subject, you may contact Dr. Mary Ruizicka, Director of the Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Human Subjects Research at (973) 313-6314, or irb@shu.edu.

Audio Record Consent: The researcher will request to use a digital recorder to record the interviews; this element is completely optional for the participant. Nonetheless, all participants will be identified by a coded pseudonym (alias), and only the researcher will have access to the audio files with the ability to listen to the recorded information. The researcher will be the sole transcriber of the audio files. All data collected and analyzed will remain protected for no longer than five years, and then will be destroyed. Participants will have access to their interview data upon request during this time.

Consent: To indicate consent to participate in this research study, please sign below.

I agree to be audio recorded during my interview.

Participant Name (Please Print)  

Participant Signature  

Date

Jubilee Hall • 400 South Orange Avenue • South Orange, NJ 07079 • Tel: 973.761.3397 • Fax: 973.275.2847 • www.shu.edu

A HOME FOR THE MIND, THE HEART AND THE SPIRIT

188