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Adela Ames-Lopez

adela.ameslopez@student.shu.edu

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The Influence of Active Shooter Incidents in K-12: Principals Perceptions of Armed Personnel
and Tactical Police Capabilities in New Jersey District Factor Group (I) Public School Districts

By

Adela M. Ames-Lopez

Dissertation Committee

Daniel Gutmore, Ph.D, Mentor

Richard Blissett, Ph.D

John Decker, Ed.D

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education

Department of Education, Management, Leadership, and Policy

Seton Hall University

2020

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COLLEGE OF EDUCATION & HUMAN SERVICES
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION LEADERSHIP MANAGEMENT & POLICY

APPROVAL FOR SUCCESSFUL DEFENSE

Adela M. Ames-Lopez has successfully defended and made the required modifications to the text of the doctoral dissertation for the **Ed.D.** during this **Fall** Semester 2020.

DISSERTATION COMMITTEE

(please sign and date)

Dr. Daniel Gutmore, Ph.D

Mentor

Date

Dr. Richard Blissett, Ph.D

Committee Member

Date

Dr. John Decker, Ed.D

Committee Member

Date

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.

ABSTRACT

In the wake of increased shootings in schools, safety concerns are in the forefront of school administrators' concerns. This study is a replication of a dissertation published in 2016 as well as some components of a research study published in 2014. The 2014 study examined elementary principals in an urban public-school district in Paterson, New Jersey, within District Factor Group (A), whereas the 2016 study examined suburban public-school districts in New Jersey's District Factor Group (GH) with a median household salary ranging between \$86,000 and \$105,000.

An interview study was utilized for this qualitative research design to assist in determining the perceptions of principals regarding armed personnel being operationalized in a specific New Jersey public school district factor group as well as their perceptions of police tactical response capabilities relevant to school shootings.

This current study examined public school districts within affluent communities that possess a median household salary ranging between \$88,000 and \$149,000, in which the socioeconomic status of these schools was identified by New Jersey District Factor Group (I). There were fourteen K-12 public school principals who were interviewed, and audio recorded to gather evidence of their perceptions regarding armed personnel being operationalized in a specific New Jersey public school district factor group as well as their perceptions of police tactical response capabilities relevant to school shootings in a learning institution.

The responses of the interviews highlighted and confirmed the various consistent and predetermined themes that were applicable to this study. The outcome showed that eight out of fourteen principals representing elementary, middle, and high school level of leadership

endorsed armed personnel in their school at a rate of 57%. Overall, in this deductive analysis and comparable to the previous studies in 2014 and 2016, the principals directed their answers to school safety by following safety policies and procedures, building trust through communication with their students and staff, conducting the appropriate drills in their school with all of their students, staff, and faculty, and ensuring the building is physically secured to ensure an environment that is conducive to learning.

Keywords: principal perceptions, active shooter, armed personnel, school violence, mass shootings, school preparedness, and District Factor Group (DFG).

DEDICATION

This Doctoral work is dedicated to all the victims of active shooting incidents with hope that this work will continue to ensure that safety precautions are effectively in place to allow a safer learning institution for students, staff, and faculty.

It's pleasing to know that New Jersey has a good pulse on safety by passing **Alyssa's Law** in 2019.

This Doctoral work is dedicated to my amazingly intelligent, strong, and beautiful children and granddaughter;

~Dyvae, Quannah, Lance Jr., Lanae, and Raquel Lopez~

My children, your mother finished this work for you!

You were created and are here to continue to positively impact this world as well as find and fulfill your God-given purpose!

~I Love You Beyond Words! ~

This Doctoral work is also dedicated in the memory of my grandmother,

Daisy Lee McKnight-Ames!

She left behind a legacy of strength, fortitude, love, and the true essence of **FAMILY!**

Thank you for setting the bar and showing me that education has monumental power that anchors the principles of freedom, democracy, and sustainable progress!

My grandmother, ***I DID IT!***

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

“Knowledge is power.
Information is liberating.
Education is the premise of progress,
in every society, in every family”.
~ *Kofi Annan*
Ghanaian Diplomat

To my ancestors, I would not be the person that I am today without your sacrifice in paving the way for equal rights and more importantly our right to a valuable education – the ability to read, write, and preserve the knowledge and wisdom that we have ascertained. We still have more progress to make, but I am continuing this fight on your behalf to change the trajectory of your lineage!

To the amazing participants: Thank you for trusting me with your insight. Your perception, your vulnerability and unwavering support for your students, staff, and faculty have shown me what real strength and resilience look like during and after a heightened time of school violence.

To Dr. Daniel Gutmore, my committee chair, advisor, and mentor: I would like to express my sincere gratitude for your unceasing support; for your patience, motivation, and immense knowledge which abetted my continuation to move the needle every time. I considered quitting, but I am highly fortunate to have had you in my corner during my doctoral journey.

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And I'm proud to be a SHU PIRATE like my father. I love you both!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	ii
DEDICATION	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
LIST OF TABLES	xi
CHAPTER I – Introduction	1
Background	1
Problem Statement.....	4
Purpose of the Study	8
Research Question	11
Conceptual Framework.....	11
Delimitation and Limitations	13
Definition of Terms	14
Summary	15
CHAPTER II – Review of Related Literature	17
Introduction.....	17
Literature Search Strategy Methods	19
Active Shooter.....	19
School Shooting	23
Police Response.....	29
School Resource Officers (SRO).....	33

Laws and Administrators	34
State Law	38
Civil Liability	39
School Security Policies.....	41
Public Information.....	43
Summary	46
Synthesis of the Literature	47
CHAPTER III - Methodology.....	49
Introduction.....	49
Design	52
Settings	55
Participants.....	55
Profiles of the Participants	56
Method.....	57
Validity and Reliability.....	59
Summary	61
CHAPTER IV – Findings	62
Introduction.....	62
Policy and Procedures.....	70
Safety Procedures/Drills.....	70
Crisis Management Team/Plan.....	72

Physical Security	75
Options for a Safe and Secured School	76
Alternative Security Options	77
Communication	79
Cultural Awareness	80
Trust-Based Relationships	81
Armed Personnel	82
Feel Safer	82
Firearm Concern during Response	84
Escalation/Scare Tactics	85
False Sense of Security	86
Mental Health	86
Mental Health Programs/Support Teams	87
Prevention Training	88
Safe Space/Peer Groups/Clubs	89
Other Concerns	89
External Threat/Parents	90
Research Question	92
Summary	98
CHAPTER V – Conclusions and Recommendations	103
Introduction	103

Summary of Findings	104
Discussion	107
Conclusion	112
Recommendations for Future Research	117
Recommendations for Policy	118
Recommendations for Practices	120
Reflective Summary	122
REFERENCES.....	126
APPENDIX A – SOLICITATION OF SUPERINTENDENTS LETTER.....	144
APPENDIX B – PERMISSION OF SUPERINTENDENTS OF SCHOOLS	146
APPENDIX C – IRB APPROVAL.....	147
APPENDIX D– SOLICITATION OF PRINCIPALS LETTER.....	148
APPENDIX E – INFORMED CONSENT FORM	150
APPENDIX F – INTERVIEW QUESTIONS	152

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 - List of codes used in this research study – Primary Themes & Sub-Themes.....	63
Table 2 - Additional sub-themes identified in the current study.	64
Table 3 - Current Study’s Consistent Themes.....	65
Table 4 - 2016 Previous study’s consistent themes	66
Table 5 - 2014 Previous study's emergent themes.....	67
Table 6 - Demographic Survey.....	68
Table 7 - Participating School Districts	69

CHAPTER I – INTRODUCTION

Background

The educational system has long been viewed as a safe haven for students, from their infancy through their adulthood (Cawood, 2010). Despite the decrease in violent crimes in schools since the mid-1990s (Zhang et al, 2016), in recent years, there has been a surge of high-profile violent crimes, such as active shooting, that have caused questionable safety measures by parents, community members, and stakeholders. Law enforcement agencies must possess the ability to manage the overall expectations of school districts, as well as parents, teachers, and school district leaders, when addressing the realistic capabilities of handling an active shooter incident on school grounds and how fast that they can eliminate the threat.

An active shooting incident is an overwhelming situation confronting school and security personnel and any other individual entrusted with ensuring the safety of students. It also elicits fear and confusion from the public and policymakers and leads to a demand for policy changes (Thompson & Kyle, 2005). Perceptions of school shootings are relatively similar cross-culturally; however, the noteworthy differences lie within the course of action that countries have taken in response to these events (Barbieri, 2015). The FBI (2014) defines an active shooter “as an individual actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill people in a populated area” (FBI, 2014, p.1).

Since the surge of incidents of school violence, the public, practitioners, and academics are considering different approaches to deal with such an important societal issue. Many administrators and practitioners have suggested that, in order to deal with school violence, schools must be staffed with health professionals who can identify troubled youth (Elliot et al.,

1998; Lamberg, 1998; Marans and Schaefer, 1998). However, this ideology appears to not be consistent based on the nature of these violent incidents within national active shooter incidents.

Tactical Response (2008) reported that in an active shooting situation, once the shooting starts, someone is shot every 15 seconds. And Dinkes, Kemp, Baum, and Snyder (2008) reported that 11% of all crimes occur on school property. Law enforcement response to such critical incidents still varies on a case-by-case basis, having both positive and negative results.

Regarding the school shooting in Broward County, Florida in 2018, the FBI and the Broward County Sheriff's Office have come under intense scrutiny following the shooting. The FBI admitted days after the shooting that they received a call on January 5, 2018 from a person close to the suspect, Cruz expressing concerns about his erratic behavior and disturbing social media posts. According to Sheriff Scott Israel, the former school resource officer, Deputy Scot Peterson, "never went into the building that was under attacked" (Fox News, April 2018, para. 7).

Historically, school leadership has emphasized safety when dealing with school violence. By placing officers in schools, administrators are hoping that police presence will have a deterrent effect on school violence and delinquency. Every five minutes, there's approximately 225 teachers being threatened by students and 15 are nearly attacked. Each year, approximately 400,000 violent crimes are committed on school property (Dinkes et al., 2009). Besides the deterrent effect, having officers on campus may also increase the level of respect that young people may have toward the police and generate a better understanding of the law and the role of law enforcement, which may have a great impact on policing outside the school environment (Jackson, 2002).

For the State of New Jersey, the Department of Education and New Jersey Office of the Attorney General impose minimum standards regarding policy, active shooter training, and drilling preparation for learning institutions and law enforcement agencies. In fact, these minimum standards are mostly self-enforced, in that the Department of Education has fewer than ten educational specialists to audit policies and administer unannounced drills or inspections statewide (New Jersey Office of the Attorney General, 2015). The relationship between municipal police and their local school districts appear to have a collaborative rapport, yet their response to the schools are uncertain during heightened times. According to Hess, Hess Orthmann, & Ladue (2016), state and municipal law enforcement agencies nationwide that have a shortage in officers responding to emergencies can negatively impact police response time if these particular states and counties are not collaborating and instituting a county-wide protocol due to the shortage in law enforcement.

For agencies with so few first responders, it can be a challenge to train regularly, prepare adequately, and respond quickly to an event of such magnitude. Medium-sized and large law enforcement agencies are impacted from their own limitations in active shooter preparation, including budget constraints, high-call volumes that take priority over training, the political realm, and large school districts with numerous facilities requiring police attention (New Jersey Attorney General, 2015).

Research focusing on the impact of armed personnel serving as a deterrent in K-12 schools is lacking. According to Zubrzycki (2012), the National Association of Secondary School Principals and the National Association of Elementary School Principals noted that the increasing number of guns in schools would not reduce the likelihood of tragedies. As such, a principals' first responsibility is to foster a safe, orderly, warm, and inviting environment.

Problem Statement

Despite school administrators' reluctance to have police officers within their school environment, the increasing level of violence and delinquency on school campuses has forced many schools to consider the utilization of police in the role of school resource officer (SRO) to ensure safety (Jackson, 2002). Regardless of the underlying causes, rates of gun ownership, or the mental health of the suspect, educators and law enforcement officials must partner to prevent, mitigate, react to, and recover from these incidents. That partnership should be based upon open communication, mutual respect, trust, and feelings of safety and security on behalf of educators and police.

On April 20, 1999, a catastrophic event occurred at Columbine High School in Colorado, impacting students, faculty, parents, administrators, all school personnel, and the community. In total, 12 students and a teacher were killed, and 21 others were wounded. During this mass shooting, a school resource officer (SRO) was on campus to address any problem that might occur on school grounds. A SRO would know the layout of the school premises and have a rapport with students and school personnel for the purpose of deterring any disruptive and delinquent matters that might occur on school property, which would include any violence detection and prevention tactics. As Kopel (2006) reported, the SRO during this 1999 incident remained hidden rather than enter the building and confront the shooters. However, an overarching dissection of planning may need to be implemented, coupled with a multitude of continued assessments regarding managing the expectations of responding in an expeditious manner, specifically to an incident of this magnitude.

On December 14, 2012, Adam Lanza entered Sandy Hook Elementary School. After killing his mother, he came to the school and opened fire, killing 20 children, six teachers, and

the school principal. Then he took his own life (Barron, 2012; Schildkraut & Muschert, 2014). Some teachers and the principal of Sandy Hook put their lives in jeopardy to save their students. This was the first attack of such a scale to occur at an elementary school in recent years in America. When a mass shooting involves loss of life, particularly of children, it causes a stronger desire within society to find a deeper level of understanding in order to try to make sense of such events (Schildkraut & Muschert, 2014). The victims in this attack were between ages six and seven years old. It was difficult for many in the country to comprehend how anyone could target such innocent victims, and once again, the fear and outrage around this topic swirled through the media (Schildkraut & Muschert, 2014).

According to CNN reporter Ben Brumfield (2012), “What the teachers and principal at Sandy Hook Elementary School did for the children in their care could win a soldier in a war zone a Purple Heart” (para. 2). This shooting particularly affected parents, teachers, and the country, given the age of most of the children. Shortly after that, in January of 2013, a shooting occurred once again, but at Taft High School in California, where one student was shot and critically injured before a teacher intervened and got the shooter to drop the weapon. In addition to the concern of school shootings, violence in various forms has increased within schools. For example, “Eighty-five percent of public schools reported at least one criminal/violent incident that occurred at their school during the 2009-2010 school year” (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011). Police officers and supervisors should also understand the true capabilities and limitations of their response network and plan accordingly.

A school shooting call would surely garner a large response from any available personnel in and around any jurisdiction, yet no solid response numbers exist for crisis-planning purposes. A consideration of relying on formal and informal mutual aid is the existence of additional crises

and crime scenes, which would divert resources. Active shooters and terrorists often employ explosives at the school (i.e. Beslan School Siege, 2004) or at another location as a distraction (i.e. Columbine Shooting, 1999). They sometimes target first responders with these devices (i.e. San Bernardino, 2015) and they occasionally flee the initial incident scene, creating motor vehicle pursuits (i.e. San Bernardino, 2015). Additionally, they might commit other coordinated attacks (i.e. Paris Attacks, 2015) or they initiate lengthy standoffs (i.e. Orlando Shooting, 2016).

Despite the opportunities afforded to individuals to respond effectively to a crisis situation (Klein, 1998), there is limited research detailing a school principal's expectations about police tactical capabilities and response during a violent crime. Like any collaboration, law enforcement and educators must maintain an open line of communication and have mutual understanding and respect of safety and security for students and faculty. Without such collaboration, school administrators, principals, and other educational leaders will devalue law enforcement's capabilities and decision-making during an active shooter incident. This will cause educational leaders, such as principals and teachers, to risk their own lives by attempting to confront a shooter. As an example, noted by CBS News, an Indiana teacher who was shot while tackling and disarming a student inside his classroom said that his swift decisions "were the only acceptable actions" to save his seventh-grade students (The Guardian, 2018). Equally, law enforcement officers should be well equipped to respond, deescalate, and aid in the recovery process of an active shooter situation.

The school board of a rural Colorado school district voted to allow the high school principal and superintendent to act as school security officers, thereby allowing them to carry concealed semiautomatic weapons on campus ("Administrators Armed at School", 2013). One teacher, interviewed for a newspaper article, attempted to sum up the concerns of those on both

sides of the issue when she said: “Yes, it is true, guns in the wrong hands can harm or end a life. Likewise, in the right hands, they can protect and save lives. The challenge is in identifying and distinguishing between those individuals” (Landers, 2013, 4D).

School violence and active shooter incidents often correlate with the concept of gun possession and control; hence, where are the guns originating from that kill students and staff within schools? Furthermore, a need for a continued study may exist in the area of illegal gun reduction by way of increasing security countermeasures. Nonetheless, the Brady Act of 1993 was the most important gun control law passed in decades, and its supporters declared the law would significantly reduce firearm, specifically handgun, violence in America (Gray, 2014). This law imposed a background check on firearm purchases as well as a five-day waiting period on purchases.

Faculty teaching in high-crime areas have reported violent offenses that have impacted them or their communities (Maring & Koblinsky, 2013). Evidence of the problem at the local level is reported through Kids Count Data Center of New Jersey (2017), revealing a local problem with youth violence existing in New Jersey. In comparison from 2013, whereas violence in school (not including harassment and bullying) was at 7,895 reported incidents, and in 2017, violence in school increased to 8,245 reported incidents. Although not a large margin, it is an indication that violence in schools is still a concern for students, parents, and school personnel. Therefore, based on the overarching consistence of school violence, yet the limited data that exists as to whether the use of armed personnel in K-12 schools is the best solution as a security counter-measure, integrated with the examination of what is perceived as adequate police response times to active shooter incidents, do police active shooter capabilities manage

expectations of school principals when attaining the best results regarding security for all students and faculty?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to identify and understand what safety measures are established to ensure a safer learning environment for principals, faculty, and students. An interview study will be utilized for this qualitative research design to assist in determining the perceptions of principals regarding armed personnel being operationalized in a specific New Jersey public school district factor group as well as their perceptions of police tactical response capabilities relevant to school shootings. This researcher was influenced by a previous study conducted in 2016 as well as some components of a 2014 research study, whereas a decision was formulated to conduct an enhanced study in looking at a different phenomenon than the 2014 and 2016 research studies. The different phenomenon will focus on police response and capabilities and the public-school districts in District Factor Group (I). However, there will be some aspects of a synonymous design and methodology.

The 2014 researchers conducted their research on one inner city school district in Paterson, New Jersey with District Factor Group (A), which is an environment with high crime and low socioeconomic status within District Factor Group A. This study examined principals' perceptions regarding armed personnel within their schools in the inner city and their perception towards how it affects the learning environment for both students and faculty. According to Reyes (2014), "Every school principal in the Paterson Public School District was aware of the problems that an urban community faces, as well as the personal challenges with which their students must deal, including violence in their community" (p. 159).

The 2016 research conducted its research with K-12 public schools in District Factor Group GH in New Jersey, which consisted of suburban school districts with a higher socioeconomic status. This study explored principals' perceptions of armed personnel in their schools along with their challenges when determining the best approach in securing a safe learning environment for their students and faculty. According to Kelly (2016), "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, 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" (p.179).

Many U.S. schools are deemed unsafe because of the number of acts of violence committed within and on school campuses has increased over the years. Although researchers recognize that poverty and violence are connected, they also view other contributory factors, such as low socioeconomic status (SES), minimal community involvement, substance abuse rates, lack of or overcrowded housing, and unemployment (Chonody, Ferman, Amitrani-Welsh, & Martin, 2013) accounting for violence in communities. Nonetheless, different school districts throughout New Jersey were selected based on socioeconomic status, in particular, the multiple suburban districts with a high median salary for its residents. This was the basis of this researcher's decision to select a different district factor group than what was utilized in the previous study. Each school district solicited is, in and of itself, its own case study, as each school principal may possess differing perceptions of the core phenomenon.

The current study will be using New Jersey District Factor Group DFG (I), which possesses more affluent households, and based on SES and demographics, could translate into more money allotted for school security, as well as a higher demand and community expectations in the realm of police response capabilities relevant to an active shooter incident. Many schools have increased their security measures (Jones & Bouffard, 2012), and there has been increased debate about what other solutions should be implemented. The selection of public schools in New Jersey DFG (I) focuses on the school and principals' challenges that they face and address regarding school violence in conjunction with their perceptions about police capabilities and response to an active shooter incident. This research study's importance and alignment derives from this researcher's personal background as a professional in the child protection/criminal justice/juvenile and human trafficking systems coupled with the fact that my children currently attend a public-school district in New Jersey DFG (I). The interest in how the school districts in this DFG address and handle safety and a potential active shooter drill, scare, and/or incident within their schools became the motivation in selecting the DFG (I) public schools in New Jersey.

District factor groups (DFG) were initiated in 1975 for comparison of students' performance on standardized assessments across similar demographical school districts statewide. These include, but are not limited to, a community's socioeconomic status (SES). Reportedly, these categories are updated decennially after the Census Bureau releases their data. Since its origin, DFG has also been utilized for purposes other than the students' performances (NJDOE, 2019).

Crime and violence in schools not only disrupts the learning process but has an emotional impact on other students, staff, and the school community (Henry, 2000). The motivation of this

study is to determine the mindset/feelings/perceptions of school principals in DFG (I) relative to having armed personnel in their schools used as a security countermeasure, as well as to identify their perceptions on current police response in case a critical incident occurred on school property.

Research Question

Violence in schools should not be separated from the larger problem of violence in communities. Researchers have determined that violence is impacting the development of students in U.S. schools (Henry, 2000), especially students who are victimized in some way increasingly report feelings of isolation, hopelessness, frustration, and the inability to develop relationships with the school (Johnson, S.L., 2011). This researcher has focused her investigation around the following research question:

RQ1. How do school principals in one New Jersey District Factor Group (DFG) address school safety, based on their school district's policies and practices, for their students and faculty, while simultaneously manage their own expectations of current active shooter response capabilities of their local police departments, as it pertains to a potential school shooting?

Conceptual Framework

This study comprises a multitude of factors contributing to police response capabilities as perceived by school principals who may not be afforded the resource of armed personnel in their schools. Whereas high profile incidents – primarily April of 1999 to present – often promulgate how procedures in schools will be instituted or

amended, the practicality of students retaining the information under the stress of an actual shooting brings up the possibility that misapplications of the techniques could cause deaths instead of preventing them (Dorn, 2011).

The average time for these type of mass shootings is between five to seven minutes (Wood, 2001). The approximate time that the shooting took place at Columbine High School was 16 minutes. This is almost double the average time and the police response time was approximately 30 minutes after the shooting and killing had ceased. Prior to the Columbine High School's mass shooting, "there were at least 16 school violence incidents, in which the majority ended with deadly outcomes" (Wood, 2001).

Marx & Mayhood (2004) reported that reviewing such incidents can justify the slow response by the Special Weapons and Tactics team (S.W.A.T.). Nonetheless, school shootings continue to transpire, and school principals' expectations vary or may not be managed based on the capabilities of local police who respond to violent incidents within these schools. In this case, planning is paramount for school districts, whereas the planning for emergencies is normally spearheaded by the school principals.

To combat these school shootings, countermeasures must continue to be developed on all levels. School shootings are still occurring and a close look at influences on school violence prevention should be an option, such as the exclusion of one entity of subsystems (stakeholder, community, etc.), as well as societal, school, parental, and media influences. After the Newtown, Connecticut shooting, a citizen group, Moms Demand Action, and Mayors Against Illegal Guns completed a joint inquiry of school shootings between December 2012 to February 2014. The discovery noted that during this 14-month period, there were 44 shootings throughout the United States (Pilkington, 2014).

Nonetheless, there is a gap in research regarding what is the best methodology for a school principal to combat these violent acts, coupled with an additional gap in research regarding how school principals perceive police response capabilities pertaining to an active shooter incident within a school. In some of the research, school violence of all types has been declining since 1993, yet educators still view violence as increasing (Hemphill et al, 2006). Despite these variations in numbers, fear concerning school violence and the effectiveness of the policies that are in place to keep schools safe still remains high (Wike & Fraser, 2009).

This study will examine literature on school violence, the debate on armed personnel in schools, and police response capabilities pertaining to an active shooter incident within schools. School principals, by and large, will provide their perceptions, based on their school district's policies and practices, as to what extent the safety of the students and faculty will be carried out, while also ensuring an environment that is safe for learning.

Delimitation and Limitations

As stated by Rudestam and Newton (2001), there will be restrictions in any study. This is a researcher's inability to control the outcome of something within the study. There are several identifiable delimitations in this study:

DL1. This qualitative research study is based on data obtained from the interviews with school principals (elementary, middle, and high school level).

DL2. The interview location and personnel being interviewed as well as being a public school in New Jersey within a specific district factor group (I), which was specifically selected for this study.

DL3. The interview questions were developed based on themes that would occur in any educational setting (i.e. K-12 public schools).

There are also some identifiable limitations in this research study:

L1.The results/conclusions will not extrapolate beyond the demographics of the environment that was studied.

L2.This qualitative study will not generalize the research findings due to the sample population.

L3.The abrupt closing of schools to remote learning due to COVID-19 will limit the ability to reach a larger sample population.

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.); the term used for a person who enters into a location where multiple people are assembled and begins to shoot or harm indiscriminately.

Armed Personnel: 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, retired police officer, or teacher/principal.

Critical incidents: terrorist activities, hostage taking, mass causality events, high-risk repetitive crimes, riots, or bombings

DFG: is an acronym for District Factor Group, the classification of New Jersey schools by their socioeconomic status.

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: 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.

School: 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.

Socioeconomic status: The social standing or class of an individual or group. It is often measured as a combination of education, income, and occupation. The acronym for socioeconomic status is SES.

School Resource Officer: This is a sworn law enforcement officer responsible for the safety and crime prevention in schools. The acronym for school resource officer is SRO.

S.W.A.T. team: A team of police officers trained in Special Weapons and Tactics, equipped to respond to a variety of dangerous situations.

Summary

The overall purpose of Chapter 1 is to provide a brief summary of the research study. It outlines the background of the study and why it is needed, the indication of the problem, the purpose of the study, guided research question, conceptual framework and significance of the study, delimitations and limitations, and the definition of terms. In Chapter 2, the purpose is to present a review of related literature and the inferences of the literature. The extensive literature review is essential to the study and it is derived from themes used to address school violence, such as mass shootings/active shooter, school safety efforts/prevention, police response, state laws, school policies, and school security/armed personnel. In Chapter 3, the qualitative research design and methodology

will be discussed as well as the data collection process, which consists of interviews, note-taking, and a review of documents. In Chapter 4, the collection and analysis of the data by interviews and demographic survey will be discussed as well as the thematic coding of all data collected from these qualitative methods. In Chapter 5, there will be the summary of findings, discussion, conclusion, recommendations for future research for policy and practices as well as the reflective summary.

CHAPTER II – REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

In this section of the study, this researcher's goal is to identify strategies that were implemented in schools to address violence, such as active shooter, at the K-12 public school level. This study's concentration is on New Jersey DFG (I) public school principals' perspectives regarding armed personnel in their schools as a security countermeasure as well as on current police response to a critical incident occurring on school property. This is important to explore, considering the need to create and maintain a safe and secure school for learning. Not only is this the responsibility of the community, but more importantly, the administrators, principals, and leaders of the school system are held accountable to ensure its safety daily.

In reviewing the literature on this topic of mass shootings, violence, strategies, and prevention for addressing school violence, this researcher found minimal research regarding school principals' perspectives about police capabilities pertaining to an active shooter incident within a school. The FBI has a clear definition of an active shooter and uses that term more than the term "mass shooting." In determining the identification of a "mass shooting," there is no standard definition of what constitutes this type of shooting. However, the FBI defines mass murderer "as someone who kills four or more people in a single incident, excluding the shooter and in a single location" (Rand Corporation, 2018). And according to the Congressional Research Service (CRC), "mass shootings are events where more than four people are killed with a firearm within one event, and in one or more locations in close proximity" (Berk, 2020, para.1).

According to the Gun Violence Archive -GVA (2020), there were 417 mass shootings in the United States. The GVA tracks every mass shooting in the country, and out of the 417 mass shootings, 31 were mass murders. Also, with this data, GVA noted that there was a total of 15,381 gun deaths, which included homicides, suicides, and accidents, along with 29,568 injuries in 2019, in the United States. In noting their tracking of mass shootings, GVA noted that 2019 had the highest number of mass shootings since 2014, which is the year the GVA initially started to track this data. In 2016, there were 382 mass shootings, 346 mass shootings in 2017, and 337 mass shootings in 2018 (CBS News, 2020).

Based on the FBI data, an analysis review was organized by a group examining 133 active shooter incidents. In this review, it was determined that “out of the 133 shooting incidents, 4% occurred in schools, including primary, secondary, and college campuses, while 11% of these shooting incidents noted concerns to a medical professional, school official, or legal authority regarding the shooter’s mental health prior to the shooting” (Everytown for Gun Safety, 2015). In looking at this analysis review, based on these incidents, it’s evident that countermeasures to undertake these incidents need to be developed and operational.

Also, there is limited research regarding the role and best practice of a school principal to address these violent acts on school property, coupled with their perception of police response capabilities pertaining to an active shooter incident within a school. Active shooting incidents “generate fear concerning school violence and the effectiveness of the policies that are in place to ensure schools are safe” (Wike & Fraser, 2009, p. 162). These incidents produce fear and confusion with the public and policymakers, thus leading toward the need for and movement of policy changes (Thompson and Kyle 2005).

Literature Search Strategy Methods

The primary focus of this study is an analysis of principals' perspectives regarding armed personnel being operationalized in a specific New Jersey public school district factor group as well as their perceptions of police tactical response capabilities relevant to school shootings. In conducting the search for information regarding school shootings for the literature review, databases, such as Seton Hall Library and the world wide web were used to include, but not limited to, Educational Resource Information Center (ERIC), ProQuest, and Lexis Nexis. Search terms that aided me in my search were "school shootings," "police response," "school violence," "school principal," "school resource officers," "active shooter," "mass shootings," "principal perceptions," "gun safety," "gun laws," "school preparedness," and "zero tolerance policy."

Supplementary insight was retrieved from two studies in 2014 and 2016 regarding federal and state laws regarding school shootings, news and media reports, books, peer review articles, and updated research on active school shooting incidents, principals' perceptions of armed personnel in the school setting and on police response time and capabilities during an active shooting incident. A review of the current literature was studied to obtain relevant information that is accessible to school leaders, administrators, principals and law enforcement officers for the purpose of decision-making in ensuring a safe learning environment for students and faculty.

Active Shooter

According to the FBI, an active shooter is an individual engaged in attempting to kill people in a confined space or populated area (FEMA.gov, March 2018). Also, according to

Borelli, “a suspect’s activity is immediately causing death and serious bodily injury. The activity is not contained or there is a risk of death or serious bodily injury to potential victims” (2005, p. 2). In most active shooting incidents, the use of firearms is the choice of weapon and there’s usually no pattern to the shooter’s selection of victims. The profile of an active shooter typically shows that there is a developed plan, which includes randomly shooting as many victims as possible before committing suicide. According to Scanlon, “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” (2001, 31(3)). As per Borelli, “there are basically three ways that these situations end: suicide, surrender, or termination” (2005).

An active shooter event is unpredictable and progresses quickly. In the majority of these incidents, an immediate response by law enforcement is required to stop the shooting and mitigate harm to victims. Due to these active shooter situations often ceasing within 10 to 15 minutes, prior to law enforcement officials’ arrival to the scene, individuals must be prepared mentally and physically to deal with an active shooter situation. Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has implemented strategies for survival during active shooting events. During the active shooting incident, an individual is confronted with three options and specific guidelines have been provided by FEMA to address each option as well as guidelines in what to do after an active shooting incident has ceased:

1. **“RUN** and escape, if possible:

- Getting away from the shooter or shooters is the top priority.
- Leave your belongings behind and get away.
- Help others escape, if possible, but evacuate regardless of whether others agree to follow.

- Warn and prevent individuals from entering an area where the active shooter may be.
- Call 911 when you are safe, and describe shooter, location, and weapons.

2. HIDE, if escape is not possible:

- Get out of the shooter's view and stay very quiet.
- Silence all electronic devices and make sure they won't vibrate.
- Lock and block doors, close blinds, and turn off lights.
- Don't hide in groups – spread out along walls or hide separately to make it more difficult for the shooter.
- Try to communicate with police silently. Use text message or social media to tag your location or put a sign in a window.
- Stay in place until law enforcement gives you the all-clear.
- Your hiding place should be out of the shooter's view and provide protection if shots are fired in your direction.

3.FIGHT as an absolute last resort:

- Commit to your actions and act as aggressively as possible against the shooter.
- Recruit others to ambush the shooter with makeshift weapons like chairs, fire extinguishers, scissors, books, etc.
- Be prepared to cause severe or lethal injury to the shooter.
- Throw items and improvise weapons to distract and disarm the shooter.

4.AFTER an active shooting incident:

- Keep hands visible and empty.

- Know that law enforcement's first task is to end the incident, and they may have to pass injured along the way.
- Officers may be armed with rifles, shotguns, and/or handguns and may use pepper spray or tear gas to control the situation.
- Officers will shout commands and may push individuals to the ground for their safety.
- Follow law enforcement's instructions and evacuate in the direction they come from, unless otherwise instructed.
- Take care of yourself first, and then you may be able to help the wounded before first responders arrive.
- If the injured are in immediate danger, help get them to safety.
- While you wait for first responders to arrive, provide first aid. Apply direct pressure to wounded areas and use tourniquets if you have been trained to do so.
- Turn wounded people onto their sides if they are unconscious and keep them warm.
- Consider seeking professional help for you and your family to cope with the long-term effects of the trauma. (FEMA.gov)

There are many places and institutions, such as school, workplaces, and houses of worship that have plans in place to assist in responding safely. Between 2000-2018, there have been 277 active shooter incidents in the United States. Out of those 277 incidents, 20.6% were conducted in learning institutions compared to commerce (business, malls, etc. 43.7%), open space (13.4%), government (9.4%), residences (4.3%), health care facilities (4.3%), and houses

of worship (4%). During this timeframe, 844 individuals were killed and 1,546 were wounded out of the 277 incidents (FBI.gov). In looking at this data, the successful prevention of these active shooter incidents lies with a wide range of public and private entities all working together.

School Shooting

A review of the literature found little research on principals' perspectives on school violence and police response capabilities within a public school system. This researcher's focus on the literature review pertained to school shootings, police response, and policies and procedures that have an impact on public schools. It is beneficial for school administrators and law enforcement to have accurate and adequate information in order to maintain a safe learning environment for students and faculty.

In reviewing some of the recent national tragedies, there is clearly an indication that the risk is real (FEMA.gov, March 2018). According to Reyes (2014), "with all the information surrounding school shootings, it is important to differentiate between active shooter, mass casualty, and school violence. All active shooter and mass casualty situations in a school setting constitute school violence; however, not all school violence falls into the category of active shooter or mass casualty incidents" (pg. 54).

The concern regarding school shootings has created a heightened sense of fear. Schools are focusing more on security and safety, in that they have implemented metal detectors, active shooter drills, armed and unarmed guards, and sometimes local police presence on campus grounds. This heightened sense of concern impacts the learning curve within a school, especially when safety has been compromised via school violence or active shooting incidents. According to Burns & Crawford (2003), the actions of incorporating more security metal detectors and

armed guards have occurred prior to the influx of school shootings in the 1990s, and the security precautions were predominately in the inner-city schools.

This has led to the shift of discussions from inner-city school violence to that of suburban and rural school shootings. With such a change over the past two decades, there have been legal battles within the school administration; specifically, the suburban and rural school systems' superintendents and principals. With this in mind, school leaders must be conscious of such changes and how they impact their school and their ability to provide educational instruction despite such challenges (Mohandie & Hoffman, 2014). Data indicates that school shooting occurrences are more evident in rural and suburban communities, yet urban communities should not ignore information identified and shared from these tragic occurrences (Newman et al., 2004).

When discussions surrounding school shootings are held, it is not without controversy or concern. According to Burn & Crawford (2003), the response to school shootings has been exaggerated because of the decline in juvenile school violence and murders in schools is minimal. This heightened sense of fear leads to panic regarding school shootings. Goode and Ben-Yehuda noted, and cited by 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).

With the heightened sense of fear and panic, more education and training preparation on the next school shooting casualty has become the focus for school administrators, faculty, and students. However, there needs to be a balance to incorporate active shooting incidents while focusing on school violence and any other incidents that may lead to suicide and/or school shootings (Ujifusa, 2012).

According to National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), “Crime in schools and college campuses has declined overall during the past two decades” (Musu et al., 2019). NCES’ Indicators of School Crime and Safety (2018) highlights information pertinent to youth opioid use, perceptions of bullying, and active shooter incidents in educational settings. This report also divulges topics addressing student victimization, school conditions and environment, safety and security measures at schools, and criminal incidents on college campuses (Musu et al, 2019).

A review of the Indicators of School Crime and Safety report provided an analysis of active shooting occurrences at schools. This is a small subset comparable to other violent incidents and occurrences in schools, but it is still a major concern for all interested in the safety and well-being of students in school. From the years 2000 to 2017, there were 37 active shooter incidents at elementary, middle, and high schools. In considering all schools, 15 active shooter incidents were held at college institutions. Also, during this period, there were 153 casualties (67 killed and 86 wounded) in active shooter incidents at elementary, middle, and high schools, and 143 casualties (70 killed and 73 wounded) in active shooter incidents on college campuses.

The Justice Policy Institute (2012) has reported that the media’s focal lens on school violence has caused society to view school as a dangerous environment. This type of perception has magnified school violence, resulting in new laws that were created to combat school violence. Such laws within schools include the zero tolerance policies, but this doesn’t combat the bigger issue of gun violence outside of schools (Burns & Crawford, 2003). To further explicate such laws and policies, the Indicators of School Crime and Safety report (2018) noted that 99% of students between the ages of 12-18 have one or more safety and security measures at their schools (Musu et al., 2019). The most commonly used programs were (1) 95% have a written code of student conduct; (2) 90% have a visitation sign-in requirement or the visible

wearing of a badge/sticker; and (3) 88% have the presence of school staff other than security guards or law enforcement supervising the hallways.

According to Johnson (2009), schools that developed some security mechanism for their school and environment created an awareness of safety, yet further insight revealed that these measures created a more volatile environment. After the 2012 tragedy at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, in which 26 people were killed (6 adult staff and 20 children between the ages of 6 and 7), the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and National Education Association (NEA) held a press release and noted that:

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, para. 4)

After the Sandy Hook tragedy, some groups are still suggesting that teachers and faculty be armed (Wilson, 2004). In fact, Wayne LaPierre, the vice president and spokesperson of the National Rifle Association (NRA), suggested that having armed security guards in every school would safeguard them from school violence and shootings. LaPierre stated, “The only way to stop a bad guy with a gun is a good guy with a gun” (Pilkington, 2012, para. 1). Now, eight years later, there is still the same debate and concern of safety for children in school settings. An active shooting incident elicits fear and confusion from the public and policymakers in which policy changes are often demanded (Thompson & Kyle, 2005). Notably listed is a snippet of some active shooting incidents in school settings in the United States from 2014-2019.

- On January 14, 2014 at 7:30am, a 12-year-old male, armed with a shotgun, began shooting in Berrendo Middle School in Roswell, New Mexico. A teacher at the

school confronted and ordered him to place his gun on the ground. The shooter complied. No one was killed. Three were wounded: two students and an unarmed security guard. The shooter was taken into custody.

- On October 24, 2014 at 10:39am, a 15-year-old male armed with a handgun began shooting in the cafeteria of Marysville-Pilchuck High School in Marysville, Washington. Four students were killed, including the shooter's cousin; three students were wounded, including one who injured himself while fleeing the scene. The shooter, then confronted by a teacher, committed suicide before law enforcement arrived.
- On October 1, 2015, at 10:38am, a 26-year-old male, armed with several handguns and a rifle, began shooting classmates in a classroom on the campus of Umpqua Community College in Roseburg, Oregon. Nine people were killed; seven were wounded. The shooter committed suicide after being wounded during an exchange of gunfire with law enforcement.
- On September 28, 2016, at 1:45pm, a 14-year-old male, armed with a handgun, allegedly began shooting at the Townville Elementary School playground in Townville, South Carolina. Prior to the shooting, the shooter, a former student, killed his father at their home. Two people were killed, including one student; three were wounded, one teacher and two students. A volunteer firefighter, who possessed a valid firearms permit, restrained the shooter until law enforcement officers arrived and apprehended him.
- On September 13, 2017, at 10:00am, a 15-year-old male, armed with a rifle and a pistol, allegedly began shooting at Freeman High School in Rockford, Washington

- where he was a student. One student was killed; three students were wounded. School employees confronted the shooter, ordered him to the ground, and held him there until law enforcement arrived and took him into custody.
- On February 14, 2018, at 2:21pm, an expelled 19-year-old male, armed with a rifle, opened fire at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, killing 17 students and faculty and injuring 17 others. There was one SRO available at the school during the time of the shooting. The shooter was able to leave the school without apprehension. He went to a Walmart, Subway, and McDonalds prior to being recognized and apprehended by a Broward County police officer.
 - On November 14, 2019, a 16-year-old male, armed with a handgun, opened fire at the Saugus High School in Santa Clarita, California, killing two students and wounding three. There were 2,270 children present in school that day. The shooter died of a self-inflicted gunshot to the head. (Ready.gov, 2020)

This strong urgency related to firearms in school was noted by the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) President David Hecker to Michigan Governor Rick Snyder. He stated that “firearms have absolutely no place in our schools” (AFT, 2012). This sentiment is still the same today based on the listed snippet of active shootings that occurred between 2014-2019 and some concerns about arming personnel in school after the Sandy Hook school shooting in 2012. The National Association of School Principals noted their concerns about armed school faculty by stating that “increasing the number of guns in schools would not reduce the likelihood of tragedies like Sandy Hook Elementary School. A principal’s first responsibility is to foster a safe, orderly, warm, and inviting environment. And that the arming of teachers and principals might do more harm than good” (Zubrzycki, 2012).

Police Response

The Sandy Hook Elementary shooting in December 2012 has steered a serious response as to how law enforcement officials would respond to mass shootings (active shooting incidents). There are some conflicting issues over power and control from various law enforcement agencies. The FBI has been vocal and immediately sought initiatives on how their personnel would respond to an incident such as with Sandy Hook as well as their overall assistance to its law enforcement partners. There have been two key efforts that the FBI has instituted as a response to the shooting in Connecticut.

In January 2013, then President Obama signed into law the Investigative Assistance for Violent Crimes Act of 2012. This act allows the U.S. Attorney General, with the request of state or local law enforcement, to provide federal assistance during an active shooter incident and mass casualties. To streamline this process in ensuring aid is being provided during this crisis moment, the attorney general delegated this role to the FBI. The other effort that was established was the FBI, in conjunction with other cabinet agencies, is collaborating to discover ways to prevent and respond to active shooters. An initiative that was derived from this effort is “Now Is The Time.” This was initiated after the Sandy Hook shootings and this working group consists of the Department of Justice (DOJ), the Department of Homeland Security, the Department of Education, and the Department of Health and Human Services. Their role is to ensure the protocols are consistent during training for law enforcement officers and other first responders when they are responding to active shooter situations across the United States.

In looking at the protocols that are in place from these initiatives in New Jersey, it’s clear that the broader initiatives from the White House workgroup diminished slightly when imposing such standards because the State of New Jersey, the Department of Education, and New Jersey

Office of the Attorney General impose minimum standards regarding policy, active shooter training, and drilling preparation for learning institutions and law enforcement agencies. In fact, due to the limitation of educational specialists with the Department of Education to audit policies and ensure compliance of drills and inspections statewide, these minimum standards are mostly self-enforced (New Jersey Office of the Attorney General, 2015). Based on research, the relationship between municipal police and their local school districts appear to have a collaborative rapport, yet during heightened times, their service needs to the schools are questionable in regard to responding to student and faculty safety. According to Hess, Hess Orthamann, & Ladue (2016), some state and municipal law enforcement agencies nationwide have less than ten full-time officers. These particular states and counties are collaborating and instituting a county-wide protocol for the shortage in law enforcement.

In reviewing the literature on law enforcement agencies, the notion to train departments with fewer first responders on a regular basis in order to be readily prepared and equipped to respond efficiently to an active shooting situation can be a challenging mission. The vastly staffed law enforcement agencies' challenges are a bit different. According to the New Jersey Attorney General (2015), they are more inundated with high call volumes for assistance that would interfere with the required trainings, including larger school districts regularly demanding police assistance and attention. However, in the mayhem of it all, law enforcement officials and educators must continuously collaborate in order to combat and recover from these active shooting incidents.

Like any collaboration, law enforcement and educators must maintain an open line of communication and have mutual understanding and respect of safety and security for students and faculty. Without such collaboration, school administrators, principals, and other educational

leaders will devalue law enforcement's capabilities and decision-making during an active shooter incident. This will cause educational leaders, such as principals and teachers, to risk their own lives by attempting to confront a shooter. In the active shooter section of the study, this researcher provided some active shooting incidents from 2014-2019, and during some of these incidents, an educational leader of the school confronted the shooter. Equally, law enforcement officers should be well equipped to respond, deescalate, and aid in the recovery process of an active shooter situation.

Due to the rise of active shooter incidents in the United States, law enforcement personnel had to be very strategic in how to combat and minimize such incidents. The development of immediate action rapid deployment (IARD) was initiated for law enforcement to respond to the threat without waiting for specially trained officers (SWAT) to cease the threat. The IARD was geared specifically for highly trained law enforcement, in teams of three or four, to quickly respond and neutralize the threat while ensuring safety for the public and the first responders. As Gerald (2018) noted, even with the implementation of IARD, casualties continued to rise during active shooting incidents, with the realization that this type of tactic had little to no effect in ceasing the threat.

In looking at the active shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School (MSD) in Parkland, Florida, by the time the attack was over, this shooting became one of the deadliest shootings at a high school in the United States. The police response in this manner uncovered an array of challenges, such as uncoordinated and inefficient response by law enforcement. As per the "after action report" regarding this incident by the National Police Foundation (2019), it is noted that on February 14, 2018 at approximately 2:21pm, the suspect entered Building 12 of MSD High School. Approximately 22 seconds after entering this building via the east hallway

door, the suspect began firing his weapon. At approximately 2:32pm, the first responding law enforcement team entered that same building, #12, through the west hallway door. The shooter was able to leave the premises and visit a mall and eating establishments prior to being apprehended at 3:40pm by Broward County police officers.

The police response in Parkland, Florida is a clear example in what law enforcement agencies and other first responders are facing nationwide. In Broward County in Florida, the county and municipal government structure created silos and disorganization in sharing and coordinating their resources during the active shooting incident. This caused the missed response time to the shooting and the recovery; evident in that the shooting was at 2:21pm and the shooter was apprehended at 3:40pm off school campus. When looking at their resources and collaboration, Broward County government, Broward's Sheriff's Office, and Broward County Public Schools in conjunction with the municipal governments in Parkland and Coral Springs have extensive resources to assist in the response and recovery of heightened crisis times. With this particular active shooting with 34 casualties, lack of leadership, lack of existing partnerships, and lack of collaborative planning between those in charge of various aspects of the response teams were displayed.

For the Parkland active shooting, the Broward County Public School had its own special investigative unit (SIU), which served as the law enforcement and investigative team for the school. The Parkland municipal police were the lead in this shooting, but the coordination with other governmental entities was disjointed and led to failed responses, recovery, and a major delay in apprehending the suspect. There was confusion surrounding the "location of the command post, staging area, and the tactical operations center, as well as the incident command

structure on scene also contributed to the intra and inter agency communication challenges” (National Police Foundation, 2019).

Many school shootings captured the attention of the nation in ways that were similar, yet not quite to the magnitude of Columbine (Schildkraut & Muschert, 2014). For example, the shooting at Virginia Tech (Wikie & Fraser, 2009) and the Amish school shooting garnered some attention (Wikie & Fraser, 2009). However, in December 2012, a rampage shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School brought the issue of school shootings to the eyes of America once more, but at a magnitude that had not been seen since Columbine (Schildkraut & Muschert 2014). Then the school shooting in Parkland, Florida in February 2018 represented a litany of failed planning, coordination, resources, and trained first responders from the Columbine and Sandy Hook massive school shootings. After massive shootings, new tactical responses and recovery methods are imposed, yet the casualties in schools are still occurring and in higher numbers in some areas in the United States.

School Resource Officers (SRO)

The presence of school resource officers in schools has become a vital part of the school environment to ensure the protection and safety of students and staff on campus. SROs’ trainings consist of having law enforcement knowledge and skill in conjunction with a specialty training for SROs to ensure their understanding and training in the education setting. This specialized SRO training focuses on the school campuses, student needs and characteristics, and the educational and custodial interests of school personnel. The overall goal is for the SRO to possess a dual skill set that encompasses both law enforcement and education personnel that will allow them to protect the campus while supporting the school’s educational mission. Such tasks include, but are not limited to, investigations surrounding

drugs on school grounds, law enforcement education sessions in the classroom setting, conducting daily safety assessments of the school premises, problem-solving with students and faculty, and meeting with the school safety and security team regarding drills, safety routes, safety plans, etc.

Although evidence concerning their effectiveness is mixed, research reveals principals and teachers tend to have a positive attitude toward SROs and believe their presence serves as a deterrent to misconduct and crime at school (Chrusciel, Wolfe, and Hansen, 2014). Chrusciel et al. (2014) also states that “despite this line of research, the perspectives of principals and police officials concerning whether SRO presence in all schools as an effective strategy for increasing school safety remains largely unexplored” (p. 27).

Laws and Administrators

When examining the data as it pertains to strategies and tactics regarding gun violence in school, there appears to be limited and differing opinions as to what constitutes a safer learning institution. Information was shared with urgency from the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) to the White House to “reinstate the assault weapons ban while calling for strengthened background checks for the purchase of firearms” (Karhuse, 2013, p.3). Federal courts have also played a pivotal role in upholding the right of the school districts to establish regulations surrounding the operations of their schools on a daily basis.

In February 1994, the federal government mandated that all interested handgun purchasers undergo a background check for determining if they are legally able to have possession of a gun (Gius, 2015). The primary purpose of the act was to establish a waiting period for handgun purchases and to create a national criminal background database for firearm dealers to use before transferring firearms to non-federally licensed individuals (Gray, 2014).

The federally licensed firearms dealer (FFL) was responsible for steering the firearms background check (Gius, 2015). The Brady Act requires federally licensed firearms dealers to contact the FBI or state authorities to determine the eligibility of potential customers (Gray, 2014). However, the Brady Act failed to have any significant effect on the crimes specifically targeted by the act of handgun and domestic homicides (Gray, 2014).

One of the earliest studies on the gun control topic was Ludwig and Cook (2000), in which they looked at state-level data between the years of 1985 and 1997. The authors found that the Brady Act did not have statistically significant effects on homicide or overall suicide rates (Gius, 2015). Philip J. Cook and Jens Ludwig found similar results when testing this theory again and factoring in suicides, stating, “We found no evidence of a reduction in the homicide rate that could be attributed to Brady. We also considered the possibility that Brady reduced the overall suicide rate but found no discernible impact on that outcome either” (Cook & Ludwig, 2003 AEFAB). Remarkably, though, the results of the present study also suggest that states that had background checks with private vendors resulted in higher gun-related murder rates than states with no such background checks (Gius, 2015). In fact, according to the log-linear model results, states with private sales background checks had gun-related murder rates that were 20% higher, even after controlling for state and year effects and a variety of other control variables (Gius, 2015).

Prior to the passing of the Brady Act, many states had already enacted laws similar to the Brady Act. By comparing states without preexisting Brady-type laws and states having preexisting Brady-type laws in the time period after the passing of the Brady Act, Monroe (2008) showed violent crime decreased in states with preexisting Brady Act-type laws more than states without preexisting Brady Act-type laws (Gray, 2014). These results run contrary to what would

be expected from effective legislation. The law should produce significant decreases in states without preexisting Brady-type laws, leading to the conclusion that something other than the laws are responsible for the crime drop (Gray, 2014). A number of other researchers have acknowledged firearm ownership appears to have little effect on crime (Moody & Marvell, 2005) and gun control seems to have little or no effect on violent crime (Monroe, 2008; Gius, 2015; Kopel, 2006; Gray, 2014).

The school board of a rural Colorado school district voted to allow the high school principal and superintendent to act as school security officers, thereby allowing them to carry concealed semiautomatic weapons on campus (“Administrators Armed at School”, 2013). One teacher attempted to sum up the concerns of those on both sides of the issue when she said: “Yes, it is true, guns in the wrong hands can harm or end a life. Likewise, in the right hands, they can protect and save lives. The challenge is in identifying and distinguishing between those individuals” (Landers, 2013, 4D).

After the National Academy of Sciences extensively studied elements of gun control in 2004, they were unable to identify any gun limitations that would produce a reduction in gun accidents, crime, or suicide (Kates & Beard, 2013). In 2005, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), after releasing a comprehensive review of the exact literature as the National Academy of Sciences, could not identify any gun control mechanism that would minimize suicide, gun accidents, or crime (Kates & Beard, 2013). Kates & Moody (2016) strongly believe these two studies are what impacted the result in *D.C. v. Heller*, stating, “The Court undoubtedly gave attention to the National Academy of Sciences’ 2004 finding that, after exhaustive investigation, it could not identify any gun control measure that had reduced violent crime, suicide, or accidents. The Justices also may have noted the same result that the Centers for

Disease Control reached in an even more extensive study as well as in the cognate results of other researchers” (p.3).

According to an article by Laura Diamond (2013), a state legislature in Georgia recommended that school principals, with their school district’s permission, have the right to carry a concealed weapon on school grounds. In looking at New Jersey, the level at which public schools and their leaders, such as principals, are compliant with New Jersey’s laws vary from district to district and across the state. In addition, there may be organizational, political, financial, and/or structural barriers that limit a principal’s or school’s ability to fully meet requirements of the law (Rocco, 2018). Educators’ beliefs and feelings with hard data in an effort to manage their own expectations during a critical incident may vary.

At the same time, numerous legislators, policymakers, and activist groups were involved in the nationwide debate regarding the most effective strategy in maintaining a safe learning institution. One of these security strategies was in arming schoolteachers and/or administrators, such as principals. This has been an ongoing debate since the 2012 Sandy Hook school shooting. During that time, the NRA developed the National School Shield Program to provide training guidelines and suggestions in implementing armed personnel in every school. In fact, between 2013 and 2014, eight states – Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Texas, South Dakota, Oklahoma, and Kansas – passed legislative law to arm school personnel, such as administrators, principals, and/or teachers. At the same time, other states, such as Utah, Tennessee, Virginia, South Carolina, Missouri, Maine, Colorado, and Arizona proposed similar legislation (Flock, 2013; Koppel, 2014; Roberts, 2013).

Law enforcement officers and supervisors must also understand the true capabilities and limitations of their response network and plan accordingly. Research studies within this genre

examining this controversial phenomenon may provoke positive feelings and attitudes on behalf of police officers. The mere perception of such interest on behalf of researchers often translates into better performance on behalf of those studied, also known as the Hawthorne Effect (Hess, Hess, Orthmann, & Ladue, 2016). Finally, this level of examination provides academic and law enforcement trainers with laser-like focus on the areas that need further training, drilling, or modifications, such as incident command, rapid deployment, marksmanship, and critical incident stress management.

State Law

New Jersey State law prohibits any person from carrying or possessing a weapon on any school, college, university, or educational institution campus without the written authorization of the “governing officer” of that institution (Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence, 2018). Even though this is specified in the state law, this does not supersede the federal mandate that the person carrying the firearm must meet qualifications under the state law (Cornell University Law, 2012). If any person is in violation of this law, this is a crime of the 3rd degree. New Jersey is known as a “May Issue” state for a permit/license to carry a handgun. The person must be a resident in New Jersey and the permit is valid for two years.

New Jersey’s “May Issue” requirement is that a permit/license is required to carry a concealed handgun, the applicant has to meet certain requirements set by law, the applicant must also demonstrate a good cause for their reasoning in needing a handgun, and the permit/license is issued at the discretion of the sheriff or police. The applicant would also need to complete a firearms training course and have their fingerprints completed prior to approval. Other requirements for the New Jersey law in obtaining a gun permit/license is that the resident must be 21 years of age, of good character, have familiarity with the safe handling and use of

handguns, justifiable need to carry a handgun, and three references of individuals who have known the applicant for a minimum of three years.

The New Jersey School Search Policy Manual (1998) defines a search as “conduct by a government official that involves an intrusion into a student’s protected privacy interest. These include peeking, poking, or prying into a place or item shielded from public view or closed opaque container as well as a frisk or pat down by school officials” (p.13). In order for a search to be judicious 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” (NJ School Search Policy Manual, 1998, p. 45). The School Search Policy Manual has also identified a protocol in which police officers utilize school officials to search a student with judicious suspicion. Under the New Jersey v. T.L.O. (1985), school officials are permitted to search a student, which would prevent the police officers from violating the Fourth Amendment requirements. Also, Smith & Smith (2006) noted that some school principals and administrators are utilizing metal detectors (stationary magnetometer or portable handheld device) as a form of safety measures against firearms for students and faculty.

To note the relational aspect of law enforcement and education in New Jersey, there is a Memorandum of Agreement between Education and Law Enforcement Officials (2011) in which the Attorney General’s office highlights 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).

Civil Liability

Generally, there’s no guarantee that schools will ensure safety of their students and faculty while on school premises. Legally, they have a duty to provide reasonable supervision of

students while ensuring and maintaining the safety of the educational institution. “Rules and procedures, set in place by principals, may allow for a more steadfast approach to how liability is handled” (Kelly, 2016). Any act of violence can subject a school district to legal liabilities, which is viewed more as a civil claim. There are some contributing factors that would allow a school district to face potential civil liability for any act of violence against a student or faculty (Bailey, 2002). If the school district failed to (1) supervise a specific area of the school where prior acts of violence may have occurred, (2) warn faculty, administrators, school personnel, and potential targets about a pre-existing danger, and (3) establish or adhere to the school safety plan, then the school district is subjected to a civil liability (Bailey, 2002).

Hamilton (2008) indicated that an environment conducive to learning characterizes a school. There are some forces that may limit the accomplishment of such an environment by the escalation of school violence. And many authorities are compelled to formulate appropriate strategies to improve the situation. As per NJ School Search Policy Manual (1998), school officials will be more protected from litigation by understanding and practicing the laws and policies governed by school law and it will avoid any violations of a student, parent, or faculty’s constitutional rights.

In a case involving *Ryburn v. Huff* (2012), there was a concern of a high school student (Huff) drafting a letter threatening to shoot up the school. The principal, acting on good faith and within legal protocol, notified the local police department of his concern for the safety of students and faculty at his school. Based upon the principal’s concern, the police department initiated an investigation due to the student’s (Huff) two days of absence from school and the potential threat letter. The police interviewed other students at the school, during which they indicated they believed the student (Huff) was capable of following through with his threats

(Holtz, 2014). The police investigated the home and inquired about weapons inside the home. Mrs. Huff ran into her house with the police following suit. They were able to interview the student (Huff) and they were satisfied that the actual threat was false and a rumor. The police notified the school officials of the outcome of their investigation (Holtz, 2014).

Due to the inappropriateness and illegal tactics in handling this matter, since the police officers did not have a search warrant or consent to enter the Huff residence, a federal lawsuit (42 US Code 1983) was filed by the family based on the civil act for denial of rights. Based on these circumstances, the United States Supreme Court ruled, “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). As for school officials, “when they act in good faith with the belief that their actions are lawful, they are protected from legal actions against themselves and their school” (Reyes, 2014 p.35).

School Security Policies

The strategy of school security has been effective in addressing school violence (Garcia 2003). Law enforcement and education officials have begun to take preventive measures in ensuring the safety of students and faculty. New Jersey’s model school security policies have established protocols regarding school safety and security, which covers active shooter incident response tactics, evacuations, lockdown, bomb threats, and public information. This is in conjunction with the First Responder’s Guide for School Preparedness. The Attorney General Law Enforcement Directive (2007-1) notes directives for law enforcement agencies to incorporate policies that will enhance school safety and security. “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” (Kelly, 2016). Basically, the policies are carried out through a drill exercise process by school administrators. With the increase in violence in school, the focus of safety and security is paramount when implementing these specific drills that resemble real life situations, such as the shelter-in-place protocol.

As it pertains to a lockdown situation, school officials must notify law enforcement immediately and note the decision for the lockdown. This provides more insight for law enforcement to render the best course of action in order to stop the threat and render the appropriate response need for the school. According to Jackson (2002), after the Columbine shooting incident, many schools developed policies and procedures to reduce the occurrence of violence in their learning institutions. “For example, many schools began to lock their doors and restrict access during school hours, conducted video surveillance, and implemented metal detectors in their school” (Myrstol, 2011).

In reviewing the research, it showed that six of the ten deadliest mass shootings in the United States have occurred in the last 10 years. Bomb threat protocol must be aligned with the directives of the Attorney General 2007-1. In accordance with this directive, all New Jersey administrators and principals should familiarize themselves with it so that they are prepared if they encounter such incidents. These devices are not as common in school incidents, but they were used by rampage school shooters in Oklahoma City in 1995 (Mohandie & Meloy, 2014) and Columbine in 1999 (Cullen, 2009). So, in response to the increase of school violence in the United States, there has been an emergence to adopt better security measures with the initiation of technology to allow schools to effectively implement

safety measures to combat violence in schools (Brydolf, 2013).

School administrators and policy makers are finding it easier to deal with security concerns due to advanced technological gadgets that have proved not only effective but also highly reliable (Ballard & Brady, 2007). The resources used to maintain security in schools are very significant in assisting policy makers in making informed decisions and driving an effective agenda. Kupchik (2010) noted that the Association of Chiefs of Police in the United States has been faced with the escalation of school violence in the past two decades (1990-2010) primarily because of the lack of effective security measures in schools. Also noted the same year, chiefs of police in the United States have been able to respond in a timely manner to prevent incidents of school violence after being informed by the school safety liaisons about the safety threat (Borum, Cornell, Modzeleski, & Jimerson, 2010).

Public Information

When a crisis of this magnitude is publicized for the media, it is crucial to identify an individual who will represent law enforcement and discuss pertinent information as it relates to the incident. This person is known as Public Information Officer, whose job is to deal with the media. According to Bill Sadler, a member of the Arkansas State Police, he recommended “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). The media is known to glorify the gruesome acts displayed on others, and with such violence, they are providing a sense of false beliefs and speculation about the alleged suspects and the circumstances around the violent act (Booth, Van Hasselt, & Vecchi, 2011).

The New Jersey Department of Education's Office of School Preparedness and Emergency Planning established a "minimum" set of requirements for School Safety and Security, which requires each school district to have a school safety and security plan that meets the minimum state requirements. I will highlight the important content of this plan:

(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:

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; and
4. Supportive services for staff, students and their families.

(b) 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.

1. The plans, procedures and mechanisms must be consistent with the provisions of this section and the format and content established by the Domestic Security Preparedness Task Force, pursuant to N.J.S.A. App. A:9-64 et seq., and the Commissioner of Education.;

2. The plans, procedures, and mechanisms shall be reviewed annually and updated, as appropriate.

(c) The district board of education must disseminate a copy of the school safety and security plan to all district board of education employees.

1. New district board of education employees must receive a copy of the school safety and security plan, as appropriate, within 60 days of the effective date of their employment;
2. All district board of education employees must be briefed in writing, as appropriate, regarding updates and changes to the school safety and security plan.

(d) The district board of education must develop and provide an in-service training program for all district board of education employees to enable them to recognize and appropriately respond to safety and security concerns, including emergencies and crises, consistent with the district board of education's plans, procedures and mechanisms for school safety and security and the provisions of this section.

1. New district board of education employees must receive the in-service training, as appropriate, within 60 days of the effective date of their employment;
2. The in-service training program for all district board of education employees must be reviewed annually and updated, as appropriate. (NJDOE, 2019)

In recognizing relational connections between school personnel and their students, when teachers have a healthy connection with their students, it is much easier for them to bring any concerns to their administrators (Newman et al., 2004). Alcaraz et al. (2010) suggests "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.” In a survey provided to youth between the ages of 12-18, “Sixty percent of teens said that they are worried about a shooting occurring at their school” (Graf, 2018). Johnson (2009) suggests that “school principals and school superintendents rethink what ‘security’ means in schools” (p. 464). If the school environment is conducive to learning in the classroom and the relationship between faculty and student is healthy and positive, then there’s a greater chance to control violence in a learning institution.

In 2018, a research study noted that “a student’s risk of dying in a school shooting reached its highest level in at least 25 years” (Holland et al., 2019). And despite school administrators’ reluctance to have police officers within their school environment, the increasing level of violence and delinquency on school campuses has forced many schools to consider the utilization of police in the role of school resource officers (SROs) to ensure safety (Jackson, 2002). On average, “fewer people die from gun violence in states with strong gun laws and more people die in states with weak gun laws” (Fleegler et al., 2013). Research shows that children exposed to violence have a higher propensity toward participating in violence, have trust issues, and perform poorly in school (Hankin et al., 2011), but having an engaging school administration will create a culture that’s conducive to a safe and healthy learning environment (Wilson, 2004).

Summary

There was a multitude of literature that was reviewed throughout this chapter in order to explore the challenges that principals would face when determining the best approach in providing a safe learning environment for their students and faculty. The three barriers to implementing firearm violence prevention practices appear to be the lack of expertise in

implementing practices, lack of time, and lack of research as to which practices are most effective. A comprehensive review of the literature on firearm violence found only one published study on secondary school principals' perceptions and practices concerning minimizing the potential harm from firearm violence in schools.

A study in 2015 in which 800 secondary school principals were surveyed regarding perceptions and practices showed that less than half of schools trained school personnel regarding firearm violence issues (Price, et al, 2016). The findings indicated that firearm incidents at schools might be more common than known and/or reported. A significant portion of school principals are struggling in determining what to implement because of a lack of empirical evidence on what is effective in reducing violence. More research is needed to find the most effective school interventions for reducing firearm violence.

The literature used in this research study consisted of federal and state legislation in order to recognize the current laws and policies that affect school principals and their response to their policies and practices in order to maintain a safe school. 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. However, more research is needed to determine the most effective school interventions for reducing violent acts in schools, especially with firearms.

Synthesis of the Literature

The overall summary analysis of the literature review consisted of 45 references, which could be categorized into government sources and experiential studies. The experiential studies primarily focused on educational leadership where the school principal is considered the primary administrator challenged to improve school security, coupled with governmental sources that

allow for a deeper understanding of the concept of active shooter incidents, many of which are applied to K-12 settings, as well as ancillary sources exploring the concept of actual police response.

CHAPTER III - METHODOLOGY

Introduction

School violence and active shooter incidents often correlate with the concept of gun possession and control; hence, where are the guns originating from that are killing students and staff within an educational setting? Creating a safe learning environment is necessary for students to focus on their academic studies (DeAngelis & Presley, 2011). Nonetheless, the Brady Act was the most important gun control law passed in decades and its supporters declared the law would significantly reduce firearm, specifically, handgun violence in America (Gray, 2014).

This interview study was a replication of a dissertation published in 2016 as well as some components of a research study published in 2014. This replicated study's area of interest attempted to validate as well as exhibit any contrast between this current research replication and the previous studies. This study examined public school districts within communities that possess a median household salary ranging between \$85,000 and \$149,000, where the socioeconomic status of these schools is identified and outlined by New Jersey District Factor Group (I) as designed by New Jersey Department of Education.

This researcher identified and explored the challenges that school principals face as to whether armed personnel in schools will allow students and school personnel to feel safe when securing K-12 educational settings. This researcher also explored school principals' expectations of police tactical capabilities during their response time to an active shooting incident regardless if there was armed personnel being utilized at the school or not. The study's concentration was New Jersey DFG (I) public school principals' insight regarding this phenomenon. This was an important matter to uncover, considering that school administrators,

such as principals and other leaders within their school district, are responsible and accountable for the daily safety of students and faculty. At the same time, there was minimal research available about having armed personnel in schools based on school principals' insight and recommendations (James & McCallion, 2013; Newman et al., 2004; Smith & Smith, 2006).

Within this chapter, this researcher divulged the methodological approach that was utilized for this research. My concentration on a specific district factor group (DFG) within a New Jersey public school system noted the school and its administrators' challenges that they face and address regarding school violence in conjunction with principals' perceptions about police capabilities and response to an active shooting incident. This research study and decision to focus on DFG (I) public school districts aligned with this researcher's personal background: a professional who has dedicated over 20 years of experience to the child protection/criminal justice/juvenile and human trafficking systems coupled with the fact that my children currently attend a public-school district located in the DFG (I) in New Jersey.

An interview study with a deductive analysis was utilized for this qualitative research design to assist in determining the perceptions of principals regarding armed personnel being operationalized in a specific New Jersey public school district factor group as well as their perceptions of police tactical capabilities relevant to school shootings. Qualitative data consists of words rather than numbers or other statistical data found in quantitative research (Merriam, 2002; Rudestam & Newton, 2001). This researcher was influenced by a previous study conducted in 2016 (K-12 and the Active Shooter: Principals' Perceptions of Armed Personnel in New Jersey District Factor Group GH Public Schools) as well as some components of a 2014 research study (School Shootings & Principals' Perception of Armed Personnel in an

Educational Setting), whereas a decision was formulated to conduct an enhanced study while using the same coding framework as the 2014 and 2016 research studies. There were some aspects of a synonymous design and methodology.

With this replication of a previous study, I conducted interviews with school principals, similar to the previous research studies. These interviews helped measure the perceptions of two central facts by these principals, which were their views on police response abilities as well as the utilization of armed personnel in schools. Also, with this replication, I was able to focus on different geographical areas throughout New Jersey, which is DFG (I), whereas the previous study, which I've obtained approval to replicate, focused on DFG (GH). This selection is based on socioeconomic status and the overall demographics of the area that I have selected and focused on. I have no professional affiliation with any of the school districts in any of the townships located in district factor group (I). The study design, or collective study, investigates several cases to gain insight into a central phenomenon (Creswell, 2002; Stake, 2006; Yin, 2017).

The district factor group selected, DFG (I), which possesses more affluent households based on SES and demographics, could translate into more money being allotted for school security as well as a higher demand and community expectations in the realm of police tactical capabilities relevant to an active shooter incident. Based on my experience and trainings surrounding violence and crime in both urban and suburban jurisdictions, I believe a more thorough understanding and interpretation of these facts would be unarguably presented based on the selected district factor group. In understanding a study, it is "an exploration of a 'bounded system' of a case, or multiple cases over time through detail, in-depth data collection" (Creswell, 1998, p. 61).

Design

In order to obtain principals' perspectives on armed personnel and police capabilities and response to an active shooter incident, my approach was to obtain data from several subjects whose position included functioning as a school building leader, such as principals within a K-12 public school district factor group (I). A letter of solicitation (Appendix A) was sent to each superintendent of every public-school district in the DFG (I). This letter of solicitation ensured compliance with the research in accordance with the National Institute of Health (NIH) of Extramural Research (2011). Upon receipt of these letters of solicitation, it was hopeful that permission of superintendents of schools (Appendix B) would be approved for performance site approval for the basis of this research study. For my next step, I submitted the framework of my research to Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board (IRB) for their approval (Appendix C). All confidential information pertaining to my research study has been secured in a locked area within my office, which is a governmental facility located in Northern New Jersey. An inclusion of the research, a letter of solicitation explaining the framework of my study (Appendix D) was provided to each principal within a public-school district in which I'd obtained approval to conduct the research study. At the same time, each principal received an Informed Consent Form (Appendix E) for review, if a decision is made to participate in the study, via interviews (NIH, 2011).

Qualitative methods allowed this researcher to investigate matters related to human perception and understanding (Stake, 2010). These interviews were identified to be face-to-face, although conducted remotely due to the COVID-19 lockdown in New Jersey, to allow a thorough collection of data regarding principals' perception of police tactical capabilities and armed personnel in an educational setting. This researcher's results hopefully authenticated a

previous study, which I have been given permission to replicate, from 2016, but from other public school districts in DFG (I). As noted by the researcher from the previous study, “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” (Kelly, 2016).

With this qualitative study, the data was gathered through interviews by utilizing open-ended questions, in which the participants explained their viewpoints on the issues geared toward this study. These interview questions were approved by a panel of experts, which is different from the 2016 study (Appendix F). This researcher focused this investigation around the following question:

RQ1. How do school principals in one New Jersey District Factor Group (DFG) address school safety, based on their school district’s policies and practices, for their students and faculty, while simultaneously manage their own expectations of current active shooter response capabilities of their local police departments, as it pertains to a potential school shooting?

In a qualitative study, a researcher limits the number of participants to allow for more in-depth and thorough contact with participants, which allowed this researcher to effectively understand the participants’ perspectives (Creswell, 2003). The interviews that were conducted were approximately 35 minutes each. The interviews were conducted remotely due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the New Jersey area being under orders to stay-at-home. To minimize the time of the interviews, with the permission of the participating subjects, these interviews were identified to be conducted by videoconference via a VoIP technology system such as Skype or Facetime. Also, with the programs such as Skype, there was the ability to record the

interviews of participants via EVAER software, which is free and recommended by Skype. It was important to ensure validity and accuracy in the answers provided by the participating principals. However, due to COVID and limitation in availability, the fourteen interviews were audio recorded and conducted via telephone, with permission from each participant. Therefore, these interviews were able to be recorded with an audio recording device (Bogden & Biklen, 2007). However, in the case of participating subjects refusing to be recorded or there was a malfunction of the recording device, then note-taking was also part of the research process (Bogden & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2009).

Once all interviews were completed, this researcher processed the transcripts based upon the interview recordings and the notetaking from these individual interviews to ensure precise data for the research study (Bogden & Biklen, 2007). The recordings, notes, and transcripts were “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 allowed this researcher to become familiarized with the data results and common themes (Reissman, 1993). According to Creswell (2009), using qualitative data for a study will also include official documents. Some of my resources came from public databases, which are obtainable from the United States Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and New Jersey Open Public Records Act (OPRA). In obtaining the demographic data for my study, I utilized the United States Census Report and public-school data made available from the school districts participating in this study as well as the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE). These similar resources were also included in the previous research study (Kelly, 2016).

Settings

Conducting a research study involves work in real life settings (Creswell, 2007). Therefore, my hope was that the public school districts would grant permission for conducting my study with the public school districts in the New Jersey district factor group – DFG (I). This researcher gathered and relied on relevant information provided by each public-school district and the New Jersey Department of Education. Any socioeconomic and demographic information pertaining to the townships participating in this study was provided by the United States Census Bureau. My interview questions originated from the previous study. I received permission to use these questions but tailored them more specifically to my current research study. As this is a replicated study, the 2016 research study focused on similar analysis, excluding the focal point on police response and capabilities and the public-school district factor group (I).

An example of the tailored changes that were made to the interview questions included ensuring 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 or DFG-GH”. Kelly’s 2016 research study included various suburban public-school districts from DFG-GH and Reyes’ 2014 research study included the one specific public school within DFG-A.

Participants

According to Creswell (2007), purposeful sampling allows the researcher to select participants who can contribute to the phenomena being studied. In this study, I selected only those subjects who have the ability to make significant contributions by responding to my interview questions and self-reporting observations with reliability. These participants were able

to effectively communicate their thoughts and insights to this researcher. For this research, the participants were principals who were tasked with the responsibility of leading and educating K-12 grade level students and staff as well as being accountable for the safe learning environment of the students, parents, faculty, and all persons visiting, employed, or contracted by their schools.

I used total population sampling for my study. According to Zhi (2014), total population sampling is a purposeful sampling technique, such as non-probability sampling, which makes it difficult to make statistical generalizations about the studied population. In my study, there were approximately 103 public schools comprising district factor group (I). However, through my solicitation of 103 principals (N=103), I expected to conduct interviews of 10-15 elementary school principals, 10-15 middle school principals, and 10-15 high school principals due to the length of the interviews (approximately 35 minutes) and to limit the number of participants in order to obtain more of an in-depth, thorough, and concise insightful discussion with the participants. Also, the previous studies in 2014 and 2016 were comprised of the responses from principals from approximately 20-25 face-to-face interviews. However, the solicitation for this research study allowed actual responses and interviews from fourteen principals, who comprised of elementary, middle, and high school educational leaders. This minimal response could have been contributed to by the abrupt closure of schools to remote learning due to COVID-19.

Profiles of the Participants

During my interview process and upon its completion, the participating subjects were not identifiable by name when referenced during the documentation and transcription of themes and specific answers from the interviews. Confidentiality of the participants was ensured by this researcher, so pseudonyms were used to protect their anonymity. This researcher utilized

categories in this section of the study, which highlighted the participants' gender, age, years in education, years as a principal, and years in their current school district. A voluntary survey was provided to each participant to complete in order to gather the particular information about them as a principal within their school district.

Method

The framework of this study was similar to Reyes' (2014) and Kelly's (2016) research studies' analysis method. I've conducted a deductive analysis to validate similar common themes from the previous studies as well as exhibit any contrast between this current research replication and the previous studies. In using the research question, a series of interview questions were changed, added, and tailored to this study by a panel of experts; current principals who were not participants in this study, but were doctoral students at Seton Hall University.

Upon completion of the interviews that were audio recorded, each discussion was transcribed via NVivo Transcription. These transcribed interviews consisted of 94 pages of word documents. Prior to digging into the transcribed data, I focused my lens from a deductive approach. I knew that I was coming to the data with some preconceived themes that I expected to find reflected in the interviews, based on the previous research studies' existing data. In order to discover themes from my interviews, I've conducted a thematic analysis of the data and later conducted a cross-case analysis of the 2014 and 2016 research studies.

With this thematic analysis, I've focused on familiarizing myself with the data through transcription, reading, and taking notes from the 94 pages of data. Next, I highlighted sections of the text by going through every interview, proofreading, highlighting phrases and sentences and matching them with codes. During this highlighting process, I've used keywords (sub-themes)

from the previous study to identify and match certain passages from my interviews to the predetermined themes in this current study.

I collated the data into one group identifiable by code. Also, I utilized hand coding, without computer software, after noting word repetition and key words in the text of the transcribed interviews. After the coding, I reviewed these themes to determine their relevancy, accuracy, and frequency to this study. Once these themes had been defined and were similar to the previous studies', I made note of the number of times that these particular themes were discussed during my interviews with the principals. The themes were noted, written, and cross-case analyzed on the similarities and differences with the previous studies in 2014 and 2016.

So, an example in how I've approached an interview's response in order to identify any predetermined themes from the previous studies is listed below:

One of my interview questions was "What safety measures have been instituted to provide for a safe school"? With this question, I identified any words/sentences/paragraphs that may have indicated any of the six predetermined themes (armed personnel, physical security, policy and procedures, communication, mental health, and other concerns). The list of words/sentences/paragraphs were my initial codes. I had two highlighters with different colors, one for the interview question and the other for the words or phrases that stuck out. Once finished, I opened a new word document and copied the question and listed the words or phrases under that question in numerical order and the page number. After doing this to all fourteen interviews, I went back and read each word or phrase and then attached the theme that I felt it was relevant to.

So, for this particular question, answers such as buzzers, buzzing parents into the school, and door locks are just a few identifiable responses. Afterwards, I completed a

cross-analysis of these terms to determine if they were identified in the previous studies as a sub-theme and then what theme were they relevant to in those studies. The cross-analysis revealed that door locks and buzzers were previous sub-themes and were attached to the “physical security” theme. The term, “buzzing parents into the school” was not a previous sub-theme, but it was equivalent to the “sign into the main office procedure” sub-theme from the previous studies, as the principal noted this as part of their policy and procedures. The completion of this process led to the discovery of 23 out of the 26 sub-themes being similar to the previous studies at the rate of 88%. There were 15 additional sub-themes identified from the interviews in this current study.

Validity and Reliability

The methods that I used in this research study to address validity and reliability were similar in regard to the previous studies, in which a panel of experts consisting of principals, not participating subjects of any of these research studies, were selected based on their in-depth knowledge and experience to objectively review and offer suggestions surrounding the interview questions in a constructively critical manner. 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). This panel of experts were current principals in various schools throughout New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and New York and were not included in the DFG (I) research. These experts were also doctoral students in Seton Hall University’s Educational Leadership, Management, and Policy Program.

To ensure validity and reliability throughout this qualitative study, this researcher took certain steps as recommended by Creswell (2009). By reviewing notations and transcripts from

the interviews, I was able to discover any mistakes and complete the necessary corrections prior to proceeding to the next step. “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, 2009, p. 192). Therefore, I was able to ensure my coded material was consistent with the collected data without any modifications to the established coded or consistent themes.

As noted previously, this research consisted of a qualitative case study that examined the results from the interviews, descriptive data, transcripts, and demographic data collected throughout this study. This researcher also conducted a comparison of this data with the literature review and the original research studies, which this researcher replicated. From the research questions, a series of interview questions were created for this study and reviewed by a panel of experts who provided input to further this study while ensuring all ethical provisions were upheld in the questioning. The research was derived from the problem statement, which was described in Chapter 1, integrated with limited information addressing school shootings and the perceptions of principals about armed personnel in an educational setting (James & McCallion, 2013; Smith & Smith, 2006).

Bogden and Biklen (2007) recommend that analysis of the data should begin in the field, by obtaining information that will support the development of analytical questions and appropriate themes for the study. The collection of data, interviews, and transcripts were thoroughly reviewed in preparation for the coding of the data in order to identify, validate, and note the themes and descriptive data that assisted this researcher in interpreting the information obtained for this study (Creswell, 2009). Together, these forms of data collection provided an

accurate picture from the principals' viewpoints. "Some qualitative researchers like to think of this as peeling back layers of an onion" (Creswell, 2009, p.183).

Summary

The above section described the various methods that were used in this study to examine the K-12 public school district factor group (I) principals' perceptions of armed personnel in a learning environment and police tactical capabilities during their response to an active shooter incident. The qualitative research design and methodology was discussed as well as the data collection process, which consisted of interviews and a review of documents. In Chapter 4, I will report the results of the findings generated through data analysis. Chapter 5 will offer a summary of study conclusions, implications for change, and the researcher's recommendations and reflections.

CHAPTER IV – FINDINGS

Introduction

In this chapter, the findings are presented in this study with a deductive approach. The researcher's focus was to obtain the perceptions of public-school principals from New Jersey District Factor Group (I) regarding police tactical capabilities during their response time to an active shooter incident, regardless if armed personnel were already utilized or not. School principals were interviewed, and their responses were collected, coded, and analyzed to provide valuable information pertaining to their individualized perceptions regarding school shootings and armed personnel within a school setting. Coding is described as the “critical link between data collection and their explanation of meaning” (Saldana, 2013, p3.)

The responses of the interviewees highlighted and confirmed the various consistent and predetermined themes that are applicable to this study. Creswell (2009) notes that “qualitative researchers can do much with themes to build additional layers of complex analysis” (p.189). Accordingly, the themes in this study display the many layers that are affiliated with the principals' perceptions relating to armed personnel and a safe and positive learning environment.

Discussing the topics of school shootings, armed personnel, and police tactical capabilities, the interviews held with 14 principals in the New Jersey District Factor Group (I), revealed their point of view pertaining to their needs and the needs of their students, staff, and school's safety and perceived identifiable practices that would benefit their learning institution overall. As a result of the interviews that were conducted, the research's six consistent themes were similar to the previous study in 2016 yet had additional sub-themes in relation to these

themes. These consistent themes are armed personnel, physical security, policy and procedures, communication, mental health, and other concerns are noted in Figure 1.

Table 1 - List of codes used in this research study – Primary Themes & Sub-Themes

CODE	THEME	SUB-CODE	SUB-THEME
AP	Armed Personnel	sro apo adm tea soa non	School Resource Officer Active Police Officer Administrator Teacher Staff on Alert None
PS	Physical Security	pb dls cam buz bw sg	Panic button Door locks Cameras Buzzer/Bell Ballistic windows Security Guard
PP	Policy and Procedures	ref drl shp ldp acp smo sip ctp	Referendum Drill Shelter in Place procedure Lockdown procedure Active Shooter Procedure Sign into Main Office Procedure Scan IDs Procedure Crisis Management Team/Plan
CM	Communication	hib pbr beh cua tru res	Harassment, Intimidation, and Bullying Positive Behavior and Relationships in schools Behavior Cultural Awareness Trust Respect
MH	Mental Health	ssw sgc cst sac spc psy mhl	School Social Worker School Guidance Counselor Child Study Team Substance Abuse Coordinator Suicide Prevention Counselor Psychologists Mental Health Liaison
CO	Concerns	Pag cio hwc ncb out bul mhc	Parents/Guardians Community Issues/Outreach Home Wellness Checks No carrying Bookbags in schools Outsiders Bullying Mental Health support/counseling

The sub-themes or keywords in Table 1, which were derived from the previous study, were identified from the principals' interviews. Out of the 26 sub-themes in the previous study, 23 of these sub-themes matched the passages, phrases, or keywords that were expressed during the interviews and identified through data analysis. Also, during the data analysis, there were 15 additional sub-themes identified from the interviews in this current study.

- These additional sub-themes per themes were:

Table 2 - *Additional sub-themes identified in the current study.*

Themes/Sub-themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Armed Personnel/Staff on Alert • Armed Personnel/School Resource Officer • Physical Security/Ballistics windows • Physical Security/Panic button • Policy and Procedures/Referendum • Policy and Procedures/Scan ID's Procedure • Policy and Procedures/Crisis Management Team/Plan • Communication/Respect • Communication/Cultural Awareness • Mental Health/Suicide Prevention Counselor • Mental Health/Psychologists • Mental Health/Mental Health Liaison • Other Concerns/Community issues/outcomes • Other Concerns/Home Wellness Checks • Other Concerns/No carrying bookbags in schools

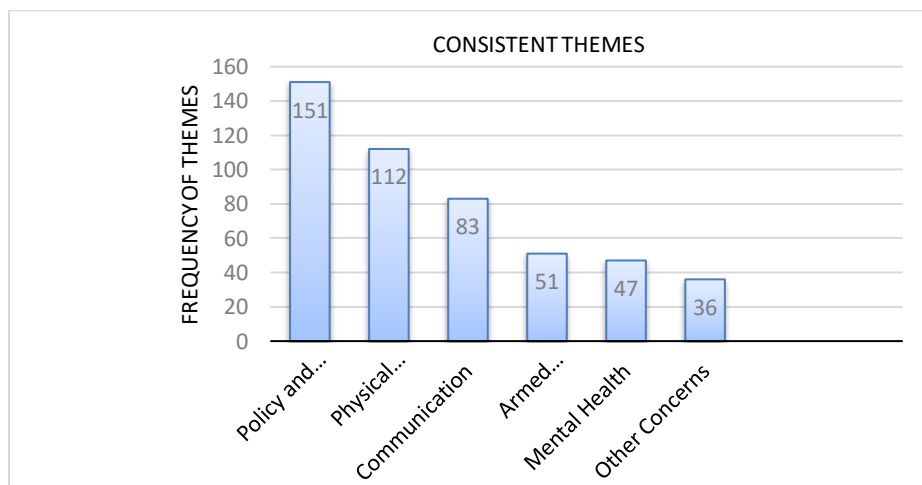
To understand the perceptions of principals, coding their interviews in a certain way was essential to this study's outcomes. Richards noted that "coding should always be for a purpose. It is never an end in itself" (2015, p.105). As noted previously in the Methodology section, an interview protocol was designed prior to the administration of interviews that focused on questions pertaining to the school principals' perceptions and beliefs. The interview questions were approved by a panel of experts who were current principals and doctoral students at Seton Hall University. These interview questions were derived yet expanded upon from the 2016 study (Appendix F). This researcher focused the investigatory process around the following question:

RQ1.How do school principals in one New Jersey District Factor Group (DFG) address school safety, based on their school district's policies and practices, for their students and faculty, while simultaneously manage their own expectations of current active shooter

response capabilities of their local police departments, as it pertains to a potential school shooting?

Based on the responses from the sixteen interview questions presented to the principals, these six themes were considered in order of relevance by the amount of times they were noted by the principals in response to active shooting events, police capabilities, student, staff, and school safety. In this consideration, policy and procedure was the most dominant theme in 100% of the schools represented by the principals, as it was referenced 151 times. The second most common theme noted was physical security, which was referenced 112 times. In additional consecutive order, communication was mentioned 83 times, armed personnel were referenced 51 times, mental health was referenced 47 times, and other concerns, which was the least noted theme, was referenced 36 times.

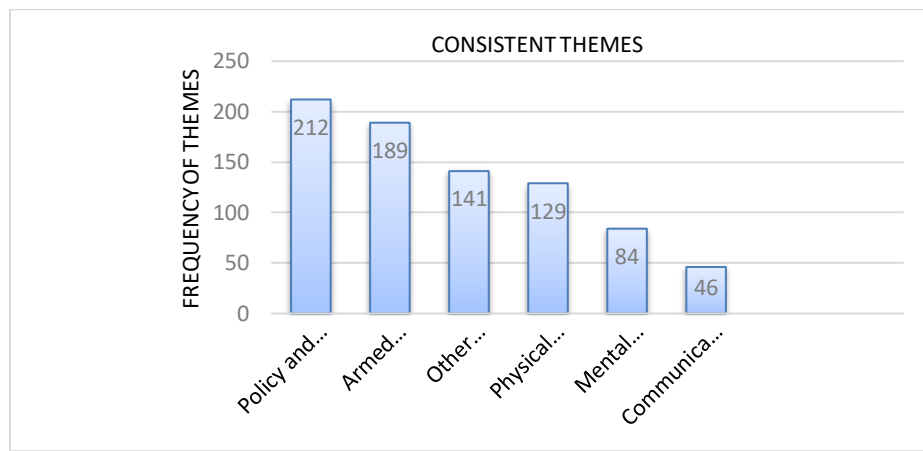
Table 3 - Current Study's Consistent Themes



In my cross-case analysis, in which the interviews of 21 principals from another New Jersey Public School District Factor Group, GH, the most overriding theme noted was policy and procedure, which was referenced 212 times. The second most common theme that emerged from

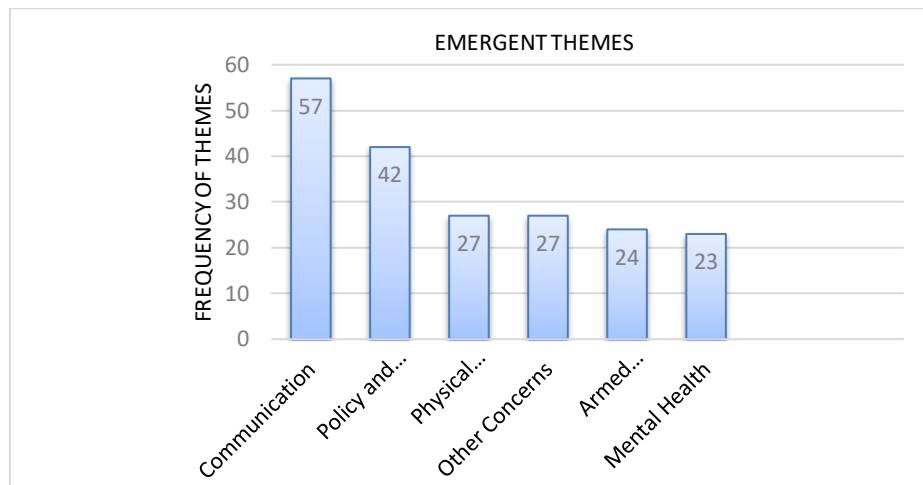
this study was armed personnel, which was referenced 189 times. Other concerns were referenced 141 times, physical security was referenced 129 times, then mental health, which was referenced 84 times, and communication, which is the least mentioned of the themes and was referenced 46 times (Kelly, 2016).

Table 4 - 2016 Previous study's consistent themes



In comparison to the previous study in 2014, in which 12 principals from a large urban public-school district within New Jersey Public School District Factor Group A were interviewed, the most overriding theme was communication, which was referenced 57 times. The second most common theme that emerged from this study was policy and procedure, which was referenced 42 times. Physical security and other concerns were each referenced 27 times, armed personnel, which was referenced 24 times, and mental health, which is the least mentioned of the themes, was referenced 23 times (Reyes, 2014).

Table 5 - 2014 Previous study's emergent themes



During the interviews that were conducted in this multiple-case study, the 14 principals continuously noted their school district's policy and procedures whenever they discussed the physical safety and security of their students, staff, and faculty. Similar to the previous study, policy and procedure was the pivotal theme emphasized during the principals' interviews about their school, students, and school personnel as it relates to the central focus of this study.

In Chapter 3 of my methodology discussion, I referenced that upon the completion of my interview process, the participating subjects, 14 principals, would not be identifiable by name when referenced during the documentation and transcription of emerging themes and specific answers from the interviews. Confidentiality of the participants was ensured by this researcher, so pseudonyms were used to protect their anonymity. This researcher utilized categories to highlight the 14 principals' gender, age, years in education, years as a principal, and years in their current school district. The previous study in 2016 captured the race of each participant. However, due to COVID-19, this researcher was unable to conduct in-person interviews. These interviews were done via audio recording due to the limited availability of the principals and their focus on their student and faculty's remote learning. Also, with the expectation of

interviewing 30-45 principals for this study, the outcome of interviewing only 14 principals could have been due to remote learning in New Jersey caused by COVID-19.

Table 6 - Demographic Survey

Principal Demographics	Percentage Per Category
Principals	100%
Males	57%
Females	43%
Over 30 years old	100%
Over 40 years old	57%
Over 50 years old	21%
Years in Education (≥ 15)	86%
Years in District (≥ 10)	36%
Years as Principal (≥ 5)	64%

This researcher utilized pseudonyms to represent the 5 public school districts in DFG (I) as well as the 14 principals who participated in this study. This format of pseudonyms was only for the purpose of allowing the researcher the ability to identify the code representing the participating subjects. For this study, codes were developed and utilized. Coding is the process by organizing data into chunks or segments of text and assigning categories and phrases to each for understanding of the code (Creswell, 2014).

Contrarily, in an effort to keep confidentiality and anonymity among the principal participants within this study, there were no abbreviations used for the identity of a specific school district or specific names of principals. Therefore, all codes used do not indicate which school or principal were being represented in this study. The next table reflects the coding of school districts and the principals participating in this study. There were five public school districts in DFG (I) that participated in this study. These five school districts represent the

Northern, Central, and Southern regions in the New Jersey District Factor Group (I) public school districts.

Table 7 - Participating School Districts

District Code	Principal Code	Number of Participating Districts	Number of Participating Principals
District = D	Principal = P (n=14)	D1	P2, P4
		D2	P1
		D3	P5, P6, P13
		D4	P7, P8, P9, P12
		D5	P3, P10, P11, P14

Upon completion of the interviews, the principals' words were analyzed to express their perceptions and beliefs regarding school shootings and armed personnel within a school setting. The major findings of this study are focused on policy and procedures, physical security, communication, armed personnel, mental health, and other concerns. This is where the common or consistent themes were developed by the most referenced words or phrases that represented the principals' overarching perceptions and beliefs regarding police tactical capabilities during their response time to an active shooter incident, regardless if armed personnel are already utilized or not.

In each section highlighting the consistent themes that have been noted during the principals' interviews, there are numerous responses documented in this study to reflect the principals' perceptions, thoughts, feelings, and overall voice regarding policy and procedures physical security, communication, armed personnel, mental health, and other concerns in their school.

Policy and Procedures

The most prevailing theme that resonated by all the principals in this study is the policy and procedure of their public-school district in conjunction with the New Jersey Department of Education. The recent high-profile shootings at schools have increasingly contributed to the concerns of school safety and school administrators and leaders' decisions to increase school safety and security precautions. During the interviews with the 14 principals, there was a consensus about their students, staff, and faculty's preparation for such an incident in which they regularly conducted active shooter drills, fire drills, lockdown drills, and shelter-in-place drills.

Safety Procedures/Drills

According to **D3-P13**, in regard to her school's safety preparation,

We have a rapport with the local police department. They visit the schools, drive around the schools in the parking lot, they are there in the beginning and end of the school day.

We have video cameras and surveillance, doorbells, drop boxes, and silent panic alarms.

We conduct emergency drills quarterly for staff as well. (June 30, 2020)

D4-P7 similarly expressed that "Yearly safety procedures; training for running recess; cafeteria emergency drills; mandated lockdown and emergency drills are a must in our school and occurs regularly" (June 23, 2020).

D3-P6 expressed that:

Being able to be buzzed in and then have to make their way to the main office to be checked in our vestibule areas, create a man trapped so to say. In essence, when someone is buzzed in, they can only be in that one area. Our emergency response system, once a person enters the building, they have to scan their license to print out an identification

badge. It runs them against sex offender lists and determine if they've been convicted of crimes. Our district has installed an extensive amount of surveillance, throughout the building, which is linked directly in conjunction with our police department. We have a strong relationship with our local authorities. We've also been able to outfit our building with silent panic alarms. (D3-P6, June 22, 2020)

D4-P7 noted similar thoughts about having a safer school.

The screening area for those visiting the school was remodeled. The vestibule has a window where you would check in first, Now you get buzzed in and there's a camera where we can see the person. We can take a picture of the person and we can record if we needed to. Then once they're buzzed in, they have to come to the window. It's similar to like a bank teller window. The teachers need ID badges to be able to access the building. We had a new alarm system put in. And we now have two officers as opposed to the one that we used to have. They are active police officers. They're not security guards or anything. (D4-P7, June 23, 2020)

D1-P2 described their district's updated emergency drill practices and procedures in that,

We really put an emphasis over the past year and a half on taking our drills seriously, especially among our hearing impaired, hard-of-hearing students. And that in itself has made a big difference in our policy and procedures. The State Department of Education visited our school during our drills and provided their feedback on what they saw as outsiders. So, with that information, we utilize their feedback and put some things in place. In addition, making sure our students, staff, and faculty are taking this more seriously. (D1-P2 June 8, 2020)

Crisis Management Team/Plan

Some principals noted a safety and violence prevention committee that is composed of school security staff, physical facilities personnel, fire, emergency management personnel, law enforcement, teachers, staff, students, school administrators/leaders, and other school community members/stakeholders to develop a comprehensive security plan, such as the school site safety plan for their district. In an example of such a collaboration, **D5-P10** noted these sentiments:

I don't have too many concerns as long as things are in place with our emergency management protocol. I see a very functional security team, a good administration, procedures and protocols that need to be followed on a daily basis on safety measures. (D5-P10, June 25, 2020).

In discussing the guidance for school violence prevention and response with the principals, some of them have noted that the roles of school administrators, teachers, staff, students, parents, law enforcement, and community are pivotal when planning, recommending, and responding to ways to prevent violence from happening at their school. **D5-P11** expressed the responsive actions taken to prevent any foreseen violence in the school. This principal noted that

The procedure is that the parents could not come into the building at the beginning of the school day or at the end of the school day, they had to drop their children off at the door because we didn't want anything like that to happen. And so I understand the importance of keeping the children safe and the staff. (D5-P11, June 25, 2020)

While school districts and its educational leaders create a climate of safety in schools, principals, especially, must be directly involved and supportive to their students, staff, and

faculty in all stages of developing and implementing programs to achieve safer schools. **D3-P5** discussed systems in place to achieve a safer school.

A crisis management plan and a crisis management team; cameras, security system be buzzed in for the first set of doors in order to get through to the second set of doors. All of our windows have been secured with a film that is, I guess it's shatterproof. We also have panic buttons in different areas of our building. Also, we have a plan to have teachers trained on an app to call in an emergency; like a classroom system; yearly training with police department; mandated lockdown and emergency drills. (D3-P5, June 18, 2020)

D2-P1 emphasized the importance of procedures to provide safety.

Every year, we have, as part of our welcome back and annual trainings that we go through, the police department comes through and they review the safety plan with staff. We do that in the gym, the first day of school. So, either the police officers or one of our district's lead officers will come in and they'll go through it and answer any questions. They'll go over the updated sections of a procedure or protocol change from their point of view to keep it in the forefront of everyone's minds, like a refresher. Like here is what we do in a lockdown. Here's what we do in a lockout. Here's what we do before securing the building before exiting, you know, so we review all that. Then of course, during the school year with the new rules, we do our one fire drill a month and we also do our one school security drill, whether it's an evacuation of bomb threat, lock downs, lock ins, we do some sort of security drill every month at schools and development sessions for faculty/staff. (D2-P1, June 4, 2020)

In the same discussion, **D3-P13** also noted that the school district holds

Discussions surrounding their policy and procedures as well as emergency safety exits, protocols, drills, and contact people in the District and police and fire department. The fire and emergency drills are part of the teachers' staff development days and over the summer orientation. (D3-P13, June 30, 2020)

D5-P14 resonated similar views as P13 in that “Active shooter drills are part of the teachers' trainings/in-service days” (July 1, 2020). This was viewed by some of the principals as being helpful in the collaboration of administration, faculty, and other educational leaders and stakeholders to develop and enforce school rules and policies. In the implementation of the school’s physical design, safety policies, and emergency procedures, it allows a more comprehensive safety and security assessment of the school district.

With all of the principals interviewed in this study, the process of all visitors being signed in, scanned, picture taken, or recorded prior to entering the building is a policy and procedure that is adhered to by the principals, faculty, and security staff. During these interviews, it was quite evident that the significance of policy and procedure is critical in ensuring the safety and wellbeing of students, staff, and faculty. The details in the orchestration of their drills and safety plans were expressed and noted to be the forefront of their work in ensuring a safe learning environment. The most noted issue from the interviews regarding policy and procedures derived from actual instances that took place with parents and visitors attempting to enter the school.

An example of the noted issue regarding policy and procedures was expressed by **D3-P6**.

There were many concerns because the layout of certain buildings in our district kind of lent itself to an unidentified intruder, being able to be buzzed in and then have to make their way to the main office to be checked in has lessen the possibility of a violent act occurring in the building. (D3-P6, June 22, 2020)

A few of the principals indicated that their school's safety plan also included the students' involvement towards a safer school. According to **D4-P9**:

On the school safety team, students are allowed to be a part of that on the school leadership team. And some of our guidance counselors and teacher leaders have mini peer groups of students that are there to support other students when they're having difficulties or anything like that. (D4-P9, June 25, 2020)

The principals interviewed were less concerned and more pleased with their current policy and procedures. They have implemented additional policies and procedures in regard to the advancement of their security of their school, specifically panic alarms, buzzers, and identification upon entry into the school protocol.

The majority of the principals interviewed noted that their school district were recipients of the 2018 Securing our Children's Future Bond referendum, in which they received funding to enhance K-12 public school security, such as the installation of silent panic alarms, which directly alert law enforcement during an emergency. Overall, all of the principals interviewed knew that establishing and maintaining policies and procedures in addressing potential threat of violence is a pivotal part of their school's emergency planning.

Physical Security

During the interviews of the principals, some have exhaustively expressed that school safety requires physical security and prevention. Most of the principals believe that all schools should establish a security team and identify a lead to oversee security efforts as well as engage the district and school staff, students, parents, and emergency management officials, such as first responders, law enforcement, armed guards, SROs, etc. In the interview process, each principal was asked about the safety of their school, students, and faculty, as well as what areas are needed

to ensure school safety. Physical security was another critical topic and the second most identified theme, which included panic buttons, door locks, cameras, buzzer/bell, ballistic windows, and security personnel.

Options for a Safe and Secured School

One of the interview questions that was asked to each principal was, “What options are available for safe and secure schools other than armed personnel?” One of the principals, **D4-P9** responded that “You can have hand screening measures as well as metal detectors. However, at our school, you can't get into the building if you don't have your swipe card; those are some other options” (June 25, 2020).

Another suggestion was provided by **D5-P10**. “Metal detectors, staff awareness; and having one door open during active school hours would be beneficial in maintaining a safe and secure school” (June 25, 2020).

D2-P1 noted that:

We’ve always buzzed parents in, but once they got into the front door, they just came into the main office where essentially you have access instantly to the main entry of the building. Now with the security vestibules, or man traps, as another term people would say, you would come into the vestibule and still need to be buzzed in. However, we have bulletproof glass now. We also have the banker pass through type system like it’s a movie where you slide your forms under the window. That was certainly a big upgrade for us. And we added cameras as well, which covers entries, exits, and around the outside perimeter as well as all of our hallways. (D2-P1, June 4, 2020)

Also, **D5-P3** expressed the physical security of their school in that,

We have double locked doors. So, when visitors go through the first door, it will close behind them, and they would have to verify their identity. We have a scanner that will do facial recognition or any history that the visitor may have criminally, or any child protection concerns as well. If the visitor shows up with a warrant or any concerns as well as become hostile and threatening, then we will not allow access to the building and they will remain locked in that area due to our double locked door feature, and we will notify police. We also have hidden alarm buttons throughout the building and only administrators know where they are installed. These alarms are connected to our local police department in which they would response immediately. (D5-P3, June 10, 2020).

Alternative Security Options

In discussing the physical security aspect of a safer school, some principals also noted other options inclusive to the physical security, such as **D4-P9**,

We have a safety team along with the metal detectors. We have a cool down/timeout room in addition to the guidance counselors being of assistance. We have a climate and culture specialist that helps students to face and work out and mediate things before they get to the level of where it may constitute a physical interaction. (D4-P9, June 25, 2020)

Regarding additional security options or methods put in place to recognize or address any unforeseen situation, **D2-P1** mentioned,

We don't have kids with bookbags in school. We let them go to their locker. They carry their books in the morning to their classes. They hit their lockers at lunchtime, and they get their books for afternoon classes. By not allowing them to carry book bags, we've reduced the opportunity for them to have something on them. It's like community policing for me being in the hallways since we no longer have police officers in our

school. I developed relationships with kids and it give those kids who have seen something or hear something, whether its online or in the hallway, an opportunity to send me an email or to stop by my office to tell me, but lowkey to stay out the mix of things. Because once you burn that bridge of trust, those kids will never come back to you again. (D2-P1, June 4, 2020)

Although this can be viewed as procedural for the school, the principal noted this as an additional security mechanism to ensure a safe learning environment.

Many of the principals had similar thought patterns in regard to other options for a safe and secure school other than armed personnel. **D1-P4** noted that “Mental health support staff using restorative case practices, mindfulness, school support staff, and unarmed security measures will be highly received by students and parents when ensuring a safe learning environment” (June 11, 2020).

D4-P8 mentioned that “Education information, continued learning opportunities for both staff and students regarding safety in schools as well as de-escalating any potential threat or act of violence on school premises” (June 23, 2020).

D4-P12 further expressed that:

It becomes like a cost effectiveness thing. Having a police officer in our school is already a very expensive resource. We have a memorandum of agreement between the police department and the school district. And listen, as soon as we have something brewing, they’re all over it. I mean, they do a great job by handling matters right away, but we’re already disposing a lot of funds towards the safety of our schools. However, I think the education piece component is really great and a step in the right direction. I believe in addressing mental illness for all students. Having the appropriate staff to address these

different layers of need for our students, such as the guidance counselor, student assistance counselor, therapist, and on-site psychologist. (D4-P12, June 26, 2020)

In lieu of the additional options in ensuring a safe and secure school, there has been some mention about the location/structuring of the school building, which could be a safety concern regardless of armed personnel or not. **D1-P2** mentioned that:

Our campus is between two buildings. Every time the bell rings or the doors open up, just based on that configuration, it's a moderate concern. Currently, we have a construction project to resolve that issue. The construction project is to close the gap between the two buildings, but obviously until it's completed, that concern or that thread is still going to exist. (D1-P2, June 8, 2020)

All of the principals who were interviewed highlighted physical security as the second most dominant theme and area of focus. This theme also is in conjunction with all teams being able to communicate these policies and procedures and safety plans to ensure their effectiveness as well as ensuring a safe learning institution for students, staff, and faculty.

Communication

Principals, along with their staff and faculty, play critical roles in implementing planned responses before and after emergency response teams arrive during a school shooting/violence act. Therefore, continuous participation and communication surrounding the understanding and implementation of these safety plans are pivotal for a safer school. These discussions also include the students, parents, and community to build and cultivate a sense of belonging and trust for all in the school. These variations of communication are held through assemblies, extended homerooms, peer groups, PTO meetings, teachers' trainings and in-service days, after school activities, etc.

Some of the key words that resonated with the principals were: harassment, intimidation, and bullying, positive behavior and relationships in schools, behavior, cultural awareness, trust, and respect. These subthemes were highlighted as a focal point regarding communication during the interviews with the principals. The principals in this section viewed trust-building relationships to address interpersonal conflict and cultural awareness as a major component in effective communication.

Cultural Awareness

According to **D5-P3**,

Our biggest challenge is interpersonal conflicts among students and many of our children bring issues from their neighborhoods and communities into the school. Most of the violence are all internal from student to student. Rare instances of children assaulting staff, in which we've discovered that these students have mental health needs or behavioral health needs. There has also been missed opportunities in which staff missed cultural matters with students in the school. So we have implemented a cultural awareness and peer groups as a form of communication to build trusting relationships and keeping administration abreast of any potential threats of violence. (D5-P3, June 10, 2020)

D5-P14 also expressed that,

In this day and time, it has a counter-effect on minority children. In my opinion, the way security is being used does more harm than good. When students fight, they are ticketed, sent to court, and fined. Most families cannot pay the fines, which leads to additional fines or probation. It's like systemic oppression against minority students, so it put them at a disadvantage in their learning compared to their white peers. This is why a peer

group has been developed to address any disparities as well as any safety concerns. The positive peer culture/mentor and safe school environment discussions, which has been suggested for this upcoming school year. This will help in identifying red flags before it turns out to an active shooter incident. (D5-P14, July 1, 2002)

Trust-Based Relationships

D2-P1 noted this about trust-building with students:

I developed relationships with kids, and it give those kids who have seen something or hear something, whether its online or in the hallway, an opportunity to send me an email or to stop by my office to tell me, but lowkey to stay out the mix of things. Because once you burn that bridge of trust, those kids will never come back to you again. (D2-P1, June 4, 2020).

D5-P11 expressed that,

Now that we are no longer allowing parents to come into the building to see their children during classes or have breakfast with their children, we had to find a way to rebuild the relationship and what we did was allow them to develop a thriving PTA and they would have appointments throughout the day where they could come into the building. So, then they knew that they were welcomed. It just wasn't going to occur at the time of arrival and dismissal because there's such a high movement time. You have to make certain that you're keeping everyone safe. (D5-P11, June 25, 2020)

D1-P4 believed relationship-building is key to communication as well. This principal noted that, "Providing professional development to the leadership, the staff, as well as the community, while being present and proactive with ongoing communication will strengthen the school, student, parent, and community relationship" (June 11, 2020).

Armed Personnel

The attention on some recent high-profile shootings at schools has contributed to concerns about school safety and what decisions are needed to increase school safety and security precautions. Of course, the extent to which schools employ these precautions varies, but their use of these measures is collective. When the questions were posed to the principals during their interview about armed personnel in schools and the effect this would have on school violence, there were a variety of opinions in this regard. These impressions ranged from feeling safer, having mixed feelings, discriminatory, worried that students may access firearms, and a false sense of security. The discussion surrounding police tactical response capabilities were also held with the principals during their interview session.

These principals are representatives of public schools within New Jersey District Factor Group (I), in which the educational settings in this district factor group are designated based on being primarily suburban environments with low crime and higher socioeconomic status. However, most of these fourteen principals had similar and difference in opinions even from the same school district.

Feel Safer

According to **D4-P12**, “This is like a political issue, but I perceive it very positively. I feel safer with them being armed” (June 26, 2020).

D3-P13 echoed similar thoughts in regard to feeling safer in school.

Personally, it's a good alliance between students and law enforcement. It brings a sense of safety and peace for students who felt bullied in the past and if there were any safety

concerns in a class, hallway or even outside of the school building, students and staff feel comfortable to alarm the officers in the school. (D3-P13, June 30, 2020)

D3-P6 stated, “Me, personally, I welcome it. I think that a majority of the people in a building are unarmed. So, if you have someone that is trained with the proper training and proper license, so to say, as a police officer, I welcome them in the building” (June 22, 2020).

D5-P10 noted a positive spin on armed personnel:

I think overall it is a positive effect. I think individually it depends upon the students. If the students have been trained well at home and as well as in school, there should be a mutual respect between the kids and the police. But if the kids come from possibly a broken family or they haven't been trained properly, and they may be in trouble, they may have a comfortability with the police where that respect might not be there. (D5-P10, June 25, 2020)

Mixed Feelings

There were also principals who had mixed feelings in regard to armed personnel being in schools. **D5-P10** stated:

I don't know how I really feel about having the police on campus because having a firearm and building, you know, if somebody gets their hands on it, that's not a policeman and it could be problems, but, if the police are properly trained to do this and it gives you a little bit more security makes you feel more safe. (D5-P10, June 25, 2020)

The mixed feelings and concerns of someone else having access to the weapon were similarly expressed and shared as the same by a few principals. **D5-P11** expressed:

If they're going to be armed, I would say, has to be concealed. And the reason that I said that is because again, it's children and children know that they're carrying, they might be

tempted if they get in a fight, you know, they might snatch your guns, things can happen. And so, if they are going to carry, I want them to be concealed, but that would only be at the high school level. I wouldn't have a weapon officer in the building at the elementary or middle school level, but at the high school level, that's a definite option, not for the elementary and the middle school; they should have it in their patrol vehicle. So, it should be close by, but not in the building. (D5-P11, June 25, 2020)

D5-P14 further correlated violence and its impact on learning:

It can be a mixed response. The violence has been resolved, but the damage is done to the student, which could impact learning. Most of the combative behaviors are a result of poor coping skills by the students. So we have to work with our SROs a little bit more to be cognizant of this and handle the matter much differently than past times. (D5-P14, July 1, 2020)

Firearm Concern during Response

D5-P3 also expressed the concern regarding police tactical capabilities.

Based on our training, it's tough to say that I expect them to be able to come and handle and manage the situation well. I'm concerned about that, you know, I'll get shot by the active shooter or by them because I know how they come in. Even though I'm known and they know who I am, I still, you know, that's still a real possibility that in your effort to help and aid students and staff and faculty, know you as a school leader can become a victim of either side. (D5-P3, June 10, 2020).

D2-P1 also noted similar sentiments regarding police tactical capabilities.

Certainly, first thing is to get here, get in, and try to take care of the situation the best they can. We've also joined with a number of schools in the County and the County

Prosecutor's Office. We've hired a team from North Jersey. I believe that does some strategic mapping of our buildings, setting it up in a grid of common language for any first responder that has been downloaded to the police officers' phones and their computers so when they arrive and the call goes out, they're all understanding what part of the building, what code we're using, and how we're implementing it so that they're all on the same page when they arrive. (D2-P2, June 4, 2020).

Escalation/Scare Tactics

D1-P4 noting the threatening aspect of armed personnel, stated:

In wake of what's happening right now, it's somewhat threatening, very punitive, and can come off as a scare tactic. As a professional, I understand the safety measures again, based on the code, however, when it comes to the community, it probably isn't necessarily the best measure as, as I said, the state that we're in currently. (D1-P4, June 11, 2020)

D4-P8 expressed a possible escalation of violence with armed personnel.

The perception of safety is really left up to those in the moment. The armed resource officers could escalate the situation. Fortunately, we haven't had any issues to date, but it is something that could be more of an escalation as opposed to a de-escalation or a positive effect. (D1-P8, June 23, 2020)

Principals also shared a variety of opinions in regard to armed personnel and how they view their role in schools. **D5-P3** said, “At our school, our police officers are the disciplinarian. They are there for the safety and they also teach” (June 10, 2020).

D4-P8 also expressed discriminatory concerns for minority children. “Especially students of color have been policed differently. They aren't afforded the same due process as their

Caucasian counterparts and their behaviors have been more criminalized. They're seen more as offenders first, and then victim second” (June 23, 2020).

False Sense of Security

D4-P7 took a pause prior to responding to this inquiry and felt that armed personnel in schools create a false sense of security. “I think it's almost like something to make people feel that the staff are safe” (June 23, 2020).

D3-P5 expressed similar thoughts. “I think that gives people a false sense of security, to be honest, because as I mentioned before, in these instances, and, you know, if past experiences kind of pave how we look at things and through what lens we're looking at them” (June 18, 2020).

D2-P1 stated, “I don't have a problem with the philosophy, but for our community and our board, it was not an investment that they wanted to make it this time” (June 4, 2020).

The majority of the principals interviewed opined that having armed personnel in schools were beneficial as long they were trained police officers and kept their weapons concealed. There were some principals who expressed keeping armed personnel out of the elementary and middle schools. Also, there were some principals comfortable with police officers being on school campus, but not in the school. The majority of the principals also expressed their experiences and concerns regarding police responses to a violent act at their school.

Mental Health

Another consideration that arose from the interviews was the importance of their school district ensuring that their students in need have access to counselors qualified to meet and treat their respective needs. This includes but is not limited to emotional, social development,

exceptional student, academic vocational, prenatal, gang, psychological, family, and substance abuse. Each area requires different knowledge, skills, and abilities.

The principals were asked during the interviews about mental health initiatives as part of their strategy to create a safe school environment. Some principals had strategies in place along with the educational curriculum and others paused and gave thought to how beneficial this would be for their students. Some of the principals even took notes to follow up with their superintendent regarding the incorporation of mental health strategies and safety training as part of their students' curriculum.

Mental Health Programs/Support Teams

D5-P11 identified school staff availability and on call to students. “A psychologist on staff, a school social worker on staff school, psychologists, school folks on staff to assist, if there's opportunity, but high school, they definitely have a mental health liaison. And then there should be a psychiatrist on call” (June 25, 2020).

D5-P14 echoed the thoughts of some of principals by saying that:

School resource officers, school counselors and social workers and in-school psychologist are on board at my school. There is a Safe to Tell space at the school along with a Second Wind Program (provides 8 therapeutic sessions for students. Paid for by a grant or Medicaid) to address any problems in school, at home, in the community, and even their own personal struggles. (D5-P14, July 1, 2020)

D3-P5 expressed how traumatic an incident can be to a student in school.

There's social and emotional issues all over. We could be doing a lockdown drill and child happens to be in the bathroom when that happens. That can be very traumatic situation for six, seven, or eight-year-old that doesn't necessarily know what's going on.

And we're never sure what type of exposure that they've had at home. So we have a team that we share at our two elementary schools, which include the guidance counselor and school psychologist to be part of our mental health strategic plan for our students. (D3-P5, June 18, 2020)

D5-P10 focused on the mentoring and nursing component of mental health. "My school is actually considered a community school, where we have nurses. We've been dealing with some of the kids that have issues that they need to share. We have this one guy who's a mentor comes in and speaks to the boys, and deals with that too. But we also have certified staff that are certified to deal with any mental issues as well as the guidance department. (D5-P10, June 25, 2020)

Prevention Training

D5-P10 paused and gave thought about safety and services for students in need at their school. This principal noted that "guidance has brought in speakers for de-escalation training, training for dealing with scenarios, and how to bring some resolve or calm space to a situation" (June 25, 2020).

D4-P12 also noted that "school safety training; suicide prevention training/social isolation awareness training are inclusive of our school's safety plan as well" (June 26, 2020). There were two principals who felt staff should be alert for issues. **D5-P3** noted to "Observe students' behavior/grades; monitor attendance; outreach with community; work with guidance" (June 10, 2020).

D2-P1 expressed similarity in being alert but utilizing a different method. "Watch for anxiety and stress; have wellness checks by police if needed" (June 4, 2020).

Safe Space/Peer Groups/Clubs

D3-P6 echoed the importance of ongoing support.

I think a huge component to this is mental health and increasing the support and environment for making students and staff feel safe and providing them an atmosphere where they are able to communicate possibly their feelings prior to feeling that the only way it's coming back, the violence. (D3-P6, June 22, 2020)

D1-P2 focused on the availability of staff and clubs/organizations.

We try to have people available for students to reach out to whether it be, in the formal setting or informal setting. We do believe strongly in the social and emotional needs of students and we have different clubs and organizations to support such. (D1-P2, June 8, 2020).

D5-P14 noted the availability of resources. “Yes, resources are made readily available for students who have mental health issues, and this is inclusive to the security strategies for the school” (July 1, 2020).

After this particular question was raised and answered during the interview, it was clear how the principals understood the importance of having mental health initiatives, strategies, and intervention methods in place for students and faculty as well as the identification of resources inside and outside of the school setting.

Other Concerns

This section of the themes was the least dominant. However, there are a few concerns that pertain to the safety and security of students, staff, and faculty. In alignment with my research study, “The Influence of Active Shooter Incidents in K-12: Principals Perceptions of

Armed Personnel and Tactical Police Capabilities in New Jersey District Factor Group (I) Public School Districts,” all of the principals interviewed were familiar with the high-profile school shootings, such as Columbine High School in 1999 and Sandy Hook Elementary School in 2012. The majority of the principals noted that they didn’t have a concern with an unknown outsider committing such an act at their school. Their concern was focused more on a parent, relative of a student or faculty rather than a previous student or faculty member from that particular school.

External Threat/Parents

D4-P9 expressed that,

I have a very low concern regarding past and current faculty being a perpetrator of a violent act. Additionally, with the outsider coming into the school to commit a violent act is just as low and not as a concern. However, a family member or current student is concerning as sometimes students can be territorial and things can get out of hand quickly. (D4-P9, June 25, 2020).

D5-P14 echoed similar sentiments. “There are no concerns about an outsider causing harm against my students or staff” (July 1, 2020).

D3-P5 expressed the same thoughts regarding outsiders: “I personally don't believe that just somebody random off the street would come into my school” (June 18, 2020).

D5-P11 noted concerns about parental access to school building.

And the procedure was that the parents could not come into the building at the beginning of the school day or at the end of the school day. They had to drop their children off at the door because we didn't want anything like that to happen. And so, I understand the importance of keeping the children's safe and the staff. Some parents had difficulty with these changes and expressed these concerns about their children’s wellbeing as a tactic to

enter the building. But we never changed a decision or made an exception for one parent because that could be the determining factor in safety or casualty. (D5-P11, June 25, 2020)

Other concerns that were referenced included positive relationships with students to identify any red flags. **D5-P14**, “Positive peer culture/mentor and Safe School environment discussions, which has been suggested for this upcoming school year. This will help in identifying red flags before it turns to an active shooter incident” (July 1, 2020).

D2-P1 was the only principal who noted this method, but according to him, it works for his school, students, and faculty. “Kids don't have bookbags in school and my faculty and I develop a good relationship with students to stay abreast of what is happening in their lives” (June 4, 2020).

D3-P6 expressed the following during the interview:

The community and interacting with the community, in an effort to either grasp their ideas, their feelings, their thoughts on all of these different aspects, but in the end, we're sharing our children, you know, and they're putting the trust in us as administrators and leaders to ensure that their children are safe and as well as our staff stay. So I think incorporating the community in a conversation in some way, shape, or form is very important. Once everyone is on the same page, then the concerns of school violence are not so heightened. (D3-P6, June 22, 2020)

Despite this research being a replication of a multiple-case study, research questions were created to guide this study and to collect data regarding principals' perceptions of police tactical capabilities and armed personnel in an educational setting. As noted in the methodology section of this study, these interview questions were approved by a panel of experts, which is different

from the 2016 study. To fully answer the overarching question of this research study, dialogue with New Jersey Public School DFG (I) principals were held and noted in order to support the specific outcomes of each research question for this study.

Research Question

RQ1: How do school principals in one New Jersey District Factor Group address school safety, based on their school district's policies and practices, for their students and faculty, while simultaneously manage their own expectations of current active shooter response capabilities of their local police department, as it pertains to a potential school shooting?

Along with addressing and managing safety and security for their students and faculty, the majority of the principals in this study have noted that having police involved in their school drills and professional development led to confidence that armed personnel would know what to do, arrive to their school in a timely fashion and able to handle the situation, and disarm the shooter. There was only one principal who had a concern of being accidentally injured or shot by the active shooter or law enforcement because they know how law enforcement respond to an incident of this magnitude.

D2-P1 said,

Certainly, the first thing is to get here, get in, and try to take care of the situation the best they can. We've also joined with a number of schools in the County and the County prosecutor's office. We've hired a team from North Jersey, I believe that does some strategic mapping of our buildings, setting it up in a grid of common language for any first responder, in which it has been downloaded to the police officers' phones and their computers. So when the call goes out and they arrive, they're all understanding what part

of the building to respond to, what code we're using, and how we're implementing it. So they're all on the same page when they arrive. (D2-P1, June 4, 2020)

During the interviews for this research study, out of the 14 principals, 10 of these participants expressed that their greatest risk of a safety threat will come from an outsider, specifically a parent rather than a current student, faculty, or staff within their school. Some of these expressions were noted by these principals as a reason for safety and security concerns.

D2-P1 also said that,

So the idea of putting in a security vestibule, where parents have to get buzzed in or whatever business is needed such as dropping off things allows the signing in and out of visitors in the security vestibule as well as not allowing parents to visit the main campus as they have done in the past. A number of parents said that they can't wait until their kids leave because now it feels more like a prison. I get it, but we are in a small community; our town is 1.2 square miles and there's not many faces that we don't recognize. With the 2018 referendum, we spent 2.9 million to update a number of things: facility-wise, bathrooms, lighting, a direct response system to the local police department and so on. (D2-P1, June 4, 2020)

D3-P5 noted that, "I personally don't believe that just somebody random off the street would come into my school" (June 18, 2020).

D5-P11 said,

And the procedure was that the parents could not come into the building at the beginning of the school day or at the end of the school day. They had to drop their children off at the door because we didn't want anything like that to happen. And so, I understand the importance of keeping the children and staff safe. (D5-P11, June 25, 2020)

As noted in Chapter 4 of this study, the most prevailing theme that resonated with all of the principals was the policy and procedure in creating a safe, operable learning environment for students, faculty, and staff. Uniformly, the principals were consistent with conducting and maintaining ongoing trainings and drills for preparation, if necessary, for an active shooter incident in their school. As noted by the principals, this will continuously work as long as there is a trust-based relationship between students, faculty, staff, and parents adhering to policy and procedure.

These principals expressed their consistency and preparation for a potential violent act through their major efforts in maintaining a trusting relationship with their students. The principals believe in keeping the communication flowing in a positive direction, listening to their students, including their voice, acknowledging and validating their feelings, advocating for their students, and remembering dates that were important to their students.

In discussing this research question further, the principals also provided their perception from one of the interview questions regarding the presence of armed personnel's influence or deterrent to potential school violence. The participating public-school districts in DFG (I) have three types of armed personnel being utilized within their school district. The most prevalent method used with armed personnel is the school's emergency management system, which is the use of a panic button call to their local police department. Out of the 14 principals participating in this study, six of these principals noted that their schools do not employ any police officers. However, they have a system in place to notify their local police department, when and if their presence and service are needed.

The 2018 referendum established the "Alyssa's Law" for all New Jersey public schools, directing that they must install silent panic alarms that will alert law enforcement during

emergencies or violent acts, such as an active shooter incident. The law states that each public elementary and secondary school building must be equipped with at least one panic alarm that is directly linked to local law enforcement authorities (NJ.Gov, 2019).

And as **D2-P1** has emphatically noted about not having armed personnel in their school, “It’s those relationships that you build will determine how kids feel about it. Because they know the cop and they’d seen him in town at times and have good relationships with him. A police officer walking through the halls is not that big of a deal” (June 4, 2020).

The other category noted with armed personnel is School Resource Officers – SROs. In this study, four principals noted their schools employ retired officers and that they are all full time with their school district. According to the Law Enforcement Officers Safety Act (LEOSA) 18 U.S. Code 926c (2011), it authorizes retired law enforcement officers to carry firearms. However, the school districts’ superintendent will have to grant permission for these SROs to carry firearms within their school district. In conjunction with being employed by their school district, SROs must complete SRO training in the State of New Jersey.

According to **D5-P14**,

Having armed personnel in schools can be a mixed response. The violence has been resolved, but the damage is done to the student, which could impact learning. Most of the combative behaviors are a result of poor coping skills by the students. So we have to work with our SROs a little bit more to be cognizant of this and handle the matter much differently than past times. (D5-P14, July 1, 2020).

D5-P11 noted that,

I know that the LEAD program works really good, works well. It’s called New Jersey Law Enforcement Against Drugs program. This replaced DARE. And so these programs

help when it comes to safety because a lot of times incidences of violence occur around some type of drugs. And so, if you can implement those programs, you will see the correlation between violence and school incidents decrease because a lot of times those incidents happened around drugs. So, if you can have an effective drug education awareness program, then you can decrease the violence. (June 25, 2020)

The third category of armed personnel is active police officers present within their schools. Out of the fourteen principals, three have noted active police officers in their schools. These officers are employed full-time and their salaries are paid by their police department. However, there is a Memorandum of Agreement – MOA – between these schools and law enforcement. According to the State of New Jersey Department of Education, “the New Jersey Departments of Law and Public Safety and Education issued a memorandum for use by local law enforcement and education officials. The MOA has been designed to ensure cooperation between law enforcement and education officials and ultimately to protect the educational environment” (MOA, 2019, pg. 6).

D4-P12 said,

I definitely believe it’s positive, but that could be a very opinionated question as well, but I don’t have any evidence to support that, I just think it makes us look stronger, you know, like, I even like for some of my events, I just like having a police car out, parked out front, you know, just like, hey, look we’ve got, we’ve got support here. I think it means a lot, but again, no evidence. Just that’s my opinion. (D4-P12, June 26, 2020)

Despite the differences of opinions from this interview question, the majority of the principals believe that armed personnel have a positive effect of deterring potential school violence. As identified in Chapter 4 Findings section of this study, there were four principals

who felt that the police were discriminatory and threatening in nature to minority children as well as provided a false sense of security to the school setting. Yet their students haven't provided much feedback in this regard. Out of the fourteen principals, only two principals noted their students as providing positive feedback about armed personnel in school.

Another important interview question to reference was how the principals' perceive the reality of police tactical response capabilities pertaining to active shooter incident. The police response and tactical capabilities were viewed and discussed with positive and negative acknowledgements. Most of the principals were familiar with the police response times and techniques that are utilized during an active response to an incident at their school. Their expectations of response time were in alignment with their local police department's drill times and discussions held during their emergency management meetings.

D5-P14 said,

Active shooter drills provide police with a better capacity to know what to do. Therefore, their response should be timely and well-organized in conjunction with the school district. Ongoing communication and discussion with the school as well to ensure all are on the same page and understanding. Expectation of police response time for my school should be under 3 minutes; considering the drills are within that time. (D5-P14, July 1, 2020)

Even though the drills and discussion provide some concrete response time to a potential active shooter incident, the majority of the principals in this study have noted law enforcement's response time between 3 to 5 minutes from the onset of the notification/call to armed officials arriving to their particular school.

D5-P11 noted that,

I don't think response time would ever be an issue for me, but I think they should be there within a minute. If you're calling them, then three to five minutes tops. I can't, you don't have any time when it comes to a situation like that. (D5-P11, June 25, 2020)

Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore the conflict that school principals face, as to whether armed personnel in schools will allow students and school personnel to feel safer when securing K-12 educational settings while examining school principals' expectations of police tactical capabilities in relation to response time to an active shooter incident, regardless if armed personnel is utilized or not. This researcher interviewed fourteen principals from various elementary, middle, and high schools in New Jersey within DFG (I).

The interviews conducted with the principals allowed for the identification of themes that would bring some understanding of the principals' insight on school shootings and armed personnel in a school environment. This research total sample population was comprised of eight male principals and six female principals; all are educational leaders within New Jersey District Factor Group (I) and representing the Northern, Central, and Southern regions.

The interviews also allowed six components to guide the study. These developing components and consistent themes from the previous studies in 2014 and 2016 are as follows: policy and procedure, physical security, communication, armed personnel, mental health, and concerns. Of these six themes, the most dominant theme that every principal identified as the most pivotal in ensuring a safe and secure learning institution for students, staff, and faculty was policy and procedures. Overall, all of the principals interviewed agreed, based on the thematic analysis, that establishing and maintaining policies and procedures in addressing potential threats of violence is a pivotal part of their school's emergency planning, a more safe and secured

school setting, and a diverse workforce of teachers, principals, and other educational leaders who are trained and more equipped to strategically implement a safety plan for their school.

Physical security was the next theme that was of importance in keeping students, staff, and faculty safe and secured in schools, which included panic buttons, door locks, cameras, buzzer/bell, ballistic windows, and security guards. As stated previously in the findings section of this study, the majority of the principals interviewed noted that their school district was a recipient of the 2018 Securing our Children's Future Bond referendum, in which they received funding to enhance K-12 public school security, such as the installation of silent panic alarms, which directly alert law enforcement during an emergency. There was no discussion during the interview about any budgetary constraints for these school districts.

The next theme that was of importance was communication with the students and faculty. An important factor to consider in creating a safe educational environment is student trust. The principals' opinions were similar in the area of trust between students and faculty. The development of peer groups, revamping PTAs, and finding an outlet to share potential threats of violence without being identified by their peers are strategies in building solid communication between principals, students, staff, faculty, parents, and even community members/stakeholders. All principals identified the importance of communication in all facets of the job, especially surrounding student and faculty safety in a school setting.

This study focused on school shootings and armed personnel, in which these topics were the focus in some of the interview questions. Armed personnel weren't as dominant as a theme as policy and procedure, physical security, and communication during the interviews with the principals. Due to this recent climate change of racial inequality and discriminatory complaints, some of the principals expressed the discriminatory, threatening, and false sense of security

regarding armed personnel in schools and its negative impact on minority students. Although these principals noted these concerns, they were not totally against having armed personnel, i.e. police officers being of assistance when needed, participating in their safety plans and drills, and being more culturally aware within the community that they are servicing.

The next theme that was identified was the mental health aspect. The principals were asked during the interview about mental health initiatives as part of their strategy to create a safe school environment. Some principals had strategies in place along with the educational curriculum and others paused and gave thought to how beneficial this would be for their students. In fact, all principals interviewed had some form of mental health strategy in place for their students and faculty.

Of the six themes that were identified for this research, concerns were the least referenced of them all. The principals identified their concerns regarding a safe and secure learning environment. Acknowledging that something could occur at any time, the principals' probability was low for something violent to occur in their school, with the exception of one female principal over the age of 50. As this one principal noted, **D5-P11**, "when I think of ... the staff member or teacher being affected by violence, I get a huge level of concern" (June 25, 2020).

However, out of the fourteen principals, ten of these participants identified parents as their major concern when providing a safe and secure learning environment. The other area of concern for the remaining four principals were either outsiders (non-parents, maybe a previous staff or student) as well as the location/structure of the school building as a level of safety and security concerns. As one of the principals, **D3-P5**, noted regarding outsiders, "I personally don't believe that just somebody random off the street would come into my school" (June 18, 2020).

Lastly, in regard to armed personnel in schools and police tactical capabilities, there was only one principal who did not want any armed personnel to be present in their school. This was a male principal over the age of 40. There were four principals (all females, over age 30, 40, and 50) who felt that the police were discriminatory and threatening in nature to minority children as well as provided a false sense of security to the school setting. Another principal (male over 50) had mixed feelings. The remaining eight principals endorsed armed personnel in their schools. These principals consisted of the following: six males/two females and the age range were from 37-52.

The police response and tactical capabilities were seen as a positive and negative. Most of the principals were aware of the response times and techniques utilized during an active response to a school's incident. Half of the principals interviewed noted that they are well-equipped to deal with their students and for the armed guards or active police officers to focus on their trained techniques in calming the situation without much threat, additional violence by pulling their weapon, intimidation/scare tactics, etc. As one principal noted, **D5-P11**, "I have a better understanding of what the situation calls for, and they won't have the knee-jerk reaction to pull their gun and take a life" (June 25, 2020).

Based on the findings and geographies of the participants, age of the principal, years in education, and years as a principal, it may be a strong factor in the support of having armed personnel in public school settings. However, the approval of the security enhancement referendum for these particular school districts could have a bearing on such a decision in regard to the increase in their security measures, such as armed guards.

In conclusion, the previous study included twenty-one principals from the suburban districts in which they were divided among elementary, middle, and high school settings. In this

study, fifteen of these principals endorsed armed personnel in their school, at a rate of 71% overall. Whereas in this current study, eight principals representing elementary, middle and high school level of leadership endorsed armed personnel in their school, at a rate of 57% overall. This includes three elementary school principals, four middle school principals, and one high school principal. With this current information, the sample size allows the impossibility of determining if administrators from middle and high school are keener to endorse armed personnel in their school than elementary schools. However, it was noted in my interviews by a select few of principals that they do not want armed personnel in the elementary school. A select few also noted that having armed guards and other security measures in place, such as drills at the middle school level, is preparation for high school and is necessary.

CHAPTER V – CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the conflict that school principals face as to whether armed personnel in schools will allow students and school personnel to feel safer when securing the K-12 educational setting, while simultaneously examining school principals' expectations of police tactical capabilities in relation to response time to an active shooter incident, regardless if armed personnel are already utilized or not. This research study assessed literature involving school shootings and other research studies that displayed similar variables, such as school safety. The previous research studies had some comparable qualitative findings that were seen in this research's investigation surrounding principals' perception of armed personnel in their schools.

The NASP (2013) suggested that having safe schools is a priority; however, having more guns in schools may not be the best approach. NASP (2013) warned:

The tragic events at Sandy Hook Elementary School in December 2012 further bring to the forefront the urgency for a serious national commitment to ensuring the safety of our school children and staff. However, it must be taken into consideration in not allowing our sense of urgency obscure evidence-based school safety initiatives in favor of seemingly obvious and potentially harmful approaches, particularly those that bring more guns into schools. (p. 22)

The root of the study was to garner the perception and expectation of elementary, middle, and high school principals in public school of District Factor Group (I) in New Jersey. The overall themes that were collected and verified through the principals' interviews aligned with

what some of the other studies and literature noted and recommended. The themes from this study include the following: armed personnel, physical security, policy and procedures, communication, mental health, and concerns. These exact themes were evident in the 2014 and 2016 research studies, but the extent of their significance to the principals ensuring safety in their schools were different from this research study. Further explanation of these six themes were discussed in Chapter 4 as well as its contrast with the previous studies in 2014 and 2016.

Through the literature that was explored, it was discovered that emergency planning and crisis management involves more than a multi-hazard plan created by school leadership. Reeves et al. (2010) suggest that although schools continue to be safe for students and staff, school leaders should work with community members and stakeholders to ensure staff members are trained to handle a variety of contingencies. “Creating and strengthening relationships with community partners such as law enforcement, fire safety, and public health and mental health agencies is best facilitated when all speak the same preparedness language” (Reeves et al., 2010, p.82).

Summary of Findings

This study’s participants were K-12 public school principals in District Factor Group (I) school districts in New Jersey. There were fourteen principals from various elementary, middle, and high schools in New Jersey, who were interviewed for this multiple-case study. The total sample population was comprised of eight male principals and six female principals, all of whom are educational leaders within DFG –(I) and representing the Northern, Central and Southern regions in New Jersey.

In conducting a deductive study, the interviews allowed for the verification of themes similar to the previous studies and it brought some understanding of the principals’ insight on

school shootings and armed personnel in a school environment. These interviews noted six components to guide the study. These components/themes are as follows: policy and procedure, physical security, communication, armed personnel, mental health, and concerns. Of these six themes, all of the principals interviewed agreed that establishing and maintaining policies and procedures in addressing crisis or a potential violent act is a pivotal part of the school's emergency preparedness plan, a more safe and secured educational setting, and a diverse workforce who are trained and more equipped to strategically implement a safety plan for their school.

Since school crisis occurrences, such as an active shooter incident, are minimal, the effectiveness of having school drills in mitigating loss of life remains undocumented. As a result, school safety plans should not be shelved until a crisis occurs. Staff development is key to crisis management and school safety. It must be diverse enough to ensure readiness for any number of tragic events that may happen in a learning institution. Staff development training also needs to involve local, county, and state responder agencies working together to ensure all roles and responsibilities are clearly defined (Trump, 2011; Reeves, et al., 2010).

In the interviews with the principals, they noted that their emergency planning or crisis management plans are reviewed, rehearsed, practiced, and part of staff development on a consistent basis. Also, these safety plans should be modified as needed to account for changes in personnel and all new staff and faculty should be notified and properly trained on their assigned roles during a crisis incident. However, not all fourteen principals could accurately say that this is occurring in their school district as a whole.

The research question that was accurately generated to conduct this study and to formulate the data for analysis is noted below as well as the analysis of these results were individually highlighted and presented in Chapter 4 (Findings):

RQ1. How do school principals in one New Jersey District Factor Group (DFG) address school safety, based on their school district's policies and practices, for their students and faculty, while simultaneously manage their own expectations of current active shooter response capabilities of their local police departments, as it pertains to a potential school shooting?

Overall, the findings in this study indicated that eight out of the fourteen principals representing elementary, middle, and high school level of leadership in the Northern, Central, and Southern regions in New Jersey endorsed having armed personnel in their school. However, it was noted in the interviews by a selection of principals that they preferred not to have armed personnel in elementary school settings. And a select few also noted that having armed personnel and other security measures, such as drills, in place at the middle school level is preparation for when students enter high school.

Also, of the six themes, all of the principals interviewed agreed that establishing and maintaining policies and procedures in addressing an act of violence is key to crisis planning. In this current research study, ten out of fourteen principals identified parents as their major concern when providing a safe and secured learning environment. The other remaining four principals noted other outsiders, such as a previous staff or student, non-parent, as well as the location and structure of the school building as a level of safety and security concerns. Lastly, in regard to armed personnel in schools and tactical capabilities, eight out of fourteen principals endorsed armed personnel in their schools.

Discussion

Having armed personnel in schools does not necessarily suggest that schools will become a safer place or become a better learning environment (Weiler & Cray, 2011) and there is no one policy that will guarantee “complete security” (Odendahl, 2013, p. 3). Yet, there have been additional suggestions for alternatives to having more armed personnel in schools. One suggestion is that by increasing student achievement at school, it will become much safer because the “youth that are in school are engaged during the day, preventing them from engaging in illegal behaviors” (“Justice Policy,” 2012, p. 4). Another suggestion is for principals and their faculty to educate students in effective conflict resolution without the involvement of law enforcement (Petteruti, 2011).

In analyzing school shootings broadly, several similarities were identified regarding the incidents at these particular schools: Pearl High School, Columbine High School, and Sandy Hook Elementary School. All of these schools’ shooting incidents occurred during the morning hours (CNN, 2013). All of these schools’ victims were either killed or injured inside of the learning institution (Matthews, 2013; Dodson, 2009). All three of these shooting incidents received national media attention (Dodson, 2009; CNN, 2013). All of the shooters had some type of connection to the schools in which the shootings occurred (CNN, 2013; Dodson, 2009; Matthews 2013). All three of the incidents served as a catalyst for change in the way that school districts view school safety and crisis management. While all three shooting incidents may have shared some similarities, creating a profile for a school shooter continues to circumvent law enforcement officials since school shootings are infrequent.

As the similarities were noted, an analysis of the school shooting differences in the Pearl High School, Columbine High School, and Sandy Hook Elementary School continue to suggest that there is no real pattern for a school shooting or shooter. Both Pearl and Columbine High Schools' shooting incidents were carried out by current students of their school (CNN, 2013). In the case of Sandy Hook, the shooter was not a student, but his mother was an employee at the school (CNN, 2013). The motives for the school shootings in Columbine and Sandy Hook are unknown since the perpetrators committed suicide prior to police arrival (Matthews, 2013). The Pearl High School's shooter was apprehended by the assistant principal and held until law enforcement arrived (Dodson, 2009). The shooter is currently serving three life sentences for his violent act in a learning institution (Dodson, 2009).

In the case of Columbine and Sandy Hook, multiple weapons were used to carry out the attacks (Matthews, 2013). On the contrary, the Pearl High School's shooter used only one weapon (Dodson, 2009). While the motives for the Sandy Hook shootings remain a mystery, bullying was a factor in the school shootings at Pearl and Columbine. Both Pearl and Sandy Hook were committed by single shooters who killed their mothers prior to the shootings (Dodson, 2009; CNN, 2013). Columbine was committed by two shooters with multiple weapons and homemade explosive devices (CNN, 2013). In regard to such shootings, **D2-P1** stated, "What signs did we miss that might've led to this? What can we do to improve in how we look for these triggers or signs, you know, that something is about to happen?" (June 4, 2020). This statement aligns with the FBI's study of incidents from 2008 through 2017. One of the results of the study noted that in 77% of school shooting incidents, at least one person knew about the attacker's plan (Alathari, et al, 2019).

Although the Stoneman Douglas High School (Parkland, FL) shooting in 2018 is considered the most recent and deadliest act of violence (17 deaths and 17 injured), Columbine High School (Colorado) in 1999 (15 deaths/24 injured) and Sandy Hook Elementary (Connecticut) in 2012 (28 deaths/2 injured) were considered the worst school shootings in United States history. The Pearl High School shooting in 1997 brought the reality of a school shooting to the southern region of the United States, as it occurred in Mississippi. This also brought the reality in how child abuse and bullying were contributory motives to such a violent act. While Columbine caused school districts to reassess school safety measures and include active shooter drills in crisis management plans, Sandy Hook reminded school districts of the devastating impact a single school shooting can have on a school as well as the community.

Newman et al. (2004) discovered that perpetrators of school shootings to be suicidal but change their suicidal intentions to a homicidal act towards a group of people or an institution that may have contributed to their motive, such as being bullied. The United States Secret Service has identified bullying as an issue that creates “isolation and fear and could lead to behavioral problems” (Wilson, 2004, p.2). With this in the forefront, schools, especially their educational leaders, which would be the principals in this study, need to be proactive with their faculty and staff “in recognizing and diffusing potentially violent situations and developing appropriate relationships with students” (Smith & Smith, 2006, p. 41). **D5-P3** stated,

We observe students' behavior and grades, monitor their attendance; outreach within the community such as home visits, yes we do that in our school district as well as work with the guidance department to ensure necessary supports are readily available for these students who begin to exhibit these telling signs of concerns. (D5-P3, June 10, 2020)

As seen through the extensive literature research, school security experts inform educational leaders and law enforcement officials to balance their school violence programs with a comprehensive approach rather than concentrating solely on active shooters and suicide incidents in a learning institution (Ujifusa, 2012). In this study, the principals, through their interviews, identified the specificity of wide-ranging processes in place to ensure student, faculty, and staff safety to the best of their ability. **D4-P9** stated,

We have monthly drills, including lockdown drills as well as bus drills, which is held twice a month. That is in place to determine how our teachers and students would know how to react if anything should happen, such as someone, like a disgruntled parent coming into the building or something such as an active shooter incident when students are boarding off of their bus and entering into the school. There are so many variations in holding these drills and we can only do our best, you know, just do our best to ensure everyone is safe. (D4-P9, June 25, 2020)

Safety plans and emergency crisis management involve the coordination between the citizens, community, and government agencies responding to the crisis or violent act. Therefore, effective school drills include the involvement from representatives of various agencies, including police, fire, local paramedics, and other emergency management agencies. When the various agencies are involved in school drills, potential problems in communication are brought to the forefront, which saves time and possible lives during an actual crisis, such as an active shooter incident.

While school districts and their educational leaders create a climate of school safety, some of the many safety topics that are increasingly being discussed among school design teams surround bulletproof glass, lighting, and reconfiguring traffic patterns (O'Meara, 2014). In

addition, surveillance cameras and identification card entry are among the technological systems being utilized in schools. Consequently, new schools are being developed around guidance issued by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) All Hazards Approach, incorporating the most current design and construction elements for tornados, hurricanes, earthquakes, fire, intruders, and site dangers (O'Meara, 2014).

O'Meara states "schools will also be designed according to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security Buildings and Infrastructure Protection Series to Design Safe School Projects, January 2012" (p. 12). To further note these exact sentiments from the lens of one of the principals from this study, **D1-P2** mentioned that

Our campus is between two buildings. Every time the bell rings or the doors open up, just based on that configuration it's a moderate concern. Currently, we have a construction project to resolve that issue. The construction project is to close the gap between the two buildings, but obviously, until it's completed, that concern or that thread is still going to exist. (D1-P2, June 8, 2020)

In review of some of the recent national tragedies, it clearly is an indication that the risk is realistic (FEMA.gov., March 2018). Johnson (2009) suggests that "school principals and school superintendents rethink what security means in schools" (p. 464). Research shows that children exposed to violence have a higher propensity toward participating in violence, have trust issues, and perform poorly in school (Hankin et al., 2011), but having an engaging school administration will create a culture that's conducive to a safe and healthy learning environment (Wilson, 2004).

Conclusion

The ultimate goal of this study was to identify and understand what safety measures were established to ensure a safer learning environment for principals, faculty, and students while simultaneously, examining school principals' expectations of police tactical capabilities in relation to response time to an active shooter incident, regardless if armed personnel are already utilized or not. Although fourteen principals participated in this current research study, their insight and comprehensive approach in safeguarding students and staff in their schools were apparent in their interviews, despite some of the differences in their perceptions regarding the presence of armed personnel in their schools. These same principals noted similarities in police tactical capabilities in relation to response time to an active shooter incident, regardless of the presence of armed personnel in their schools.

Due to the ongoing and consistent drills that are being held at the principals' learning institutions and holding at least yearly crisis management meetings and staff development with law enforcement and other emergency management personnel, the timeframes of response time was noted as being between 2-3 minutes for ten of the principals. One principal has noted 1-2 minutes in response time due to the proximity of the school and police department, and three other principals noted a timeframe of 2-5 minutes due to the location and size of their school and police department. This additional component of this research study is not a replication of the previous studies in 2014 and 2016.

This deductive study has some similarities and differences in regard to the replication of the previous studies. In highlighting the safety necessities noted by the principals, in which themes were essentially verified from their interviews, similarities to those themes in previous studies were found. Discussing the various focal points of school shootings, armed personnel,

and police tactical response capabilities and their impact on public schools, the fourteen principals revealed their perspectives in regard to their needs and the needs of their students and staff. And from the interviews, these principals prioritized these safety necessities based on their various mandated systems during their tenure in the educational realm.

In this study, the principals noted that establishing and maintaining policies and procedures in addressing the potential threat of violence is pivotal to their school's emergency management planning and ensuring a more safer and secured school setting, as is having a diverse workforce of educational leaders who are trained and equipped to strategically implement a safety plan for their school in accordance with the New Jersey Department of Education's established protocols regarding oversight in school drills compliance and other emergency management planning.

In the 2016 study, policy and procedure was also the highly prioritized necessity by the principals in safeguarding their students and staff. The principals credited crafting a safe environment within their schools through enforcement of policy and procedures with their students, staff, and faculty. They also noted the significance of maintaining trust with the students and staff through their consistent trainings and effectively interconnecting students, staff, and faculty.

The 2014 study, which interviewed only principals in the Paterson School District in New Jersey within DFG-A, noted policy and procedure as a secondary factor to communication in regard to their school's safety. The principals stated that dialogue is imperative to building trust between student and faculty as well as faculty and administration. Through communication, it will create a safer educational environment and provide guidance for students to communicate with their parents as well.

The other areas of necessity for this research were different between this study and the previous studies. For this study with fourteen principals, the additional themes in order were physical security, communication, armed personnel, and mental health. In the 2016 study, the twenty-one principals noted these exact themes, but its level of significance was different from this current study. These themes are noted as armed personnel, physical security, mental health, and communication. In the 2014 study, the twelve principals noted their priorities as communication, policy and procedure, physical security, armed personnel, and mental health. In comparison to the 2014 study and this current deductive study, the principals noted mental health as the least important safety theme or priority. In this current study, all principals interviewed had some form of mental health strategy in place for their students and faculty, which was the same in the previous studies.

This study identified that eight out of the fourteen principals representing elementary, middle, and high school level of leadership, endorsed armed personnel in their school. These eight principals noted armed personnel as SROs or police officers. In the 2016 study, fifteen out of the twenty-one principals, who also represented elementary, middle, and high school level of leadership, endorsed armed personnel in their school and were identified as police officers or retired police officers. In the 2014 study eleven out of twelve elementary principals in the Paterson School District endorsed armed personnel in their school, who were identified as police officers or retired police officers.

The 2014 study, “School Shootings & Principals’ Perception of Armed Personnel in an Educational Setting,” conducted its research with the school district within DFG-A, in the City of Paterson, New Jersey, which is an urban environment with high crime and low socioeconomic status. During this research, the principals discussed their memories upon hearing about the

Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting in 2012, in which a person, who was not a student, killed twenty 1st grade students and four faculty members before killing himself (Sedensky, 2013). The 2014 study consisted of twelve elementary school principals, so this particular active shooter incident was in the forefront of their minds and their decision in being supportive of armed personnel in their school district. In this current deductive study, a select few principals did not want armed personnel in the elementary school. Yet they were supportive in having security measures, such as drills at the middle school level, in preparation for high school emergency crisis planning.

The 2016 study, “K-12 and the Active Shooter: Principals’ Perceptions of Armed Personnel in New Jersey District Factor Group GH Public Schools,” conducted its research with the K-12 public school districts in District Factor Group GH in New Jersey. Although the active shooter incident at Sandy Hook Elementary School had occurred four years prior to the study, the remnants of its results still lingered with school officials. The overall fear and panic were not highlighted as a means to drive their safety protocols and practice, even though it was noted by a few of the principals as a reaction by some staff and parents to certain events. Yet it still assisted in thought-provoking and collaborative efforts to ensure safety across the board for their school districts. The research consisted of suburban school districts in New Jersey with a higher socioeconomic status, in which they have more means to safeguard their staff and students in their schools. This current research study replicated the 2016 study more than the 2014 study. This current study focused on K-12 public schools in District Factor Group (I) in New Jersey and the population consisted of elementary, middle, and high school principals from suburban school districts from more affluent communities and much higher socioeconomic status.

In regard to having armed personnel in learning institutions, the economic status doesn't apparently influence this issue to any great extent in this current study or the previous studies in 2014 and 2016. The DFG status of the school districts in all three studies did not reference the SES status for the need or high demand for armed personnel or the school and community expectations in the realm of police response capabilities relevant to an active shooter incident.

During the course of conducting this study, the fourteen suburban principals noted some of the casualties and police response in the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School (Parkland, Fl) active shooter incident in 2018 along with the approved security enhancement referendum for their school districts in New Jersey. They also coupled those concerns along with the current climate change of racial inequality and discriminatory complaints and police brutality coupled with armed personnel in schools being a negative impact on minority students. Although these principals noted these expressions in this study as well as the expressions of school shootings and safety noted in the previous studies in 2014 and 2016, these school principals were not totally against having armed personnel in schools.

The themes in this current study were validated and consistent with the themes in the 2014 and 2016 studies. However, its level of significance varied in all three studies. Although armed personnel were the key element of this research topic, it was not highlighted as the priority to the fourteen principals interviewed in this study or in the previous studies in 2014 and 2016. Overall, in this current study and in the previous studies in 2014 and 2016, the principals directed their answers to school safety by following safety policies and procedures, building trust through communication with the students and staff, conducting the appropriate drills in their school with all of their students, staff, and faculty, and ensuring the building is physically secured for a safe learning environment.

Recommendations for Future Research

This interview study provided purposeful insight into the perceptions of principals in how they view issues that impact their safety and the safety of their students, staff, and faculty in a learning environment. This research added to the existing body of literature regarding school shootings and principals' perception of armed personnel in suburban public schools in New Jersey, obstacles, and supports to the process and recommendations for future research.

This study recommends similar studies to be conducted in other settings, such as larger rural school districts and larger urban school districts in New Jersey to ascertain similarities and differences in principals' perceptions of school shootings and the dilemma school principals are challenged with regarding the issue of utilizing armed personnel within their schools as well as police tactical capabilities in regard to their response time to an active shooter incident. This current study and the study in 2016 have conducted research on suburban school districts in New Jersey, whereas the study in 2014 focused on one particular urban school district in New Jersey.

Perception can be a changeable entity. A principal's perception of their safety may be changed by a single incident in their school, such as a threat or violence. If a principal, student, or staff at a learning institution is involved in or witnesses a violent episode, such as a school shooting, then that particular individual may feel unsafe in a school environment, regardless of the type of security personnel that are in their school. Research should be conducted to determine if police officers or SROs assigned to a specific public school are properly trained to deal with children in school who have behavioral and/or emotional problems, as well as addressing events of a catastrophic nature in which violence is present.

Furthermore, research is needed to determine if armed personnel actually has a statistical impact on safety at schools. While this type of research would be extremely valuable, it would be

difficult to determine this type of effect due to several causes that would be influential to the results. To gauge whether armed personnel has an impact on school safety, future researchers would need to determine how they would measure such an impact. One suggestion would be to compare the number of disciplinary or violent incidents at schools that required the involvement of armed personnel, such as active police officers or SROs.

A researcher could utilize data reported by schools of violent incidences; however, an assumption to the study would have to be made that the data being reported was truthful and factual. A school administrator, such as a principal, would be the decision-maker in deciding the type of disciplinary measures are necessary for a specific infraction and their response will also determine their reporting of the incident. This is something that future researchers would have to take into consideration when addressing this potential limitation in their study.

While there is research related to community violence, school violence, and general firearm violence, the studies that were completed in 2014 and 2016, coupled with the findings from this current study, relate more to the preparation for an active shooter incident as well as the reaction to the event. Future research could improve upon the findings of this study by questioning principals about the components once again, after policymakers have approved and instituted the 2018 security enhancement referendum for all school districts in New Jersey.

Recommendations for Policy

Thorough school policy development plays an essential role as a violence prevention and control apparatus. Having clear and consistent policies will promote a stable school setting, leading to a safe educational environment. As a result of the research conducted for this study and based on the previous research studies in 2014 and 2016, the following policies are similarly recommended:

- The New Jersey Department of Education should consider implementing policies that would require the hiring of mental health professionals in all schools. Research has revealed that children with behavioral problems without any effective strategies and resources accessible to them are more likely to be involved in violent acts that will impact their education. In this study, some principals noted in having mental health professionals on school campus whereas others would have to outsource or recommend mental health services in the community to the parents.
- All schools should be mandated by the federal government to employ an active school resource officer (SRO) if their jurisdiction does not contain a local police department that is a visible support in their school. Research has revealed that a trend in schools displaying the presence of armed personnel allows for a quicker response time to active shooters, whether the threat is internal or external. In this study, some of the principals noted that their students and staff felt safe in their school knowing that there is armed personnel present during school hours.
- In the United States, all personnel legally authorized to carry a firearm in an educational setting should be required to obtain the training received by law enforcement officers. This training should include firearm preparation and training, 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 law enforcement personnel as well as educational leaders. In this current study, it was noted by a few principals about their concerns with armed personnel

not being equipped to effectively handle students exhibiting such signs of distress and would result in brandishing their weapon or even use it if necessary.

- In addition, educators, such as principals 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 the 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 through counseling and therapy, as long as it's recognized and facilitated during earlier phases.
- Another consideration of this advanced training for administrators and faculty would be identifying and addressing the racial disparities among students in regard to the outcome of disciplinary actions, such as suspensions, notification of law enforcement, court involvement, and possible expulsion from school when addressing safety concerns in schools. In this current research, this was noted by quite a few principals who voiced their opinions in how minority students were treated differently than their peers in school.

Recommendations for Practices

Like any collaboration, law enforcement and educators must maintain an open line of communication and have mutual understanding and respect for safety and security for students and faculty. Without such collaboration, school administrators, principals, and other educational leaders will devalue law enforcement's capabilities and decision-making during an active shooter incident. This will cause educational leaders, such as principals and teachers, to risk their own lives by attempting to confront a shooter. As an example, an Indiana teacher who was shot while

tackling and disarming a student inside his classroom said that his swift decisions “were the only acceptable actions” to save his seventh-grade students (CBS News, 2018).

Equally, law enforcement officers should be well equipped to respond, deescalate, and aid in the recovery process of an active shooter situation. And because faculty and staff establish the frontline of school safety, they should be supported by their administrators in creating a safe learning environment. Overall, schools should provide training and assistance to faculty and staff in the following areas. This is also inclusive to SROs who are employed by the school districts:

- Conflict resolution and management
- Identify signs and triggers of anger management, behavioral and emotional problems, and mental health needs
- Diversity and cultural competence training
- Victim sensitivity and support
- Bullying and harassment recognition, prevention, and intervention
- Child abuse and neglect recognition, prevention, and intervention
- Safety planning and crisis management collaborative meeting with educational leaders and law enforcement officials

By having such training and support to students, faculty, staff, and armed personnel employed by the school district, it would allow faculty and staff along with armed personnel to play critical roles in implementing strategic responses before and after the crisis or violent act. In preparation for this, educational leaders and law enforcement officials will be effective in the following:

- Identifying and implementing activities that promote safe school environments.

- Developing and instituting policies and procedures that enhance school safety and security while promoting positive relationships between students and law enforcement officers.
- Developing partnership relationships between the operational needs of the school and law enforcement.
- Formalizing the Memorandum of Understanding that outlines the roles and responsibilities of the school and law enforcement as well knowing the chain of command channels of communication in event of a violent act, such as an active shooter incident.

Reflective Summary

Making decisions regarding what type of security measure to implement in any school is a challenging aspect. There are many variables to take into consideration, such as students, parents, school district taxpayers, community stakeholders, and policymakers. But the principals' perceptions regarding armed personnel in schools coupled with police tactical capabilities during their response time to an active shooter incident is vital to this research. This research was limited to suburban public schools in District Factor Group (I) in New Jersey, whereas the previous study in 2014 was limited to one specific urban public school district in New Jersey, and the 2016 study was limited to suburban public schools in District Factor Group GH in New Jersey.

In comparison to the 2014 and 2016 research studies, this current study utilized data that originated from interviews and demographic surveys by principals. The studies slightly varied as to the outcome, ranging from principals' perceptions of safety at school to their faculty, staff, and students being fearful or victims of a violent act in school. The 2016 and current studies

suggested potential unfavorable effects of an outsider, such as a parent on principals' perceptions of safety. All three studies showed a significant beneficial effect of building trust-based relationships with students and staff, having armed personnel in school, and continuously maintaining and enhancing a safe school climate to minimize or deter the likelihood of a violent act, such as active shooter incident, while in school.

As a researcher, I have discovered that administrators, such as principals, should be versatile and adaptable to learning the many facets of school safety and ensuring that their students, faculty, and staff feel safe and secure in their learning environment. An educator should understand that if a student is exhibiting signs of distress or disruptive behaviors, then the student must be dealing with matters that require attention and support before things spiral out of control. This is applicable to faculty, staff, and the student's parents, as this has been voiced throughout the research about a person familiar or connected to the school would be the ideal person to commit an act of violence.

Through this current research, it was expressed, and is consistent with the previous studies in 2014 and 2016, that improved access to school-based mental health supports are needed by hiring and maintaining school-employed mental health professionals who are trained to infuse prevention and intervention services into the learning process and to help integrate services provided through the school and community partnerships. It was also discussed by the principals in this deductive study that their school districts have ongoing safety efforts with law enforcement officials and emergency management teams about crisis prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery to ensure that crisis training and plans are relevant to the school framework, strengthens learning, facilitate effective threat assessment, and are consistently reviewed and practiced by students, faculty, and staff.

It was also discovered in this study, the principals expressed the need to balance physical and psychological safety to avoid the overly restrictive measures, such as having armed personnel that can challenge the learning environment and instead combine reasonable security measures, such as locked doors and silent panic alarms, with efforts to enhance school climate, build trusting relationships, and encourage students and staff to report potential threats. If a school determines the need for armed personnel, then properly trained school resource officers (SROs) are the only school personnel of any type who should be armed if they are not active law enforcement officers.

Although there were similarities with the previous studies in building trust relationships, armed personnel, and enhancing the school safety climate, this current study had an additional component than the previous studies, which included police tactical capabilities in regard to their response time to an active shooter incident. There were similarities noted in the response time due to the many ongoing and consistent drills that are being planned, practiced, and rehearsed with the schools and law enforcement officials. This consistency in practice may be due to the contributory factor of the 2018 enhanced school security referendum in which these particular school districts were recipients of the grant and security upgrades due to Alyssa's Law.

As a researcher of this study, the principals' perception of having armed personnel in their school as a security countermeasure displayed a variety of opinions. In noting both sides of these principals' insight, **D5-P14** noted,

In this day and time, it has a counter effect on minority children. In my opinion, the way security is being used does more harm than good. When students fight, they are ticketed, sent to court, and fined. Most families cannot pay the fines, which leads to additional fines or probation. It's like systemic oppression against minority students so it put them

at a disadvantage in their learning compared to their white peers. This is why a peer group has been developed to address any disparities as well as any safety concerns. (D5-P14, July 1, 2020)

On the other side of the coin, **D3-P13** stated,

Personally, it's a good alliance between students and law enforcement. It brings a sense of safety and peace for students who felt bullied in the past and if there were any safety concerns in a class, hallway, or even outside of the school building, students and staff feel comfortable to alarm the officers in the school. (D3-P13, June 30, 2020)

As noted earlier in this chapter, perception is a changeable entity. The safety and security needs of a particular school as well as the principals' experiences and outcomes of school violence are pivotal to such a change in thought. This researcher's conclusion and recommendations considered and supplemented the previous studies in determining whether the presence of armed personnel in schools deters the likelihood of an active shooter incident and its impact on principals' perceptions of safety. Therefore, I hope this research fosters a school environment that cultivates a safety team to implement policy and procedures and security measures to ensure a safe learning environment for students, faculty, and staff.

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APPENDIX A – SOLICITATION OF SUPERINTENDENTS LETTER



Attn: Superintendent of Schools

Dear Superintendent of Schools,

My name is Adela Lopez, and I am a doctoral degree candidate in the College of Education and Human Services at Seton Hall University. At this time, I am preparing my doctoral dissertation which is titled, “The Influence of Active Shooter Incidents in K-12: Principals Perceptions of Armed Personnel and Tactical Police Capabilities in New Jersey District Factor Group (I) Public School Districts.” This research topic has been approved by my doctoral committee at Seton Hall University.

The purpose of this letter is to kindly request your permission to conduct my interviews with your principals within your school district. This replicated study is of a qualitative design, requires interviews of school principals to collect pertinent data for this study, whose narrative-based responses will then be coded, and analyzed. The purpose of this study is to explore the dilemma schools principals’ face, as to whether their perceptions of armed personnel in schools are conducive to student learning when securing the K-12 educational setting, while simultaneously examining school principals’ expectations of police tactical capabilities in relation to their response time pertinent to an active shooter, regardless if armed personnel are already utilized or not within their facility.

Each interview will take approximately 35 minutes, whereas each interview will be held remotely via video conference or audio recording interview due to COVID-19. The sixteen questions which will be used for the interviews have been previously approved by a panel of experts, who are school principals, yet they are not participating in this study. 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*, which they may withdraw at any time during the study, and that their participation will be *Confidential* and *Anonymous*. Furthermore, no information recorded will identify the participant or the school district within the data collected and analyzed. *Only the principals* that return the Informed Consent Letters agreeing to participate in the study will be interviewed, with their names and schools withheld, as stated. All of the confidential data will be securely saved on a USB thumb-drive, and then stored in a locked secure site within my work location, located at the State of NJ-Department of Children & Families, as well as within a secure location at the College of Education and Human Services at Seton Hall University.

The Institutional Review Board requires that I receive permission in writing from the Superintendent of the public-school district that I am soliciting within New Jersey District Factor Group (I). If permission is indeed granted by you to conduct the study within your school district, I will submit your approval letter or email, coupled with 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 (609) 439-1397, or by email at adela.lopez@student.shu.edu. You may also contact my Dissertation Mentor and Academic Advisor, Dr. Daniel Gutmore, at 973-275-2853.

Respectfully Submitted,

Adela Lopez, MPA, Ed.S

Doctoral Candidate

Seton Hall University

APPENDIX B – PERMISSION OF SUPERINTENDENTS OF SCHOOLS

Page 1 of 3

[EXTERNAL] Fw: Dissertation Assistance

Adela M Lopez [REDACTED]

Wed 4/8/2020 7:38 PM

To: Adela Lopez [REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, April 8, 2020 3:37 PM
To: Adela M Lopez [REDACTED]
Subject: Re: Dissertation Assistance

Hi Adela,
Thanks for reaching out. I grant you permission to interview the principals in [REDACTED] If it helps, I will reach out to the principals and see who is interested and get back to you.
Tom

On Wed, Apr 8, 2020 at 3:11 PM Adela M Lopez <[REDACTED]> wrote:

Attn: [REDACTED]

Dr. [REDACTED],

My name is Adela Lopez, and I am a doctoral degree candidate in the College of Education and Human Services at Seton Hall University. At this time, I am preparing my doctoral dissertation which is titled, "The Influence of Active Shooter Incidents in K-12: Principals Perceptions of Armed Personnel and Tactical Police Capabilities in New Jersey District Factor Group "I" Public School Districts." This research topic has been approved by my doctoral committee at Seton Hall University.

The purpose of this letter is to kindly request your permission to conduct my interviews with your principals within your school district. This case-study is of a qualitative design, requires interviews of school principals to collect pertinent data for this study, whose narrative-based responses will then be coded, and analyzed. The purpose of this study is to explore the dilemma schools principals' face, as to whether their perceptions of armed personnel in schools are conducive to student learning when securing the K-12 educational setting, while simultaneously examining school principals' expectations of police tactical capabilities in relation to their response time pertinent to an active shooter, regardless if armed personnel are already utilized or not within their facility.

APPENDIX C – IRB APPROVAL



May 29, 2020

Adela Lopez

Re: Study ID# 2020-088

Dear Ms. Lopez,

At its May 27, 2020 meeting, the Research Ethics Committee of the Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board reviewed and approved your research proposal entitled "The Influence of Active Shooter Incidents in K-12: Principals Perceptions of Armed Personnel and Tactical Police Capabilities in New Jersey District Factor Group "I" Public School Districts" as submitted. This memo serves as official notice of the aforementioned study's approval. Enclosed for your records are the stamped original Consent Form and recruitment flyer. You can make copies of these forms for your use.

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, informed consent form or study team must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to their implementation.

You will receive a communication from the Institutional Review Board at least 1 month prior to your expiration date requesting that you submit an Annual Progress Report to keep the study active, or a Final Review of Human Subjects Research form to close the study. In all future correspondence with the Institutional Review Board, please reference the ID# listed above.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mara Podvey".

Mara C. Podvey, PhD, OTR
Associate Professor
Co-Chair, Institutional Review Board

Office of the Institutional Review Board

Presidents Hall · 400 South Orange Avenue · South Orange, New Jersey 07079 · Tel: 973.275.4654 · Fax 973.275.2978 ·
www.shu.edu

WHAT GREAT MINDS CAN DO

APPENDIX D– SOLICITATION OF PRINCIPALS LETTER



Attn: Name, Principal

LETTER OF SOLICITATION (School Principals, i.e. Research Participants)

Dear Principal _____:

My name is Adela Lopez, and I am a doctoral degree candidate in the College of Education and Human Services at Seton Hall University. At this time, I am preparing my doctoral dissertation which is titled, “The Influence of Active Shooter Incidents in K-12: Principals Perceptions of Armed Personnel and Tactical Police Capabilities in New Jersey District Factor Group (I) Public School Districts.” This research topic has been approved by my doctoral committee at Seton Hall University. 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 schools principals’ face, as to whether their perceptions of armed personnel in schools are conducive to student learning when securing the K-12 educational setting, while simultaneously examining school principals’ expectations of police tactical capabilities in relation to their response time pertinent to an active shooter, regardless if armed personnel are already utilized or not within their facility.

All principals employed in New Jersey District Factor Group (I) are eligible to participate, and the expected duration of participation in this study is approximately 35 minutes. Each participant will be asked to complete a short demographic survey, and remotely participate in a video conference interview (due to COVID-19). 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, coupled with your expectation of police response time and capabilities relevant to active shooter incidents. The questions which will be used for the interviews have been previously approved by a panel of experts, who are school principals, yet they are not

participating in this study. Again, the interview will be conducted remotely and with a time that is convenient for you.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If permission is granted, I will request that the interview be recorded with either a software connected to the video conference program or a digital voice recorder; however, 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, the principal researcher, will be aware of the identity of any and all participants. This procedure will be enforced using pseudonyms and codes during this study to procure further anonymity to anyone other than the researcher. As all of the subject's data will be unspecified and confidential, as stated, where any and all data that is collected will be securely stored on a USB drive, then locked in a secured site at the Department of Children and Families, where I am employed.

Thank you for your time and consideration regarding your participation with this study. If you have any questions and/or would like to participate, please contact me at adela.lopez@student.shu.edu, or on my cellular device at (609) 439-1397.

Sincerely,

Adela Lopez

Adela Lopez, MPA, Ed.S

Doctoral Candidate

Seton Hall University College of Education and Human Services

APPENDIX E – INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Seton Hall University
Institutional Review Board
JUN 01 2020
Approval Date



COLLEGE OF EDUCATION
AND HUMAN SERVICES
Promoting Professional Practice
SETON HALL UNIVERSITY

Expiration Date
JUN 01 2021

APPENDIX E INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Researcher's Affiliation: Adela M. Lopez is a doctoral candidate at Seton Hall University's College of Education and Human Services, within the Department of Educational Leadership, Management and Policy – K-12 School Administration Program.

Study's Title: "The Influence of Active Shooter Incidents in K-12: Principals Perceptions of Armed Personnel and Tactical Police Capabilities in New Jersey District Factor Group "T" Public School Districts".

Purpose of the Research: The purpose of this study is to explore the dilemma schools principals' face, as to whether their perceptions of armed personnel in schools are conducive to student learning when securing the K-12 educational setting, while simultaneously examining school principals' expectations of police tactical capabilities in relation to their response time pertinent to an active shooter, regardless if armed personnel are already utilized or not within their facility.

Duration of Subjects' Participation: Upon voluntary agreement to partake in this research study, the subject can expect to participate for approximately 35 minutes.

Voluntary Nature of Participants: Participation is voluntary. The participants may also refuse to participate or withdraw from this study at any time with no penalty, in which the participant would indicate as such to the principal researcher in writing.

Research Procedures: The procedures for this particular study include the following: 1) the completion of a demographic survey. 2) due to COVID-19, participation in one, in-depth, semi-structured remote interview via videoconferencing and/or audio recording with the researcher. The researcher will request that the interviews be audio recorded, however, this is optional for participants.

Research Instrument utilized: Interview guide, which consist of 16 open-ended questions. The interview questions were reviewed and approved by a panel of experts, who are school principals, but not participating in this study.

Preservation of Anonymity: All participants' data will be anonymous, and their identities will remain unspecified, as pseudonyms (aliases) will be assigned to each participant, and their institutions, to preserve this unstipulated information.

Preservation of Confidentiality: All participants' interview responses will remain confidential. Participants replies to interview questions will not be revealed in preliminary and final reports or in published materials. All data collected (including audio files and transcripts) will be securely stored in a locked secured site on a USB drive at the Department of Children and Families. Each participant is entitled to a copy of the recording at his or her request. The recordings will remain in a locked secure site at the Department of Children and Families, and only I, the researcher will have access to these recordings, which will be kept for a period of no less than three (3) years.

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

Anticipated Risk: There are no foreseen risks or discomfort for any participant who volunteers to be interviewed for this study.

Benefits: There are no direct benefits to the participant during this study, other than adding to the research conducted as it pertains to school safety



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

Video/Audio Record Consent: The researcher will request to use a VoIP (voice over internet protocol), such as SKYPE as it will allow this researcher the ability to interview the participants by using voice and video via a synchronous (real time) connection. This is also an EVAER software with SKYPE to record the video conference with both parties being captured in the recording. However, if the participating subject refuse to be recorded or there's a malfunction of the video conferencing, then notetaking or audio recording will also be part of the research process.

The researcher will be the sole transcriber of the audio files. All data collected and analyzed will remain protected for no longer than three (3) years and then will be destroyed. Participants will have access to their interview data upon request during this time.

Contact Information: If you have any questions regarding this research, you may contact Adela Lopez, the principal researcher, at (609) 439-1397, or by email at adela.lopez@student.shu.edu. You may also contact my Dissertation Mentor and Academic Advisor, Dr. Daniel Gutmore, at his office at Seton Hall University, 973- 275- 2853, or the Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board at 973-313-6314.

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

_____ I agree to be interviewed via SKYPE (video conference)

_____ I agree to be audio recorded during my interview

_____ I agree to video and audio recording during my interview.

Participant Name (Please Print)

Date

Participant Signature

APPENDIX F – INTERVIEW QUESTIONS



Interview Protocol Questions

1. What are your concerns regarding a student being a victim or perpetrator of a violent act in your school?
2. What are your concerns regarding a faculty member being a victim or perpetrator of a violent act in your school?
3. What are your concerns with an outsider coming into the school to commit a violent act against a faculty member or student (i.e. parent, etc.) in your school?
4. What safety measures have been instituted to provide for a safe school?
5. What training has been provided for teachers to protect themselves and their students in the case of a perpetrator committing an act of violence?
6. What education has been provided for students to be part of creating a safe environment in school?
7. Are mental health initiatives part of your strategy to create a safe school?
8. How do you perceive police being armed in your school as a security countermeasure?
9. 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?

10. What options are available for a safe school, other than armed police personnel?
11. Have you received comments from faculty about armed police personnel in the school?
12. Have you received comments from students about armed police personnel in the school?
13. What are your expectations of your local police department's capabilities regarding the handling of an active shooter incident when responding to your school, in particular?
14. What are your expectations of your local police department as it applies to their response time, relevant to an active shooter incident within your school?
15. Have you ever discussed with your local police department about their capabilities when responding to a violent incident such as a shooting in a school, or how long they realistically will take when responding to an incident of this magnitude?
16. Has your local police department informed you about who in fact would be responding to a high-risk incident at your school, such as SERT (Special Emergency Response Team), SWAT (Special Weapons and Tactics Team), or a specially trained response unit for active shooters in schools?