STUDENT PERCEPTION OF SCHOOL SAFETY AND HOW IT AFFECTS THEIR ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

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AUTHORIZATION TO SUBMIT DISSERTATION

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DEDICATION

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ABSTRACT

The high-profile lethal violence that has occurred in multiple schools around the country has brought school safety to the forefront of educational concerns. These high-profile cases are rare, but when they do occur, they create serious concern for parents, teachers, students, administrators, and communities about school safety. Accountability has become a buzzword in today’s educational setting. When students do not feel safe at school, their academic success suffers. This study was designed to encompass a variety of research methods, using a mixed-methods research study to examine the relationship between students’ perception of safety in the schools and how it affects their academic success. There have been multiple studies on high-profile school shootings, but there has not been enough research on everyday issues that students face, such as bullying, discipline issues, or simply reacting to being a student. Research has shown that students who feel unsafe or threatened at school have a harder time academically and have a high probability of dropping out of school. There have been many studies on the effects of unsafe learning environments. This research was designed to address what makes students feel unsafe at school and to address areas to help students overcome these issues. Students, teachers, and administrators were interviewed, and they completed a survey designed to analyze issues of safety impacting academic performance. Student data, including discipline records, attendance, demographics, and grade point averages, were analyzed. The quantitative data were examined and compared to see if there were significant differences between students with discipline problems and academic success, and if demographics play a role in the feelings of being unsafe. Analysis of data from previous research has shown that students who feel safe at school do better
academically. Students who feel unsafe at school have lower grades, no grade improvement, or an increase in disciplinary action.
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Chapter I

Introduction

American news outlets have presented the issue of school safety as a sober topic of national discussion. Such attention to graphic events has added a climate of fear in today’s schools. The following headlines seize a reader’s attention and cause citizens to question the state of today’s schools and their students:

- Teen Stabbed to Death, 3 Hurt in Texas School Fight (Stanglin, 2013)
- The Little Massacre: What Can the Schools Do (Cloud, 1999)
- Girls Arrested for Planning “Attack a Teacher Day” (Gastaldo, 2011)
- Armed Youths Kill Up to 23 in 4-Hour Siege at High School (Cart, Slater, & Braun, 1999)

School safety has become a concern for parents, students, teachers, and administrators. Neiman (2011) stated, “In 2009–10, 85 percent of public schools recorded one or more violent incidents of crime” (para. 4). There are over 100,000 students who bring some type of weapon to school each day, and 40 students are killed or wounded with these weapons annually (Sprague & Walker, 2002). Violent crime reached 18% in 2011, the first major rise in nearly 20 years (Cornell, 2013). A survey of students from grades 9 to 12 found that 32.8% reported being in a physical fight, 16.6% said they carried some type of weapon to school, and 5.1% said they had carried a gun multiple times to school (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2012). Research has shown that “22% of students in our nation’s schools are afraid to use the school bathrooms because these relatively unsupervised areas are often sites for assaults and other forms of serious victimization” (Sprague & Walker, 2002, p. 4). “Seven percent of students in grades 9–12 reported being threatened or injured with a weapon, such as a gun, knife, or club, on school
property in 2011” (Robers, Kemp, Truman, & Snyder, 2012, para. 3). It is not only students who are threatened, but teachers as well. Over 6,000 teachers are threatened each year, and more than 200 teachers are injured on school grounds (Sprague & Walker, 2002). During the 2011 school year, 28% of students from ages 12 to 18 reported they were bullied at school during the year (Robers, et. al., 2012). When students do not feel safe, many will stay home from school. This impacts student learning, and over 5.9% of students did not go to school in the 2011 school year due to safety concerns (Eaton et al., 2012). School safety and student perception have become important topics in the school system and issues that need to be addressed by all school districts in order to foster increased academic achievement and student growth.

This research study examined how students cope with the threat of danger in schools and how this issue is connected to student achievement and learning. Earlier research has focused on the impact a safe learning environment has on students’ feelings of safety and ability to learn (Bucholz & Sheffler, 2009; Mayer, 2007; Parrett & Budge, 2012). The school needs to provide a safe environment for teachers and students. By creating safe classrooms and schools, students will find a positive climate where they have the ability to be successful in the classroom and magnify that success throughout their lives. Research has found students need to feel safe in the classroom before effective instruction can take place (Doherty & Abernathy, 1998). The Pennsylvania State Education Association (2010) stated, “Students learn best and achieve their full potential when they are physically, socially, emotionally, and academically safe—in safe and orderly classrooms” (p. 1). Although fatal events are rare, unfortunately, safety is not a guarantee for many of America’s students.
There are strong relationships between addressing social and emotional learning and academic achievement (National Center for Technology Innovation and Center for Implementing Technology in Education, 2008). A study by Lacoe (2012) found there is a direct correlation between students feeling unsafe in the classroom and their academic achievement. Cornell and Mayer (2010) reported that levels of school safety and school order are the basis for achievement gap, teacher retention, and student engagement and learning.

Statement of the Problem

School safety has become an important topic in today’s world due to increased publicity of bullying, disrespect, shootings, kidnapping, arson, robbery, sexual assault, and weapon abuse. School safety has an impact on students’ physical and emotional health and affects students in every nation (Angnich & Miyazaki, 2013; Cowan, Vaillancourt, Rossen, & Poillitt, 2013; “Healthy School Environment,” 2007). Research has indicated that unsafe schools, including environments where bullying and harassment occur from students or teachers, are associated with disengagement from school, increased absences, and the perception of being intimidated or not achieving academically (Sandals et al., 2008; Vooren, 2010). The learning environment, school climate, and school culture affect a student’s perception of school safety. Without a positive influence in these areas, learning and development do not take place (State of New Jersey Department of Education, 2011).

A survey exploring students’ perspective of safe and unsafe classroom environments used 121 baccalaureate and master of social work students at a university. Holley and Steiner (2005) stated, “This study found that students reported that being in a safe classroom changed both what they learned as well as how much they learned” (para. 1). Students suffer academically when
they believe they are in an unsafe environment (Education Week, 2013; Lacoe, 2012; Osborne & Walker, 2006). This is consistent with the lower achievement scores associated with victims of bullying (Glew, Fan, Katon, Rivara, & Kernie, 2005). The idea of being safe in school is not a new idea. Abraham Maslow created his theory of hierarchy of needs and hypothesized students would not be interested in learning until they felt like they belonged or were esteemed by others, thus experiencing a safe learning environment (Williams, 2003). Arum (2003), in his article on judging school discipline, argued that without discipline, schools will become chaotic places where student learning will fall by the wayside, as feelings of safety become a predominant factor that relates not only to behavioral issues, but to student success and academic outcomes. Students who do not believe they are safe are unlikely to take the intellectual risks involved in the learning process (Brophy, 2013).

**Background to the Study**

Schools can become places that students and parents fear. Sencion (2004) found that 8.3% of high school students carry a weapon to school. Thirty-three percent of K–12 parents said they fear for their child’s safety at school (Jones, 2013). These statistics show the need for research on students’ fears and how to overcome them (Jones, 2013; Sencion, 2004).

The research encompassed in this study was conducted in four rural high schools in Idaho. Rural Idaho has accounted for 30% of Idaho’s residents (Idaho Rural Partnership, 2008) and these four rural school districts were representative of the majority of the school districts in the state. A rural county is defined by having a population of less than 20,000 people (Idaho Rural Partnership, 2008). By this definition, 35 of Idaho’s 44 counties were rural. For purposes of this study, Idaho school districts were considered a rural school district if they met one of the
following criteria (IRP, 2008). Idaho code 33-319 provides that certain school districts shall be considered rural school districts if: (a) there are fewer than 20 enrolled students per square mile within the area encompassed by the school district’s boundaries, or (b) the county in which a majority of the school district’s market value for assessment purposes contained less than 25,000 residents in the most recent decennial United States Census (Legislature of the State of Idaho, 2009). The Idaho State Department of Education classified 108 of the 144 charter and regular school districts as rural (Idaho State Department of Education, 2013). Some challenges experienced by rural school districts in Idaho include hiring and retaining highly qualified teachers, reducing the technology gap between rural and urban schools, improving facilities, offering opportunities for accelerated learning, providing for the needs of severely disabled children, struggling with declining enrollment, and meeting the cost of insurance and other utilities (Idaho State Department of Education, 2013). Rural school districts have resorted to slashing costs with the downturn of the economy in 2008, and many have adopted a four-day school week for students. In 2008, 17 school districts were on a four-day schedule. However, by 2013, there were 49 school districts, just under half of the 108 Idaho rural school districts, on a four-day week (Idaho State Department of Education, 2013). The rural Idaho communities in which this research was conducted were School District 1, population 2,601; School District 2, population 1,311; School District 3, population 519; and School District 4, population 2,020.

The four school districts have one high school, one middle school, and one elementary school. For this research, only the four high schools were included in this study. Each district contained 200–320 students in grades 9–12 in the high schools. The four school districts maintained a comprehensive focus on student achievement and academic excellence.
Research Questions

In order to narrow the scope of this study, specific questions were developed (Creswell, 2003). The intent of this study was to discover and create research questions that addressed the topic (Creswell, 2014; Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Merriam, 1988). The research focus of this study was centered on the question, “Do students suffer academically when they feel they are in an unsafe environment?” There are three sub questions encompassed within this broader question:

1. What is the relationship between students’ perceived safety and academic performance?
2. Is there a difference in perception of school safety by students, teachers, and administrators?
3. What is the impact of school safety policies on perceived safety by students?

Description of Terms

The following descriptive terms are used throughout this study to create a clear understanding of what is desired through this research (Creswell, 2014; Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Merriam, 1988). Defining these terms aids in the understanding of this research.

Bullying. The condition in which a person is exposed to abusive actions repeatedly over time. Bullying is a form of violence involving a real or perceived imbalance of power. It is an act by a pupil or group of pupils directed against another pupil and may constitute sexual harassment, hate violence, or severe or pervasive intentional harassment, threats, or intimidation that is disruptive, causes disorder, and invades the rights of others by creating an intimidating or
hostile educational environment. Bullying includes acts that are committed personally or by means of an electronic device (California Department of Education, 2013).

**Physical attack.** The Prevent Violence at Work website defined physical attack as when an individual or a group provokes and attacks a person physically, with or without the use of a weapon, or threatens to hurt that person (“Physical Assault,” 2013).

**School climate or environment.** An environment that provides the student with his or her needs or promotes the desire to develop his or her capabilities (Mwale, 2006).

The definition of school climate/environment usually encompasses dimensions of the perceived social environment that (a) have a contextual influence on the learning and development of students, (b) remain stable over time, and (c) can be meaningfully aggregated across raters. Definitions of climate/environment characteristically focus on conditions as they are perceived by students, teachers, or other participants in a school setting, rather than on objective aspects of the setting. (Brand, 2011, p. 1)

**School safety.** The traditional view of a “safe school” has been one in which there is little or no violence on campus. However, the definition used by the Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools extended that in stating, “In a truly safe school students feel like they belong, they are valued, they feel physically and emotionally safe; in other words, we put a greater focus on the overall school climate” (Trump, 2010, p. 6–7).

**Vandalism.** The willful or malicious destruction or defacement of public or private property (Vandalism, 2015).

**Verbal harassment.** The use of words to attack or injure an individual, to cause one to believe an untrue statement, or to speak falsely of an individual. It constitutes psychological
violence. Verbal abuse includes bullying, defaming, negative defining, harassing, lying, and taunting (Evans, 2014).

**Significance of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to identify safety issues within the school system that cause students to feel unsafe and then provide a solution to help students feel safe. There are several areas of safety that were covered. School safety requires participation and input from administration, teachers, students, parents, and law enforcement in order to create policies and interventions that will increase student safety (Bailey, 2002). School leaders, teachers, students, and parents must be trained on how to deal with the different safety issues. Furlong, Felix, Sharkey, and Larson (2005) claimed, “Creating safe schools is essential to ensuring students’ academic and social success” (p. 11). Students must be taught or trained to overcome these fears or conditions. Different types of interventions may be used to help students succeed in feeling safe. Students who feel safe in school have fewer disciplinary problems and higher academic scores. This study will define multiple reasons why students feel unsafe, from demographics, discipline issues, grade point averages, and other issues. Lacoe (2012) discussed that one of the consequences of students feeling unsafe is to stay home, which will ultimately affect student academic outcomes. There are few studies to be found that look at student absences and the effect this has on academic success. One study by Gottfried (2009) found that unexcused absences by students result in poor student achievement. Several studies evaluating violence within schools found that violence reduces school attendance and causes an increase in behavioral problems, as well as reduces high school graduation percentages (Bowen & Bowen, 1999).
Developing strategies to help students feel safe at school is a never-ending challenge. Each student who comes into a school has different perceptions and fears of the school. Meeting these challenges and developing solutions to these challenges are jobs for all stakeholders of the school. Determining the reason for the perception of the student, teacher, or administrator is important. Is there a real reason for this fear or is it a fear born from the sensationalism of the modern American news media? Defining the cause of the perception is the first step in establishing safety policies and plans that enhance the school environment.

**Theoretical Framework**

The National Association of School Psychologists created an executive summary in 2013 entitled, *A Framework for Safe and Successful Schools*. This was created in conjunction with the American School Counselor Association, National Association of School Psychologists, School Social Work Association of America, National Association of School Resource Officers, National Association for Elementary School Principals, and the National Association of Secondary School Principals. This framework was utilized as the theoretical framework in this study. This executive summary provided effective policy recommendations for effective school safety and best practices for creating safe and successful schools. The framework included planning, policy adoption, and preparation. The classroom environment, instruction, and professional responsibilities were described in detail.

School safety and a positive school climate are not achieved by doing one simple thing. The creation and adoption of this framework take effective, comprehensive, and collaborative efforts by the community, educational staff, local law enforcement, and students (Cowan et al., 2013). In discussing best practices in school safety, the framework outlined eight areas:
• Integrate services through collaboration.
• Implement multi-tiered systems of supports.
• Improve access to school-based mental health supports.
• Integrate school safety and crisis or emergency prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery.
• Balance physical and psychological safety.
• Employ effective, positive school discipline.
• Allow for consideration of context.
• Acknowledge that sustainable and effective improvement takes patience and commitment (Cowan et al., 2013, p. 4–8).

The theoretical framework details how each area affects school safety and the reasons why these areas are addressed and need to be part of the framework for a school district. The framework must be implemented from a school-wide approach, and it starts with a proactive leadership team. The Framework for Safe and Successful Schools can be found at the website www.nasponline.rog/schoolsafetyframework (National Association of School Psychologists, 2001). The application of this framework, in conjunction with effective safety policy and best practices, should positively influence students’ perception of safety and include a prediction of higher student academics.

**Overview of Research Methods**

A mixed-methods design was employed for this study as it allowed the researcher to combine quantitative and qualitative data in different forms (Creswell, 2014; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). Case studies are used to inform and add to the understanding of the groups, society,
social, and other interconnected occurrences involving people. Surveys, interviews, and data from the schools’ student information systems provided an in-depth study of students’ anxiety and fears of school, teachers’ and administrators’ views on school safety, and finally, students’ academic success.

A mixed-methods study combining both quantitative and qualitative data gathering techniques was conducted at four rural high schools in Idaho. There was one administrator at each of the four high schools, and all four administrators were given the online survey. Two counselors in two of the high schools also took the survey as administrators. There were six administrators who participated in the survey on school safety. There were 17 teachers at High School A, 16 teachers at High School B, 20 teachers at High School C, and 15 teachers at High School D, and then two counselors who took the survey as teachers, for a total of 72 teachers who participated in the survey on school safety. Surveys are among the most important tools in school violence assessment (Skiba, Peterson, & Forde, 2006). Surveys were the main method of data collection from teachers and administrators within this research. Through this method, it was possible to reach a larger number of teachers and administrators and to procure the large amount of data needed in a short amount of time. The survey was administered as an online survey using Qualtrics, a web-based survey tool (Qualtrics, 2013). Multiple e-mails were sent to these teachers and administrators at various steps in the process. There was a pre-e-mail that explained the purpose of the survey and when the participants could expect the survey. The survey link was distributed to each of the four administrators. Once the administrators had a chance to preview the survey, the researcher e-mailed the link to the high school teachers. Follow-up e-mails were sent on two different dates to the group to increase the completion rate.
for the survey. The results for the survey responses were anonymous and collected by the online
survey tool. The survey included Likert-scale questions and one open-ended question. The
questions were created by Dr. Dewey Cornell from the University of Virginia. Dr. Cornell used
these questions in his research on school climate and bullying. The questions were also sent and
validated by Guy Bliesner and Brian Armes, who conducted evaluations for the Idaho State
Department of Education on the safety of the state’s school districts.

The planning and development of an interview protocol were completed prior to the
interviews with participants (Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 1988; Yin, 2014). Ten students from
do three of the high schools and eight students from the fourth high school were randomly chosen
by the counselor at each high school to be interviewed. Thirty-eight students were interviewed.
Best practice in interview protocol includes an audio recording, followed by a transcription of
the interview (Creswell, 2014; Merriam 1988). Creswell (2014) provided a detailed data analysis
process to authenticate the accuracy of the data, which the investigator followed in this research:
audiotaping, transcribing, coding, and identifying the issues related to school safety.

There were 38 students from four different high schools selected to be interviewed by the
researcher. Newton (2010) suggested four benefits to using interview data:

1. It provides the opportunity to generate rich data.
2. Language use by participants is considered essential in gaining insight into their
   perceptions and values.
3. Contextual and relational aspects are seen as significant to understanding others’
   perceptions.
4. Data generated can be analyzed in different ways (p. 2).
Chapter II

The Literature Review

Introduction

“Violence has invaded far too many of the nation’s schools. Fistfights are being replaced by gunfights; fire drills are being augmented by crisis drills” (Stevens, 2011, p. 2). The media headlines have inferred through sensationalized coverage that school shootings are a commonplace occurrence. The media has portrayed the isolated shootings as though they occur throughout the United States, and each incident becomes known to everyone almost instantly through modern media and social networks. Some of the first media coverage happened during the 1997–1998 school year, as local media reported on highly unusual crime stories of school shootings, and the American public was riveted. The news outlets described these shootings as an “all too familiar story” rather than providing context, and the media’s labeling of these shootings as “a trend” has tended to exacerbate people's fears about the safety of their children and youth in school (Killingbeck, 2001).

The 1999 shootings at Columbine High School were one of the first nationally publicized school shootings and changed the way school personnel looked at school safety (Borum, Cornell, Modzeleski, & Jimerson, 2010). Prior to the shooting at Columbine High School, most people believed school safety was an urban problem. Rural school districts placed little effort in establishing safety and security procedures and training. It was not until the school shootings in 1999 in rural Colorado that all school districts started to look at school safety issues (SERAPH Research Team, 2005). Prior to this incident, school safety decisions and implementation were left to the local level. A researcher reported that only after violence happens does a district spend
the time necessary to create the policy and programs needed to prevent such events (Juvonen, 2001). With the Columbine incident, national, state, and local school districts took an interest in school safety. The Columbine shootings became a focal point of the media, and this event caused citizens to develop a greater interest in school safety. People adopt or develop differing opinions about such events, determining causality, assigning blame, and calling for future action from the schools (Berres, 2005). Due to these high profile shootings, school policies and safety procedures began to change. These school shootings led to legislation at all levels of government. Politicians have reacted to school safety issues by proposing solutions ranging from posting additional police officers in schools, eliminating the minimum age at which children may be tried as adults, and expanding the death penalty to juveniles (Killingbeck, 2001). With so many organizations and the general public scrutinizing school safety, it has become a significant part of education. Zero-tolerance policies have been created in over 75% of schools in the United States (National Association of School Psychologists, 2001). Zero-tolerance policies are predetermined punishments, usually expulsion of students who bring drugs and weapons, are violent, smoke, or create school disruptions that affect student safety. Zero-tolerance policies have become a tool that school administrators use to remove difficult students from school (National Association of School Psychologists, 2001). Research on school shootings, bullying, school climate, and even neighborhoods where students live is being conducted in hope of defining issues and possible solutions.

Major acts of targeted violence in schools are very rare, but the terror they create brings these relatively limited incidents to the headlines and cause serious public concern and attention (Kirkman, 2008). Kirkman (2008) stated,
Only 35 of the nation’s 116,910 elementary and secondary schools have experienced a multiple victim shooting over the last decade, and that figure on incidents of school violence has steadily declined since 1993, but these isolated incidents can have lasting effects on the entire country, and even more powerful effects on communities, schools, and families. (p. 330)

There are multiple ideas and opinions on dealing with school safety effectively. The media, government statements, as well as religious and cultural beliefs inspire many of these ideas. Berres (2005) stated that “if it can happen here, it can happen anywhere” (p. 87). When a school safety issue becomes a media event, the school district must create laws or policies to help calm the public and create a safe environment for students. The Idaho State Department of Education enacted a task force to look at school safety soon after the Sandy Hook Elementary shootings in Connecticut. This task force examined current public school safety policies and safety implementation plans. The goal was to help districts create better plans for a safe school environment (Richert, 2013). A recent public opinion poll in the state of Oklahoma showed that school safety is a continuing public concern. The poll showed that 85% of Oklahomans, in both rural and urban areas, reported being very concerned about school violence, even though the acts of school violence are uncommon (Killingbeck, 2001).

The media has tried to portray school shootings as a common occurrence. On NBC’s Today Show, the news anchor introduced a psychologist to the audience and asked him to address parents on the new trend of shooting in schools (Killingbeck, 2001). Vincent Schiraldi, director of the Justice Policy Institute stated, “Three times as many people were struck by lightning as were killed in school shootings” (Killingbeck, 2001, p. 2). With so much emphasis
put on high-profile school shootings, regardless of how few actually happen, school safety has become a topic for all stakeholders in the educational communities. This chapter will address issues of school safety and highlight the following topics of

- the public perceptions of school safety in society,
- what is safe and what is not safe,
- the negative consequences for students who do not feel safe,
- the effect on student achievement and learning,
- the prevalence of unsafe schools,
- a review of strategies and safety plans and results,
- the school climate,
- justification for this study, and
- the conclusion and summary of the literature review.

**Public Perceptions of School Safety in Society**

Anderson, Evans, Kozak, and Peterson (1999) observed that one of the greatest issues facing educators today is the public’s criticism of America’s public schools. The Columbine shootings of 1999 have created a belief that schools are a dangerous place for youth (Muschert, Henry, Bracy, & Peguero, 2014). Research has addressed different areas of school safety and the influence of media in pushing schools, governments, and other officials into a more serious review of school safety (Kirkman, 2008). Although statistics show that the number of violent crimes at school has declined since the early 1990s, 10% of 15-year-old students polled reported they viewed school as a place where they do not feel safe and even fear being harmed (Akiba, 2010). Part of this thought is due to the media and how it has portrayed school safety issues. This
belief that schools are unsafe has encouraged this research on how students feel and how it affects them academically. The National Association of School Psychologists (2006) reported that schools are, in reality, much safer than the general public perception. The public has developed a common impression from rare, yet highly visible, reports of school shootings. Schools today are, in fact, much safer than they were 10 years ago (National Association of School Psychologists, 2006). Although the data have indicated schools are safer now than in previous years, violence at schools and its effect on students’ academic achievement have become a concern for parents, teachers, principals, students, and law enforcement authorities (Kraft, 2003). Schools create policies to address the issue of school safety in order to help ease parents’ fear over the safety of their students in schools (Muschert et al., 2014). Regardless of whether the perceived threat in schools is real or not, it has become an issue to parents, students, and the public and has had an impact on policies from the department of education to state and local school districts.

**What Is Safe and What Is Not Safe**

The recent economic downturn has caused schools to make deep budget cuts. Many districts have had to look at all aspects of the school system to find areas to cut. These deepening economic struggles are affecting the implementation of school safety measures. Budget cuts in the districts have reduced the number of security personnel and safety programs and reorganized security departments. Alternative sources of funding have had to be found to keep minimal safety and security measures in the schools (Eisele-Dyrli, 2010). In his research, Eisele-Dyrli (2010) stated,
Not only is it just security personnel, but the loss of nurses, counselors, psychologists, teachers, and custodians has had a negative impact because of the vital roles that these employees play in maintaining a positive and healthy school environment and preventing potential hazards and nullifying threats to security (p. 54).

Districts have had to make tough choices to cut programs, and many have chosen to cut areas that do not have the perception of affecting students. Due to many of the budget cuts across the United States, many districts will continue to make cuts to some safety programs. As people and programs continue to face elimination, school safety issues will rise and leave schools open for another high-profile incident such as the Columbine shooting (Eisele-Dyrli, 2010).

When constructing new schools or redesigning and updating existing schools for enhanced safety, districts should consider how they are built, the style of the school, the amount of sunlight and windows, the number of entrances, the manner in which doors lock, and the physical appearance when talking about school safety. These are expensive modifications and most school districts do not have the dollars to build new buildings or update old buildings. Most engineers have recommended that schools conduct a security audit and pinpoint the vulnerabilities before spending money on updates (Kaiser, 2013).

The school district is responsible for the well-being and safety of the students. Multiple research publications have reviewed the cause and effect of school safety measures and what issues students perceive as making them feel unsafe. Akiba (2010) evaluated reasons students feel unsafe at school. The objective of his research was to identify characteristics of students who fear being victimized by school violence and to examine the teacher and school characteristics associated with students’ fear. This study used data from the Program for International Student
Assessment collected from a nationally representative sample of 2,787 fifteen-year-olds in 111 schools in the United States. The study identified the responsibility of educators, administrators, and policy makers in establishing a learning environment that is safe for all students. Students’ fear of school violence affects their attendance, learning motivation, and academic achievement (Akiba, 2010). Violence is one area that creates an environment where students feel unsafe.

Another area that creates the perception of an unsafe environment centers on the teacher–student relationship and the need to ensure that students and teachers respect and trust one another, and that students feel connected to the teachers (National Association of School Psychologists, 2006). Many students feel teachers show favoritism to some students and not to others (Linsin, 2011). This problem also exists for teachers, principals, and school board members. Some of the administrative issues may be from showing leniency to certain students during disciplinary procedures or allowing some students to redo assignments while others cannot. If teachers or principals look the other way when bullying occurs or put certain students ahead of other students, it sends a message to the other students (Kelmon, 2014; Long, 2012; Wright, 2010). The SERAPH Research Team (2005) explained that showing favorites will create a division within the discipline system that places students into groups of those who have an inside connection and those who do not.

Bullying has become a buzzword in our world (De Walt, 2013). This term has been adopted by most schools and reflects the epidemic nature of this situation for students. Research on violence has revealed harassment and bullying cause students to strike out violently (Neeley, 2003). Research by Neeley (2003) was conducted in 150 of 1,000 Texas public school districts to collect information on violence in Texas schools and to identify violence prevention practices
used in these schools. Her research found that many teachers tried to avoid conflict or did not react to it when witnessed (Neeley, 2003). Bullying is considered a low-level violent behavior and one that can occur at any school level. School bullying remains a critical public health issue associated with negative mental and physical health outcomes. Blosnich and Bossarte (2011) gave examples of bullying, such as verbal harassment, vandalism, and physical assault. Bullying has created many issues for students in all grade levels and will continue to be a major factor in whether students feel safe at school. Bullying can be a serious issue in elementary schools and demonstrates the need for evidence-based anti-bullying curricula in the elementary grades (Glew et al., 2005).

**Consequences of Students Not Feeling Safe**

Students who do not feel safe at school may experience far-reaching consequences, ranging from students being absent to being physically or mentally injured. All of these have a toll on student achievement and learning. Backus (2010) reported 33% of females and 30% of males reported being bullied at school during the year preceding data collection. This research was conducted to evaluate a school prior to implementing new school policies and then again after the school safety plans were implemented. Litz (2005) reported boys committed 71% of the verbal, physical, and emotional bullying incidents in schools, while girls contributed 28% of the same incidents. Another report looked at the perception of students and their relationship with teachers. This study found that the students’ perception of teachers and the school tied their fear to school violence. Research was conducted on how the student perceived himself or herself in the school, based on a sense of belonging and how that related to the fear the student had of the school (Akiba, 2010). Student safety has a huge impact on the ability to learn. Research found
that the impact of violence on students increases the need for disciplinary action and the lowers achievement (Neeley, 2003).

Bosworth, Ford, and Hernandaz (2011) stated,

Violence in schools is a unique public health problem because it primarily affects children and young adults, and the negative consequences undermine the primary purposes of education. The presence of even the threat of school violence significantly inhibits teaching and learning (p. 194).

Schools need to work with the local community to help create environments where students feel safe. School safety affects student learning, and schools need to find ways to reduce the safety issues in order to increase student achievement. Student safety does not occur only at school. The time before and after school may be when students are bullied. Research has documented that there are more bullying incidents on the bus than in the classroom (Litz, 2005). This brings into the conversation the many different areas where a student deals with safety issues. Safety issues can happen at home, in neighborhoods, and the community in which the student lives. Meyer (2005) summarized how student learning is compromised if the basic needs of food, warmth, and security are not being met. This idea comes up again and again in the research that has been conducted on student safety. Kennard (2009) stated, “I believe that how students actually feel about school ultimately affects their attendance and performance both academically and behaviorally in school” (p. 158). Kennard explained his belief that students’ feelings about school will have a direct influence upon their school attendance, as well as academic success and behavior. Domestic violence is another issue student’s face. Research has indicated a link
between students who deal domestic violence and truancy, social problems, dropout rates, poorer academics, and school failure (George, 2011).

Other researchers have looked at how schools have implemented school safety features. Many districts have put in cameras, remote access doorways, metal detectors, scan cards, electronic databases, and other devices to try and combat the threats to student safety (Hanover Research, 2013). Although schools have spent large amounts of money to install and carry out these different solutions to school safety, there is no clear evidence the use of metal detectors, security cameras, or guards in schools are effective in preventing school violence (National Association of School Psychologists, 2006). There needs to be more research in this area to determine if metal detectors in schools reduce violent behavior among students. This same research also expressed concerns about whether the use of guards, cameras, and other security technologies are effective in protecting students (National Association of School Psychologists, 2006).

Safety in schools is going to continue to be an issue for educational leaders to address. Under the No Child Left Behind program, school districts must meet specific levels of safety and create violence prevention programs tied to scientifically based research. Evidence must exist of the program’s effectiveness at reducing violence (Hutton & Bailey, 2007).

Another concern that arises under the idea of safe schools is the different perceptions that students, teachers, and administrators have of the same issues. There are multiple studies that show these groups see things very differently. In one study, students reported seeing knives, drugs, or alcohol at school at a much higher rate than was reported by teachers in the same school (Booren, 2007). Another area of misperceptions is safety strategies. Researchers have
found that safety strategies at schools were sufficient for teachers, while students found them to be inadequate in addressing safety issues (Booren, 2007). Principals and vice principals believed their schools were safe when questioned about the safety of their schools and said the safety policies were sufficient; however, teachers and students from the same school stated they did not feel the policies were sufficient and there was the possibility for violence (Bakioglu & Geyin, 2009). This indicates the importance of having a positive school climate. Koth, Bradshaw, and Leaf (2008) reported a correlation typically exists between the indicators of the climate and students’ average performance, school characteristics, or student body composition.

Student Achievement and Learning

The No Child Left Behind Act called for student achievement and for districts to show growth through state-wide mandated testing (Yell, Shriner, & Katsiyannis, 2006). Students who fear school and skip school or stay home do not perform well on these tests and, therefore, create a concern for many school districts. There is a need for educators to understand the student’s perception of school safety and understand those school- and teacher-related factors associated with a student’s fear of being victimized by school violence (Lacoe, 2012).

The school climate is one of the most important factors related to how teachers and students perceive safety and learning. Thapa, Cohen, Higgins-D’Alessandro, and Guffey (2012) stated that in order for teachers to do the best job possible and for students to be able to be the best learners possible, both groups need to feel the school is a safe environment. School climate influences student safety. Having a positive school climate promotes positive student development, learning, academic achievement, graduation rates, and teacher retention (Thapa, Cohen, Higgins-D’Alessandro, & Guffey, 2012). The school climate is an integral part student’s
perception of school safety. Research has shown that if a student has a positive self-view, goes to school on a regular basis, and participates in school activities, the chances of the student being successful in school will increase, regardless of whether the student is a member of an at-risk group (Finn & Rock, 1997). Students must feel safe and comfortable in school and in the classroom for learning to take place. Students who feel safe at school generally have positive self-esteem, which is also important in student learning. Finn and Rock (1997) explained that, over time, there has been a correlation between students’ self-esteem and their academic success. Establishing and sustaining a school environment free of harassment, bullying, and discrimination should involve an examination of a school’s climate and culture. School climate and culture have a profound impact on student achievement, behavior, and the school community’s culture (Elias, Zins, Weissberg, Frey, Haynes, & Kessler, Schwab-Stone, Shiver, 1997).

**Prevalence of Unsafe Schools**

Research has shown that students who are unsafe will struggle academically, while students who feel safe will continue to learn and grow. Students feel unsafe for a number of reasons, but for students who live an alternative lifestyle, it can be even worse. Biegel and Kuehl (2010) reported that most of these students suffered ridicule due to their sexual or gender distinctions, and a large number of them faced physical attacks. Teaching and learning are tied together just as are teacher and student relationships. These relationships provide an atmosphere where students feel safe so learning can take place. This relationship needs to start at the kindergarten level. Research has indicated that if a kindergarten student has a negative
relationship with his or her teacher, the student is more likely to have behavioral and academic problems in later grades (Thapa et al., 2012).

Students find that how they interact with their peers, teachers, and other school personnel affects their perception of how safe they feel. Research has indicated students do not feel safe in schools when there is a breakdown of interpersonal and contextual variables that define a school’s climate (Thapa et al., 2012). Students’ sense of belonging and the teacher–student relationship have a significant impact on students’ fear. School administrators and teachers need to focus on developing a sense of school community, build safe school environments both in the school and in the classroom, and be consistent in how they deal with discipline and classroom management (Akiba, 2010). Students who have safety issues at school also report they do poorly in school academically. Akiba (2010) found there exists a greater sense of fear within those students who perform at a lower academic level.

Another critical issue discussed in the literature is student demographics. Does the student come from an affluent background? What is the community like? Is the district big or small? Poverty and unemployment may play an important part in school violence, as well as sexual harassment and sexual abuse, and overcrowding may create opportunities for violence in schools (Meyer, 2005). School size, rural or urban, also plays a role on perceptions of how safe the school is and greatly influences educators’ safety perceptions of the school (Bakioglu & Geyin, 2009). There has been research on how smaller schools can improve the school climate. Smaller schools have produced better student achievement, safety, and relationships among members of the school community. Research has indicated smaller schools lead to better individual academic performance (Thapa et al., 2012).
There is sufficient research on the issues of school safety and their effect. Further studies need to address how schools can deal with school climate, student safety, and staff safety.

**A Review of Strategies, Safety Plans, and Results**

There are as many suggested solutions to the problems of school safety as there are studies that have been conducted on the topic of school safety. The solutions have included everything from the physical construction of buildings to harsh punishments for breaking rules and policies of the schools. A common solution has been for school leaders to establish a good policy on school safety and to uphold the policy consistently. Ensuring that schools establish effective discipline practices helps students understand how behavior relates to academic success and how a safe learning environment benefits all students (Luiselli, Putnam, Handler, & Feinberg, 2005).

Schools need to involve the local community to create environments where students feel safe. The relationship of school safety to student learning indicates there are various ways schools can reduce safety issues to benefit student retention and participation.

There are ample descriptions of how school safety improves student achievement, and a review of the research helps with implementation of policy and recommendations to overcome these issues. Shindler, Jones, Williams, Taylor, and Cadenas (2009) discussed the following six components to improve school safety and student retention and participation.

1. Developing high-quality school environment leads to higher levels of student achievement.

2. High student achievement test scores increase as the quality of the school climate increases.
3. Various aspects of the school climate are highly correlated and various aspects are strongly interdependent.

4. Implementing isolated, decontextualized, add-on programs within a school where the climate is fundamentally poor achieves questionable results.

5. In the absence of a deliberate attempt to improve the quality of the school environment and function, it can be predicted that the quality of the school environment will continue to deteriorate on average from grade to grade.

6. Superficial indicators of achievement generally do not offer enough information to judge progress toward school improvement. Measurement at the systemic functional level seems to be necessary along with school improvement (p. 8).

It has been well established that schools can build safe school environments and increase student achievement by implementing positive, research-based strategies (Thapa et al., 2012). The six areas mentioned were implemented in a school system with positive results. In another study, strategies were implemented that decreased problem behavior, the number of students at risk for significant behavior challenges, and increased academic achievement and student perceptions of school safety as compared to low-implementing schools. The results also showed the implementation of school-wide positive behavioral supports produced enhanced outcomes in problem behavior, academic achievement, and perceptions of school safety (McIntosh, Bennett, & Price, 2011). Whether students are present at school or how often they come to school also has a direct positive effect on student achievement (Chen & Weikart, 2008). These authors reported that student background, especially poverty and racial composition, influences student behavior and academic achievement. Educators can compensate some if they address the issue of poverty.
and disparity. Disorder in schools also disrupts student achievement. Chen and Weikart (2008) explained that while students are in a safe environment, particularly when they also perceive that the environment is safe, learning is increased.

Districts and schools must work collaboratively with the parent and community stakeholders to create crisis plans and discipline policies and ensure consistent enforcement of these policies. Diepenbrock (2010) emphasized the need for working collaboratively to update a school crisis plan, establish a routine for reviewing the plan, and maintain good communication. Teachers must be supportive of the policies and be willing to enforce them when they are broken. How rules are enforced has an impact on students’ attitudes about the school. Teachers and administrators must consistently enforce school rules and provide the support so a student will turn to them when he or she has an issue (Gregory & Cornell, 2011). It is well established that when consistency is used in enforcing school policies, schools have lower rates of student violence and higher rates of student attendance (Thapa et al., 2012).

Teachers have emulated the higher standard and hold students accountable to school policy. Schools that inconsistently enforce school policy have higher levels of absenteeism and more classroom discipline issues. Teacher support, student commitment to achievement, structure, and positive peer interactions are all part of a positive school environment (Brand, 2011). Classrooms are more easily managed and more effective when the school community and culture are positive (Akiba, 2010). Teachers and school administrators play a major role in reducing students’ fear of school violence by paying attention to students’ perceptions and experiences at school. The role of the teacher is also important in developing a mentoring relationship with students that encourages them to become successful.
School size and class size are often discussed when considering school safety. State standards should be developed for school size, and enrollment should be adjusted accordingly. Efficient counselors are needed at each school to help work with students. School’s curricula should focus on student engagement and provide an opportunity for students to think critically, be creative, and enhance their self-discipline (Bakioglu & Geyin, 2009). School and class size could be developed through allocating community and state resources. Effective interventions should apply a multiple-systems approach to discipline for all students. Educators need special support in today’s classrooms and schools in order to adopt effective and efficient practices (Sprague et al., 2000). These practices can range from assigning teachers to monitor the hallways to hiring resource officers. Some school safety measures, such as having adults in the hallways, have resulted in a significant reduction in physical bullying, vandalized property, or destructive rumoring (Blosnich & Bossarte, 2011). When this type of environment is created, beneficial student outcomes are a positive school environment, increased student achievement, reduction of absenteeism, improved self-concept, pre-social and appropriate behaviors, decreased suspensions, and increased job satisfaction for staff (Byrnes, Gilligan, & Warner, 2009).

School resource officers (SROs) have become full-time positions in many schools in the United States. Since 1991, every state in the nation has employed SROs (Rippetoe, 2009). This is a significant finding because the first major, publicized school shooting happened in 1999. SROs can be an important part of school safety, but their roles need to be clearly defined for teachers and students. Teachers perceive the role of SROs in maintaining a safe environment as more important than what students think about them (Rippetoe, 2009). Teachers view the SRO’s role in enforcing law much higher than students, and middle school students have reported the role of
SROs is higher in enforcing the law than high school students have reported. Generally, principals should be involved in hiring their SRO (Rippetoe, 2009) to ensure the officer is a good fit for the school environment. He or she should be given opportunities to engage informally with the students, work fun events at school, talk with students at lunch, walk hallways during class breaks, and visit classrooms. Students should be comfortable with the SRO (Rippetoe, 2009). With the proper training, SROs can be a positive influence on the school climate.

School districts that implement the right policies have found there are a decrease in student discipline and an increase in student achievement and learning. In one school district, informal and formal policies to prevent violence have worked. The school climate becomes such that a student could be confident that if he or she went to a teacher to report an incident the teacher would take care of the issue (Morell, 2013). Even with the bullying of today, there are positive policies that can have a huge impact on decreasing this type of behavior. Bullying research data confirmed a decrease in bullying behaviors among students who reported positive perceptions of school connectedness. This connectedness seems to be the key to bring the number of bullying incidents down. Also based on research findings, students who are victimized are more likely to bully others (Backus, 2010). Schools that establish positive policies and behavior practices find students feel safer in school. Identifying effective school discipline strategies to encourage responsible behavior provides administrators, teachers, students, and parents with a satisfying and productive school experience (Lewis, 2007). The outcome of this study on development of effective discipline practices found communication was the most valuable ingredient for effective school discipline. This included both the communication of rules and expectations, as well as the consequences for students, should the rules be broken. The
biggest obstacles to effective discipline were inconsistencies of expectations and consequences (Lewis, 2007). It is clear that administrators and teachers must be consistent in their response to discipline and behavior issues in order to have success.

Another important item is that students who are at risk need not only teacher support, but parental support as well to be successful (Finn & Rock, 1997). Parents and communities need to be involved in school safety, and special supports for parents may be needed. Parents play a big role in how students perceive school and defining what is acceptable behavior. The community’s role is to create policy that supports the schools. An article on when students make threats, illustrated that a district could create threat assessment teams to review information, evaluate the severity of potential threats, determine a course of action, develop an action plan, supervise plans for students at risk, and then monitor the plan’s effectiveness (Kanan, 2010). Principals must take the lead in their buildings and show this is an important issue and ensure that all stakeholders are involved. Students need to have mentors or someone they trust enough to talk to, who are willing to listen about issues that are happening in order to break the “code of silence” (Kanan, 2010). Parents need to be alert to warning signs and be willing to report concerns to the local school district and vice versa. Staff members are at the “front lines” and are with students the most, so they need to know the warning signs and be available to talk to students at any time. Staff members must follow policies and procedures developed for reporting students at risk. School leaders and teachers must clearly define the policies, goals, and values that shape the learning and teaching environment. A positive school climate promotes students’ abilities to learn and encourages cooperative learning, group cohesion, respect, and mutual trust (Koth, Bradshaw, & Leaf, 2008). Teachers need to be informed about the process the district has
to deal with a threat. It is better to investigate a concern that turns out not to be a serious threat than to fail to respond to a threat that is real (Kanan, 2010). One group of researchers proposed both a public policy recommendation as well as legislative code to reinforce those policies (Biegel & Kuehl, 2010). School leaders must work collaboratively to create environments where students are safe and where student learning can take place. Schools whose leaders manage to foster a safe school climate are more likely to show corresponding levels of high student academic achievement (Frias, 2010).

School Environment

Lehr (2004), describing how the climate of the school is one factor that is always a characteristic of high-academic performance, stated, “School climate is consistently identified as a variable that is a characteristic of effective schools and one that is positively associated with academic success” (p. 76). The majority of the research on student safety and academic achievement stem from this idea of school climate. To promote learning, school leaders must create a climate that is safe for students. Students must feel both physically and emotionally safe from harm, and teachers and administrators must have a genuine concern for their well-being (National Center for Technology Innovation and Center for Implementing Technology in Education, 2008). Teachers must create a classroom atmosphere where students feel comfortable and know their learning needs are being met and it is okay reach ahead in their learning. Students will only ask questions or be engaged if they are comfortable in the classroom. This reinforces the idea that the classroom must be free from bullying by other students (National Center for Technology Innovation and Center for Implementing Technology in Education, 2008).
Students are more likely to experience bullying and other types of peer violence, which may lead to absenteeism and reduced academic achievement within schools that do not create these types of safe classrooms where positive relationships exist (Thapa et al., 2012). School climate reflects the beliefs and character of the students, school personnel, and parents. The school climate is built around the experiences of school life. When this positive school environment exists, students miss less school at both the middle school and high school levels (Thapa et al., 2012).

Recognition of the importance of the school climate is growing in America and around the world, as well as schools that promote safety for students and implement strategies that create safe learning environments. Positive school climate is recognized as an important component of successful and effective schools (Koth et al., 2008).

The Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools defines safe schools as ones where students feel like they belong, they are valued, and they are physically and emotionally safe (Trump, 2010). School climate will continue to be at the top of the list for creating a safe learning environment for all students. School leaders need to address policy, programs, and practices that create a school climate conducive to student learning. By creating and implementing good policy programs and practices, schools can create and improve school climate (Trump, 2010).

Although most schools are safe and provide a productive learning environment, threats to safety continue to exist in schools and need to be addressed. Whether school shootings or bullying, school districts need to find solutions to deal with these threats. Less than 1% of all violent deaths of children occur on school grounds, but many students in school today are being threatened, bullied, harassed, and intimidated (Sprague & Walker, 2002). Without safe schools,
teachers cannot teach and students cannot learn. The challenge for schools today is to create safe schools where learning can take place for all students.

Creating these safe schools requires intervention strategies and district policies that are created in a collaborative effort. This necessitates the involvement of administrators, teachers, families, students, support staff, and community members working together to create positive relationships with students and safe learning environments (Dwyer, Osher, & Warger, 1998). Policies and strategies used to develop school safety plans are essential to help create the safe school environments students need to be successful in school. These school safety plans will be a long-term systematic and comprehensive process (Stephens, 1996). The goal of creating safe school plans should be to create a positive school environment that is free of drugs, violence, intimidation, and fear. If school districts can create this type of an environment, the students will feel safe and this will enhance their learning and growth (Stephens, 1996).

There are two areas that need to be assessed when a school districts looks at school safety. The first area for discussion is the physical safety of the school building and grounds. The second area is the culture of the school or the social environment of the school. The culture of the school needs to be reviewed as it relates to the safety of the students and how to reduce safety risks (Sprague & Walker, 2002).

The physical layout of school buildings has little in common from district to district—from schools located in one building to schools with multiple buildings spread out over a large campus. The design, use, and supervision of the school space, the administrative and management practices of the school, the nature of the neighborhood and community served by
the school, and the characteristics of the students enrolled effect the safety perception of students (Sprague & Walker, 2002).

The school environment can be changed by training teachers, administrators, students, and parents and imposing limitations on policies and programs. Prevention and early intervention efforts by school districts can reduce violence and other issues in schools. School districts that understand what issues cause violence can create programs that implement effective strategies to prevent violence and other troubling behaviors in the school district and make schools safer (Dwyer et al., 1998).

Creating a plan to improve in these two areas will involve time and commitment from the school districts and the community. Suggested areas to look at when developing a plan are

• focusing on academic achievement
• involving families in meaningful ways
• developing links to the community
• discussing safety issues openly
• treating students with equal respect
• creating ways for students to share their concerns
• helping children feel safe expressing their feelings
• having a confidential system in place for referring children who are suspected of being abused or neglected
• considering extended and alternative day programs for children
• promoting good citizenship and character
• identifying problems and assessing progress toward solutions
• supporting students in making the transition to adult life and the workplace
• training staff for crisis intervention
• minimizing the number of campus entrances and exit points used daily for supervision of the campus and control management (Stephens, 1996).

Conclusion

School safety is a serious issue facing schools in the United States. By reviewing the literature, it is apparent there is a close correlation between how students feel towards safety in their school and students’ academic achievement. School climate has become a key issue in determining student safety and student achievement. Additional issues need to be researched, such as the lack of consensus about what the school environment should look like (Thapa et al., 2012), that is, how the school environment should be defined. Although the volume of research on school climate continues to grow, there is no commonly agreed-upon definition of what this term encompasses (Trump, 2010). The other issue that arises is school safety and security are inconsistent, at best, in American schools. School districts spend the majority of their time and money on different ideas and programs dealing with security and safety and, depending on the district, focus on certain aspects for that district without having a fully integrated approach. Thus, many districts focus on only one aspect of school safety rather than all the interrelated issues related to school safety (SERAPH Research Team, 2005).
Chapter III
Design and Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of student safety on student achievement. A student who feels unsafe at school can be directly related to issues at school, or alternatively, the issues could stem from home or the community (Bowen & Bowen, 1999; Volokh & Snell, 1998). This study was conducted with 38 high school students, 72 teachers, and six administrators from four rural high schools in Idaho. The following methods were used to collect data for this study. An online survey was first sent to teachers and administrators, live interviews were conducted with 38 students, and then the 38 students were also given a survey. Data on gender, grades, and discipline were collected from each of the four high schools from their student information system. The reasons why students felt unsafe were analyzed to determine whether the fear of safety impacted student academic achievement. The study was focused on three primary questions:

1. What is the relationship between students’ perceived safety and academic performance?

2. Is there a difference in perception of school safety by students, teachers, and administrators?

3. What is the impact of school safety policies on perceived safety by students?

A mixed-methods study design was employed to answer the research questions related to this study. The mixed-methods procedure is conductive to evaluating research questions that are a combination of both qualitative and quantitative research (Creswell, 2003, 2014; Driscoll,
Appiah-Yeboah, Salib, & Douglas, 2007). Using the concurrent procedure in this mixed method to converge quantitative and qualitative data can provide a comprehensive analysis of the research problem (Creswell, 2003). Data collected from this study included quantitative data from surveys distributed to teachers, administrators, and students, as well as from information obtained from personal interviews to determine if students suffered academically when they felt like they were in an unsafe environment.

Quantitative methods were used to create a story from the student interviews, allowing the researcher to quantify the connections established during the qualitative interviews. Student interviews allowed the researcher to collect data from students in their schools, while affording the students the comfort of being in a familiar place, where qualitative data lends itself to occurring in natural settings, draws on multiple methods that engages ethical practices, is content focused, emergent, evolving, and fundamental in interpretations (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Axial coding was used by the researcher to disaggregate the themes that emerged out of the student interviews (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This was conducted using Microsoft Excel to compile all of the interview responses from the transcripts, arrange the responses by the questions asked, and use these responses from the 38 students to highlight themes from each of the questions asked. Categories or themes emerged from the interviews, such as students’ views of safety policy, students’ perceptions of school, and students’ views on how to make their school safe. Using a mixed-methods approach to collect and analyze data was the best tool to use for this study, based upon the research questions investigated.

The researcher addressed the difficulty in achieving trustworthiness in a qualitative research context by implementing multiple techniques addressing the multiple strategies for
establishing trustworthiness. The strategies consisted of credibility, dependability, and conformability (Guba, 1981). Credibility in a qualitative context addresses the recurrent features, such as patterns, themes, and values (Krefting, 1991). The first strategy of credibility was achieved through the use of interview techniques and triangulation of data methods (Krefting, 1991). Interview techniques included the reframing of questions to elicit more personal responses to gain the maximum credibility with student responses (May, 1989). The researcher established triangulation techniques by asking students multiple questions on the same subject and having students, teachers, and administrators complete a survey. The data were then used to compare the themes that emerged (Knafl & Breitmayer, 1989).

The second strategy of dependability was achieved through a set interview questions that all students were asked and answers were given. The study could be repeated by another researcher asking the same questions to different groups of students at similar rural high schools. The third strategy for establishing trustworthiness involves conformability (Guba, 1981). The major technique for conformability relies on an external auditor. The researcher kept the six categories that could be included in a future audit that would allow a future auditor to confirm the conclusion reached in this study. The six categories consist of raw data, data reduction and analysis products, data reconstruction, process notes, materials related to intentions and dispositions, and instrument development information and pilots (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

**Research Design**

Consent was formally sought and permission granted in May 2014 from the Human Research Review Committee at Northwest Nazarene University prior to beginning this study. Additionally, training and certification were received from the National Institute of Health (see...
Appendix M). Informed consent was obtained from participants of the online survey, and written consent was received for all interview participants (see Appendix K). Finally, parents, students, teachers, and administrators were informed before the researcher commenced interviews and surveys in the fall of 2014. Participation was voluntary and it was made clear that withdrawal from the study was possible at any time.

Interview survey questions consisted of open-ended and close-ended questions in order to draw on multiple sources of data permitted in a mixed-method, case study research design (Creswell, 2014; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007; Merriam 1988; Yin, 2014). The questions were piloted with three high school students from the same rural high school. The researcher obtained the proper release forms from both participants and their parents. Once the paperwork was obtained, the students were brought into an office in the high school and the questions were asked to each of the three students. The students were then given an opportunity to give feedback to the researcher on whether they understood the questions, if they thought the questions were pertinent to the study, and if they would change anything in each of the questions. Once the interviews were conducted and piloted, the researcher modified questions the students felt needed to be changed so they were easier to understand.

Qualitative research was conducted as a result of the problem of student’s perception of school safety and how it affects their academic performance and that this problem needed to be explored further (Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 1988). Multiple qualitative methods employed included an online survey, two sets of interviews, and data collection from the student information systems of the four high schools participating in this study. Quantitative research methodology included instrument-based questions, performance data, and statistical analysis
(Creswell, 2014; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007; Yin 2014). Quantitative Likert-scale results for the electronic teacher and administrator surveys were analyzed with a post hoc test (Creswell, 2014; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007; Yin 2014).

Measurement of outcomes for this research was obtained from surveys on school safety given to teachers and administrators at four rural high schools. These schools were categorized by pseudonyms—High School 1 (HS1), High School 2 (HS2), High School 3 (HS3), and High School 4 (HS4)—and were located in southwest Idaho. Table I outlines the data collection for this research.
Table I

*Data Collection for Research Study*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Collection</th>
<th>Research Methods</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher surveys, HS1</td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher surveys, HS2</td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher surveys, HS3</td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher surveys, HS4</td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrator surveys, HS1</td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrator surveys, HS2</td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrator surveys, HS3</td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrator surveys, HS4</td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student survey, HS1</td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student survey, HS2</td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student survey, HS3</td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student survey, HS4</td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student interviews: 10 students from each of the three highs schools and eight from one high school</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Participants**

The research took place in four rural, western Idaho high school districts. The 38 students interviewed were made up of 17 males and 21 females. The students interviewed were randomly selected by each of the four high school counselors. Thirty-eight interviews were conducted, ten
students from three of the high schools and eight from the fourth. A purposeful sampling was selected as part of this study (Creswell, 2014). Student school grades ranged from grades 9 to 12. The students were interviewed with questions about school safety, how they felt about coming to their school, and whether they thought it was a safe environment. Interview questions were piloted with a group of three students similar to the demographics of the research participants. The interviews took place in the school’s principal’s office. Each student was asked the interview questions and given time to answer and then give feedback on if he or she thought the questions were clear and easy to understand. The pilot students consisted of a senior (female), junior (male), and a sophomore (male). After the interview of the pilot students, the questions were changed to make the adjustments for understanding and clarity.

A self-generated and validated survey was distributed to all ninth- through 12th-grade teachers in the four school districts ($n = 117$). The same survey was distributed to the high school principal from each of the four school districts ($n = 4$). The survey included questions on perceptions of school safety, policies that were in place dealing with safety, and how effectively the staff enforced these safety policies. The goal was for 40% of the teachers to respond to the survey. The survey questions came from Dr. Dewey Cornell, a clinical psychologist from the University of Virginia. His research was based on school climate and bullying, and these questions were used in his research.

**Data Collection**

Data collection is an important part of this research, and inaccurate data collection can impact the results of the study and lead to invalid results. In this study, multiple methods were used in gathering data. Surveys and interviews were the two ways that data were collected.
Documentation of the problem will come from many sources. The majority of the data came from student interviews and teacher and administrator surveys (see Appendices A and B). These surveys were distributed to teachers and administrators, and data gathered reflected the feelings of safety at the different high schools, as well as an understanding of the policies the teachers, principals, and students had.

Student interviews took place in October and November of 2014. By working with school administrators, a parent–student release form was collected prior to interviews of students. Parents and students both provided consent, and all of the forms were signed and returned prior to any contact with the students from the interviewer. Permission from the local school boards was received prior to conducting the interviews.

The survey was distributed electronically to all teachers \((n = 72)\) and administrators \((n = 6)\) from the four school principals. The survey link was sent to the principal, who then sent it out to the teachers. The survey consisted of 14 questions and had multiple-choice answers. Appendix O illustrates the exact survey that was distributed to participants in this study. The final question was an optional one that allowed teachers and students to record their final thoughts about what they thought the survey missed. The survey was completed using the online survey program Qualtrics, a web-based survey tool (Qualtrics, 2013). This allowed teachers and administrators to take the survey online without the burden of submitting a hard copy.

The survey was distributed to teachers via e-mail in October of 2014 and was open for response for approximately one month. The survey took, on average, 10 to 15 minutes to complete and contained 14 questions. Data collection for this study occurred from October 2014 until November 2014. The results of the data are summarized in Table 2.
Table 2

Synopsis of Data Collection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Collection</th>
<th>Methods</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Online survey for teachers</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online survey for administrators</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview with students</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online survey with students</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likert-scale portion of the online surveys</td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participation was voluntary and participants were able to withdraw at any time. Participants signed the informed consent form, volunteering to participate in the study. Students under 18 years of age were required to return a signed guardian consent form (see Appendix I). There was also a signature obtained from each participant agreeing to be recorded during the interviews. This form was also signed by both the parent and the student. Students, guardians, teachers, and administration signed a final time to allow the use of direct quotes in the research (see Appendix E). There were 38 minors interviewed in this study, and they were also given a paper survey. The student’s assent was received through the school counselor. Once the students were identified and agreed to participate, a letter of consent was sent home to parents. The data received from the student survey had no names on it. This kept the students’ identities anonymous from everyone, including the researcher. The research data generated from the survey coincided with the survey the teachers and principals completed. This data helped show the differences between
what adults perceived as safety concerns and what students perceived. Guardians also had to give their consent to allow students to participate.

Survey research. The surveys (see Appendices O and P) were distributed to the teachers and administrators of four rural high schools in Idaho. These schools were categorized by pseudonyms—High School 1 (HS1), High School 2 (HS2), High School 3 (HS3), and High School 4 (HS4)—and were located in southwest Idaho. Surveys administered to teachers revealed that the implementation and enforcement of safety policies have an effect on inappropriate behavior and students’ academic scores. The survey questions were piloted with four teachers and one administrator not part of the survey group. The questions were also validated by the group that conducted the safety inspections of the Idaho school districts in 2013, Guy Bleisner and Brian Armes from Educators Eyes LLC, and by two local assessment people from the Idaho Department of Education. The research also provided data towards the perception of school safety of teachers as compared to administrators’ and students’ perception of school safety.

The second set of measurements came from a survey the 38 students completed at the end of their interviews. This information revealed a significant difference between teachers’ and principals’ perception of safety and students’ perception of school safety. From this data, the four schools, HS1, HS2, HS3, and HS4, were compared and then similarities in the data were reviewed to discover the differences. Comparisons then took place. Gender was compared to grade point averages, then grade point averages were compared to discipline, and finally, the data were compared between the four different high schools. The data are displayed in Table 3.
Table 3

Data Collection for Research Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Collection</th>
<th>Research Methods</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher surveys, HS1</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher surveys, HS2</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher surveys, HS3</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher surveys, HS4</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrator surveys, HS1</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrator surveys, HS2</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrator surveys, HS3</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrator surveys, HS4</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student interviews: 10 students each from three of the high schools and eight from the fourth high school</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
<td>38 students</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The final data were compared between students, teachers, and principals to determine if there was a significant difference in the perception of school safety among the different groups and how it affected the academic grades of the students. The data identified the common beliefs of all three groups, showed what the fears of schools were from each of the different perspectives, and gave direction to these areas of concern. Recommendations were derived from the data that were collected from each of the teachers and administrators from the four high schools. The data from the student information systems also provided information on all outside
variables, such as absences or demographics, and how they played a role in the perception of school safety.

**Interviews**

Yin (2014) asserted that the interview is one of the most valuable methods of data collection in a case study. The interview process involved 38 participants who took part in face-to-face interviews. Twenty male and 20 female students were interviewed. Ten students were chosen from each of the four high schools that participated in this study. These students were selected by the high school counselor of each participating high school. Consent was given by both the student and the guardian for participation, along with acknowledgment the student could choose not to participate at any time without any consequences. All interviews were conducted on the school campus during school hours of operation in a designated school conference room. There were 40 volunteer interview participants, 10 from each of the participating high schools. Participants were interviewed with the option to follow up if there were more questions that arose from the initial interviews. All students were asked the same questions, and there were 38 face-to-face interviews (see Appendices A and B). Recording interviews with participants and managing data were utilized in this study (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). The researcher utilized Voice Memos, an application on the Apple iPhone. Transcription of the interviews was conducted by a secretary, who signed the nondisclosure agreement and kept all the information confidential (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). No translating was required in this study.

The questions were designed as open-ended questions, which allowed the students opportunity to expand on each of the questions and express their thoughts and fears on school safety, as well as offer how they were doing academically. Marshall and Rossman (2011)
asserted that skillful interviewers ask follow-up queries. The students were interviewed once with the ability to have a second interview if the need arose, for a total of 40 interviews. The interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, and verified for accuracy. A professional transcriptionist typed all of the information gained from the interviews. Each of the students and the student’s legal guardian completed a participant criteria and letter of consent form. The interview questions for the students helped determine what created the unsafe feeling for students. The questions brought out topics from the school environment, social events, bullying, absences, and any other area with which the students had concerns. The school counselor from each participating school chose the students who participated in this study. The 40 participants ranged from 15 to 18 years of age and were a combination of male and female participants. Field notes, piloted interviews, observations, and other anecdotal information were collected during the interviews (Creswell, 2014; Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Merriam, 1988; Yin, 2014). As interviews are subjective in nature, the researcher diminished bias by being as impartial and nonjudgmental as possible (Merriam, 1988).

**Analytical Methods**

IBM SPSS Statistical Software Version 20.0 (IBM SPSS, 2014) was used for data analysis. Research-based procedures were identified and employed to analyze data. In addition, descriptive statistics were employed to identify features of the data sets (Tanner, 2012). Graphs and figures describe the data in detail. Cronbach’s alpha coefficient was inclusively used with the survey instrument (Croasmun & Ostrom, 2011; Gliem & Gliem, 2003). This was effectively accomplished by summing the scales for data analysis in each section and for the overall instrument.
The Kruskal-Wallis statistical analysis was conducted to compare the four high schools to each other on the surveys, interviews, and student data. This test was used because of the comparison of two or more independent samples, which were nonparametric and independent from each other, and the similar size of the schools. The Kruskal-Wallis analysis used the sum of the difference between mean ranks of the samples as the statistic to determine if there was a significant difference to be able to state if the high schools were similar. The nonparametric data and Likert-scale method were used because both are ordinal.

Procedures used to analyze the data, such as graphical devices, statistical methods, or qualitative procedures, must be identified. Rationale for using the techniques selected should be explained. The criteria by which data can be evaluated must be explained, and bibliographic reference should be made to standard sources.

**Limitations**

Wolcott (2009) noted that researchers should “acknowledge the limitations (or delimitations) of your study” (p. 34). Several assumptions and delimitations were made in this study. First, participants who volunteered to take part in this study were presumed to present information that was truthful. Second, issues related to neighborhood crime (assault or harm outside of school), local culture, gender, educational level, age, the high school where the data were obtained, and ethnicity may have impacted the results of this study. Lastly, although participants in this study were students, teachers, and administrators from four different high schools, it was assumed that common themes would emerge in their experiences with school safety.
An essential element of a strong research study is that it be completed in an ethical manner, with careful planning and procedures to protect the individuals who participate. This was successfully accomplished throughout the course of the study. Guardians and the students volunteered with the understanding they could refrain from questions or choose not to participate at any time with no repercussions. This research utilized data from the four high schools’ student information system, and they were generalized and not specific to ethnic groups or other factors that could have changed the findings.

Mixed-methods research strengthens the study and is a stronger methodology than qualitative or quantitative methods alone (Creswell, 2014; Yin, 2014). Limitations of the mixed-methods approach include the increased amounts of data collection required to properly conduct a mixed-methods study (Creswell, 2014; Yin 2014). Both a team of researchers and a larger sample size would yield a wider applicability.

Further research could focus more attention on discovering the differences between a rural school and an urban school and the perceptions a student may have on school safety and how that perception impacts student achievement.
Chapter IV

Results

Introduction

School safety research has been conducted by looking at facilities, school policies, and the use of local law enforcement, but research is limited regarding the students’ perceptions of safety, how this affects them in school, and the effect on their academics. This research investigated how students cope with the threat of danger in schools and how this issue is connected to students’ achievement and learning. Scholarly research has focused on the impact a safe learning environment has on students’ feelings of safety and their learning (Bucholz & Sheffler, 2009; Mayer, 2007; Parrett & Budge, 2012; CIRTL, 2005). The research in this field lacks specific data on how students feel about safety issues versus how the administrators and teachers feel about the same issues. The research conducted in this study defined the similarities and differences between the students’, teachers’, and administrators’ perceptions of different safety issues in the school and identified some of the remedies to improve these issues. Students’ perceptions of safety should be the leading agent for changes made to safety concerns in school. How students perceive their schools will give stakeholders a better understanding of how to deal with safety issues that arise, allowing them to be proactive and keep these issues from occurring. Studying perceptions of rural high school students is one way to understand school safety and offer insight and direction on how to deal with school safety.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the following three questions:

1. What is the relationship between students’ perceived safety and academic performance?
2. Is there a difference in perception of school safety by students, teachers, and administrators?

3. What is the impact of school safety policies on perceived safety by students?

These fundamental questions will help show the students’ perspectives and, in turn, help administrators, teachers, and students address safety concerns and improve students’ learning. The study first sought the ideas and thoughts of the administrators and teachers to gain an understanding of school safety and how it was perceived by them. Second, the study examined the students’ responses and what they perceived as safety issues and whether these issues affected their academic achievement. Finally, the interviews and surveys were designed to comprehend what students knew about policies that schools had implemented to deal with threats and safety in schools.

As discussed in Chapter 3, the following procedures were used during the data collection process:

- A Likert-scale survey instrument was distributed to four rural high school principals, including 72 high school teachers, and the 38 students who participated in the interviews. A total of 110 responses was received. This survey focused on demographics; the role of the teacher, student, and administrator; safety issues; school policy; and academic achievement questions.

- Audio-recorded, individual interviews took place with 38 students, 10 from three of the high schools and eight from the fourth high school. The interviews provided a method of gaining firsthand knowledge of the stories students had about their experiences in school every day and what safety issues affected them. Responses were
similar and, overall, students perceived they felt safe within their own school.

However, any safety issue that arose in a student’s life that caused the student to feel nervous or scared had an adverse effect on how they performed academically.

This study used a triangulation matrix as a guide to show the various types of data sources that were used to answer the three research questions in this study. Mills (2007) suggested the strength of research lies in triangulation, a process of collecting data from numerous sources and not relying on only one source. The research data were analyzed by looking at the Likert surveys from teachers, administrators, and students, then the interviews were used to support the data from the surveys. Table 6 represents the triangulation matrix for this study.

Table 4

Triangulation Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Data Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Source 1</td>
<td>Source 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. What is the relationship between students’ perceived safety and academic</td>
<td>Student paper survey instrument (qualitative)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>performance?</td>
<td>Interviews (quantitative)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Is there a difference in perception of school safety by students, teachers,</td>
<td>Surveys (qualitative)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and administrators?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. What impact do school safety policies have on perceived safety by students?</td>
<td>Audio-recorded, individual interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(quantitative)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Using the three research questions listed in Table 4 as the premise, a survey instrument was generated and distributed to four rural high schools, where 76 adults and 38 students completed the survey. Responses from the survey instrument were collected using Qualtrics and then downloaded into the SPSS statistical software to run the analysis, frequency, and reliability tests. Participants responded to questions, which focused on safety in the schools, and perceptions of the teachers, students, and administrators were all recorded. Survey questions were rated using a 4-item Likert scale and a 6-item Likert scale. The 4-item scale was used because it has an even number of points and without a midpoint, forces a choice (Sclove, 2001). The 6-item scale supports a strong internal consistency (Croasmun & Ostrom, 2011; Gliem & Gliem, 2003). Participants were asked to respond with their level of agreement to each question using the following scales: (a) 4-point scale—1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = agree, and 4 = strongly agree; and (b) 6-point scale—1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = somewhat disagree, 4 = somewhat agree, 5 = agree, and 6 = strongly agree.

Survey Validity and Reliability

The survey questions were taken from Dr. Cornell Dewey’s research on school climate and bullying, entitled *The Authoritative School Climate Survey and the School Climate Bullying Survey* (Cornell, 2015). These questions were sent to the researcher by Dr. Dewey on May 30, 2014, with permission to use the questions that would adequately bring out the responses needed to address the research questions. In order to represent the 2-step process to achieve content validity, the researcher selected two professionals involved in educational safety to also review the questions. These two educational experts were not study participants (Polit & Beck, 2006). The experts were sent the questions via e-mail on June 16, 2014, and responded on June 25, 2014,
with feedback that satisfied all target subject groups noted and that the questions would provide accurate and valuable information in regards to school safety.

**Cronbach’s alpha.** The researcher used Cronbach’s alpha as an internal consistency reliability analysis. Tanner (2012) referenced Cronbach’s alpha as a common statistic for analyzing reliability, in particular when the test is administered just once. Gliem and Gliem (2003) also believed it imperative to calculate Cronbach’s alpha coefficient for internal consistency of any scale used. With this in mind, the online survey underwent Cronbach’s alpha testing of the schools’ safety policies and perceptions of academic success. Teachers and administrators form the four high schools were grouped together, so 70 high school teachers’ and six administrators’ responses from the survey were analyzed using Cronbach’s alpha. The students from the four high schools, a total of 38 students were also run as a group using Cronbach’s alpha analysis. Table 5 lists the results of Cronbach’s alpha for the students and teachers and administrators.

Table 5  
*Reliability Using Cronbach’s Alpha*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response and Participation</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers and administrators</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>.829</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>.816</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The statistical significance that each group needed to measure was equal to or higher than .80. The range for Cronbach’s alpha lies between 0 and 1, with an internal consistency of .80 or above as a reasonable goal (Gliem & Gliem, 2003). The statistical analysis, Cronbach’s alpha
results, included 59 survey questions to the teachers and administrators, and the results of consistency were .829, exhibiting that there was consistency between the 70 teachers and six administrators who took the survey. The 38 students from the four high schools completed 38 survey questions that were used and analyzed using Cronbach’s alpha. The results of the students was .816, also exhibiting there was consistency between the 38 students.

**Frequency**

Tanner (2012) addressed frequency distribution and the need to find themes repeated within the data. The researcher looked at frequency data on individual teachers, students, and administrators. By comparing the frequency of similarly answered survey questions, the researcher was able to use two groups, the teachers and administrators, and then the students. There were 38 Likert questions on the student survey. Using the frequency analysis in the SPSS program, the researcher found that in all 38 questions, student responses were consistent on either agrees or disagrees, with no single response from students on the surveys that were below a 60% difference in the answers. This means that for all of the questions, the frequency of responses was over 60%, and there were no outliers in the student responses. Using the 38 student survey questions, the frequency for students responding with the majority of their responses as either mostly agree or disagree was an 80% or higher, which consisted of 28 questions, and equaled 74% of the total responses. Students replied at 90% or higher as either mostly agree or disagree in 16 out of 38 questions, or 42% of students responded the same way. Due to this type of frequency in the answers, the data were based on the student responses from the four high schools as one whole group, “Student Group,” which appears in the graphs and charts.
There were 59 questions on the teacher and administrator survey. Using the frequency analysis in the SPSS program, the researcher found that of the 59 questions, only nine questions were below a 60% difference in the answers that was either for or against the stated question. That is only a 15% difference for all teacher or administrator participants from the four high schools. Using the same 59 questions, the frequency for 80% or higher agreeing, was 59% of the responses, and for 90% or higher, it was 26 out of 54 questions, or 48% responses. Due to this type of frequency in responses, the data were based on the teachers and administrators from the four high schools as one whole group. Table 6 represents that teachers’ and administrators’ responses were similar throughout the four schools.

Table 6

*Teacher and Administrator Survey Response Percentages*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency of Responses</th>
<th>Total Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>80% or higher</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90% or higher</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Teacher, Administrative, and Student Survey Results*

The next phase involved the collection of data through the use of an online survey instrument and created using the Qualtrics software. The survey was distributed online to all the teachers and administrators, while the student survey was printed and distributed to the students face-to-face after the interview. Written consent from students and parents was obtained prior to students being interviewed or participating in the survey. Examples of the permission slips can be found in Appendix E. Once the surveys were completed, the researcher manually inserted each of the 38 survey results into Qualtrics. The number of principals receiving the online survey via e-
mail totaled six; two of the counselors from two of the high schools entered themselves as administrators. The number of surveys sent to teachers equaled 70, with two of these surveys being completed by two of the counselors in two of the high schools. Rural high schools were chosen for this study because 60% of school districts in Idaho were still considered rural districts, and this was the targeted group to conduct this research.

The survey was initially sent via e-mail to each of the administrators in the four high schools to provide time to review the survey and participate. Once the four high school administrators had completed the survey, each of the administrators sent the survey to their high school teachers. The e-mails communicated directions and a statement of the purpose of the survey. The link to the surveys was sent out using the teacher’s school e-mail addresses, and the survey was completed using the Qualtrics software. Two of the high schools requested the researcher meet and converse with the staff, while at the other two high schools, the administrators took care of distributing the survey. The survey window was open from September 22, 2014, through November 28, 2014. Two weeks after the survey was opened, the researcher sent a reminder e-mail to the counselor and administrator requesting that each teacher and administrator complete the survey. Administrators then forwarded the e-mail to the teachers. The next section further details the survey response, participation rate, and demographics of the survey participants.

**Survey Response and Participation**

Surveys were distributed to the principals of the four rural school districts, and these principals had an opportunity to review the survey before allowing the researcher to distribute to the high school. Schools were coded with HS1, HS2, HS3, and HS4 to keep each school
anonymous. Students were also coded to keep their identities anonymous. They were coded
HS1S1 and this was done for each high school and each student. Table 7 shows an example of
how a student from HS1, who was the fifth student interviewed, would be student 5, or as the
researcher categorized, HS1S5. Table 7 shows the four schools and examples of how the students
were categorized.

Table 7

*School and Student Categorization*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response and Participation</th>
<th>Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High School 1</td>
<td>HS1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School 2</td>
<td>HS2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School 3</td>
<td>HS3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School 4</td>
<td>HS4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student from HS1, Fourth Interviewed</td>
<td>HS1S4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student from HS3, Ninth Interviewed</td>
<td>HS3S9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For two schools, HS1 and HS4, the surveys were sent to all high school teachers from the
administrator of that school, in these two cases, the principal. For the other two schools, HS2 and
HS3, the researcher attended a faculty meeting held in the library and had ample computers for
each teacher. The administrator e-mailed the directions and survey to the teachers, and teachers
then completed the surveys. This was the case for both schools, and the participation was very
high at both places. A second e-mail was sent and then one last, follow-up e-mail was sent to
retrieve as many responses to the survey as possible. The conclusion of the surveys consisted of
76 surveys sent out to 70 teachers and six administrators. There were two schools where two counselors signed up as an administrator, and at the other two schools, the two counselors signed up as a teacher. There were 67 responses to the surveys (88% response rate).

The survey distributed to students was created in Qualtrics, but instead of having the students complete the instrument online, the survey was distributed in a paper-based format. Once students completed the interview, a copy of the survey was given to the students and completed while the students were in the office. There were 38 surveys provided and there were 38 surveys completed for 100%. Once the surveys were completed, the researcher entered the student responses into Qualtrics manually so the data could be analyzed using the SPSS statistical program.

The comprehensive analysis of the survey began with a focus on the response and participation rates, followed by table and graphic displays of demographic data. Guidelines indicate a response rate between 25% and 30% can be expected when there are no follow-up e-mail reminders, and higher response rates with follow-up reminders (Cook, Heath, & Thompson, 2000). A reminder e-mail was sent to participants in this study, which supports the claim by Cook, Heath, and Thompson (2000) that reminders increase response rates. As noted, this study’s overall response rate was 88% by teachers and administrators and 100% by students. A strong response rate provides confidence when generalizing results (Creswell, 2003). Table 8 summarizes the overall response rate and participation by rural, teachers and administrators at the high schools.
Table 8

Teacher and Administrator Survey Response Rate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response and Participation</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Surveys sent</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey responses</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surveys completed</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surveys completed by teachers</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surveys completed by administrators</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response rate</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9

Student Survey Response Rate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response and Participation</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Surveys distributed</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey responses</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surveys completed</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response rate</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Demographic section. All teachers and administrator respondents completed the demographic section, which shows the gender of each participant. The student survey also had 100% of the participants fill out the gender section. Demographic data for the gender of the teachers and administrators completing the survey revealed that 31 males and 36 females
completed the survey. The overall interpretation of this data indicates the genders were closely
distributed at 47% and 53%, respectively, for males and females taking the survey. Demographic
data for the gender of the students completing the survey revealed that 16 males and 21 females
completed the survey. The overall interpretation of this data indicate the genders were not as
evenly distributed as teachers and administrators, but still fairly well distributed at 42% and 55%,
respectively, for male and female students taking the survey. This close, gender distribution
proved necessary to the inferential statistical testing component of the study, in which the male
responses and female responses were compared to determine if there existed a discrepancy.
Tables 10 and 11 represent the gender distribution and the completion rate for each gender.

Table 10

*Gender Percentages of Teachers and Administrators Completing the Survey*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>( n )</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 11

Gender Percentages of Students Completing the Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The students’ grade level distribution of students who took the survey is presented in Figure 1. The students interviewed and given surveys represent each grade in high school: ninth, 10th, 11th, and 12th. Criteria were not given to counselors when selecting the grade level of students, but representation of grade levels came out moderately even for each grade. The number of students who participated was 38 students. The number of students who participated in the interviews and surveys from each grade was as follows:

- ninth grade—11% of the total number of students,
- 10th grade—29% of the total number of students,
- 11th grade—31% of the total number of students, and
- 12th grade—26% of the total number of students.
The academic level distribution of students who took the survey is presented in Figure 2. Each student responded with a range of his or her grade point average. The majority of students (42%) were earning A’s and B’s while only 5% of those given the survey were earning C’s and D’s. There were no criteria when selecting students based on their grade point average.
The amount of time a student had been in the same school system was also investigated. This was to give the researcher an opportunity to investigate differences in students who had been in the school a short time as compared to those who had been in the school for four years. The majority of students (52%) had been in the school system for four years, and 74% had been in school three or more years. It appears that most students had a fair understanding of how their individual schools worked and had been there long enough to respond to questions in both the interview and the survey.

There were no criteria when selecting students based on how long they had attended school. The number of years students had attended the same school were

- one year = 3%,
- two years = 23%,
• three years = 22%, and

• four years = 52%.

Figure 3

Number of Years Students Attended the Same School in the Same District

The students were also asked what extracurricular activities in which they had participated. They were given the choice between

• clubs, such as Key Club, Spanish Club, or Honor Society;

• performing arts, such as band, chorus, or drama;

• sport teams, such as basketball, football, or track; and

• other activities, such as student government or the ROTC program.

The distribution of students who were involved in extracurricular activities was high, with 68% involved in some type of club, 79% involved in athletics, 25% involved in one of the other activities, and 20% involved in music or band. Figure 4 represents this data.
The final table in this section lists the views students had on schoolwork. This table shows the students believed the teachers’ expectations of them were high and the teachers wanted students to be successful in their schoolwork. One hundred percent of the students agreed teachers expected them to work hard and wanted them to learn as much as possible. The students also believed most teachers want them to do more than just complete minimal work and pass their class.
Table 12

Student Views on Grades and Schoolwork

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Somewhat Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree, Agree, Somewhat Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My teachers expect me to work hard.</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My teachers really want me to learn a lot.</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My teachers are happy if I do just enough to pass.</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My teachers expect a lot from students.</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My teachers do not really care about how much I learn.</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My teachers expect me to attend college.</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research Question 1: What is the relationship between students’ perceived safety and academic performance? Holley and Steiner (2005) stated, “Students reported that being in a safe classroom changed both what they learned as well as how much they learned” (para. 1). Students suffer academically when they feel they are in an unsafe environment (Lacoe, 2012; Osborne & Walker, 2006; Safety and School Climate, 2013). This is consistent with the lower achievement scores associated with victims of bullying (Glew et al., 2005). There were four rural high schools used in gathering research, and within the four schools, 38 students were interviewed and given a Likert survey instrument. The interviews showed that all 38 students perceived they
were safe in their schools. The majority of comments were directed specifically to whether they felt they were safe in their schools. The majority of students (27 of 38) used similar responses, such as “I feel safe” or “I think it is pretty safe.” The other 11 students commented, “We know everyone,” or “It is a small school or town, and there are no issues.” All students believed their individual schools were safe, and they experienced feelings of safety within them. The students felt safe in their schools because they attended rural schools where “everyone knows everyone” (HS4S3), which was a loud sounding board for most of the students. Students recognized that teachers and principals were involved in keeping the school safe. Student interviews gave insight on how students perceived their individual schools and communities. Table 13 represents actual student comments when asked how they perceived safety in their individual schools.

Table 13

*Student Interview Comments*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Pseudonym</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HS4S6</td>
<td>I think it’s just being in a small town and everyone pretty much knows everybody, but I think just everybody just knowing everybody, it kind of unites us a little bit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HS2S1</td>
<td>Well, we are all really close and we know each other and there is nobody here that doesn’t have friend support. Everybody has friends and as far as other safety concerns, I can’t think of any.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HS1S5</td>
<td>I think it’s great. I mean, I’m not a bit concerned about safety here because we all know each other. We’re a really small school. Like we’re all family, so I don’t think anything is going to happen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HS1S1</td>
<td>Probably because it’s a small school and everybody knows everybody. It is kind of like at home. You feel secure and so knowing everybody brings that security.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HS1S3</td>
<td>It’s a small community and we are all close to each other.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Safety issues and their definition created different discussions, and students had a wide range of comments during the interviews. Several students talked about monthly safety drills, such as fire drills, that gave them the impression the school was prepared for an emergency. One high school recently had an assembly on directions in case of an emergency, and many of the students commented that these types of events improved their sentiments about being safe in school. Twelve students used the phrases, “It’s a small school, district, or community” as reasons they felt safe. Several students used the phrase “it is like a big family,” and many used the phrase, “everyone knows everyone.” The student perception of feeling safe in the schools was overwhelmingly positive. Several students (3) made comments, such as “I think our school is pretty safe; it’s just concerns about bullying. I don’t really think the teachers and administrators do much about it.” This was not a common theme but was brought up two or three times by different students during the interviews. When the researcher specifically asked the students about bullying, 34 of the 38 admitted that bullying was one of the few safety issues that existed in their school. Table 14 illustrates how students felt about their school. Students were asked how they liked school, being in school, homework, and if grades were important to them. Eighty-nine percent of students liked their school and 95% of students want to learn while in the classroom.
Table 14

*Student Views About School*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am proud to be a student at this school.</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel like I belong at this school.</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I usually finish my homework at this school.</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I want to learn as much as I can at school.</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting good grades is very important to me.</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The academic side of the conversation brought out a different response during the interview, and 36 of the 38 students responded that if something had happened during the school day—an argument with a friend, girlfriend or boyfriend, parent, or staff member; being threatened or bullied; or any type of safety concern—there was very little academic learning going on. When asked how long it would take to cool down or get to a point where academic studies could commence, students responded from half a class period to multiple days. Students responded they needed time to talk to a friend, teacher, or someone before there was significant attention given to the class and academic study. This was the opposite of feeling safe in the school and was an important finding in this research. Academic learning does not take place if a student has any type of safety issue going on in his or her mind.

Table 15 illustrates the number of students interviewed who were suspended for any reason during the last school year. Only 1 student of 38 had been suspended in the past year, representing 3% of the total group of students. When talking about bullying and other safety
issues, students commented on different things that pertained to safety. The survey showed that 26% of students had been threatened or harmed in the past 30 days. This is not a huge percentage, but it does tell the researcher there are safety issues going on in the schools, even though most students responded they felt safe in their individual school. In Table 15, the most telling percentage was that 78% of students did not tell anyone about a threat to themselves. This problem was sounded by most of the students in the interview of going into a classroom with some type of an issue pending and not being able to concentrate on schoolwork.

Table 15

*Student Perception of School Safety*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How many days have you been suspended from school this year?</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has another student threatened to harm you in the past 30 days?</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did you tell anyone about the threat?</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students were asked in the survey and in the interview what the staff, teachers, or administrators thought would be the main safety issues in the school. This is an interesting point that shows what students perceive adults believe about safety issues in their school. Students felt that bullying, weapons, and fighting were the biggest safety issues that adults perceived as safety issues.
Table 16

*Student Views of What the Staff Perceive as a Safety Issues in Their School*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bullying</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weapons</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fighting</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The student interviews brought out statements to support the data in Table 16. Student HS1S1 stated, “I think there are more physical injuries, but as for bullying, we have one or two actual bullies,” and then another student (HS1S2) from the same school, when asked what staff would perceive as a safety issue, stated, “bullying” without hesitation. Another student, HS1S5 stated,

Bullying. I mean it seems like there isn’t, because if you ask upper classmen, or the more popular kids, they would say there is no problem with bullying, but we just had a beyond measure program and they got a lot of people to come out and talk to them about bullying, so there is a lot more running around that we don’t really know about. Teachers worried about their own safety, I mean some kids are brutal, you know, mean.

The final student (HS2S8) stated, “Bullying. I have seen a lot of bullying.” Students also discussed knives, and because their community is generally a farming community, many students forget to take them out of their pockets. Fighting was the only other big issue brought up by students.

Table 17 represents teachers’ and administrators’ views on safety in school. Teachers and
administrators overwhelmingly believe their school is safe and they are not concerned about safety issues in their school. The other interesting percentage in this graph is that 87% believe that disciplinary practices in the school are efficient. This means that what administrators and teachers are doing in the classroom and outside is having a positive impact on school climate and teachers feel safe.

Table 17

*Teacher and Administrator Views on Safety in the Their School*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Somewhat Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree, Agree, Somewhat Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am treated with respect by students at this school.</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel supported by the disciplinary practices for students at this school.</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel physically safe at this school.</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I worry about someone committing a shooting at this school.</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel that there is adequate safety and security in this school.</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The disciplinary practices at this school are effective.</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 18 shows what students thought how other students perceived safety issues in the school. This table’s data came from the student survey. The percentage of students who
perceived rules were fair and students who were punished for something usually deserved it was over 80%. The question “students were suspended without good reason,” 24% of students agreed that this was indeed the case, but what is interesting with this percentage, of the 38 students who completed the survey, only one student had been suspended the previous year. So a quarter of the students surveyed believe that students are suspended without good reason. Twenty-two percent of students also perceived their teachers were too strict. This would be an interesting case study in the future to determine what too strict meant.

Table 18

*Student Views of What Other Students Perceive as Safety Issues in Their School*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The punishment for breaking school rules is the same for all students.</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The school rules are fair.</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students at this school only get punished when they deserve it.</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students get suspended without good reason.</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When students are accused of doing something wrong, they get a chance to explain.</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students are treated fairly regardless of their race or ethnicity.</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The adults at this school are too strict.</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 19

*Student Interview Responses About Bullying*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HS2S8</td>
<td>Bullying. I have seen a lot of bullying.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HS2S3</td>
<td>It would just be the fighting for me probably because there is a lot of kids that don’t really like each other and their only solution to solving that is fighting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HS4S7</td>
<td>I think the response would mostly be the girls. That there are a lot of the girls bullying other girls right now.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HS2S8</td>
<td>Upper classmen—and it’s mostly the guys.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HS4S8</td>
<td>Bullying most of the time, but it’s just people looking down on you, ignoring you, just making you feel like you don’t even exist, like you are not even there. Like right now, I feel like people ignore me, all my best friends, my best friend that I’ve known since like the first grade. She’s turned on me because I’m not cool enough anymore, so she doesn’t really talk to me that much.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 19 represents students’ views on safety issues in the school with bullying and other social issues that exist in schools. The next two tables show beliefs from students about how teachers care or listen to them. Table 20 illustrates teachers’ and administrators’ beliefs about how they care about students. Comparing the percentage of students believing adults care about them at 89% and the adults recording a 98% belief, it can be stated that adults care about students and, for the most part, students also believe this. This is a significant statistic because this perception helps build a safe, positive culture in the school and classroom. The same percentages exist for wanting the students to do well. Adults in the school want all students to be successful and do well in class. The question on adults listening to students also showed a
discrepancy or disconnect between what students and adults. Sixty-six percent of the students showed a belief that adults listen to what they have to say, while 98% of the adults believed it was more prevalent—a 32% difference. Listening will need to be looked at in all schools to help create the safe environment for which students are searching. Respect also received a high percentage from both groups, and students agreed that teachers treat students with respect.

Table 20

*Student Views on How Teachers and Administrators Work and Listen to Students*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Want all students to do well</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listen to what students have to say</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treat students with respect</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 21

*Teacher and Administrator Views on How Adults in the School Care About Students*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Somewhat Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree, Agree, Somewhat Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers and adults care about all students.</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>98%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers and adults want all students to do well.</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>98%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers and adults listen to what students have to say.</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>98%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers and adults treat students with respect.</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>98%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The final piece of the first research question was how academics are affected when a student feels unsafe. The survey looked at how teachers and administrators care about students, and both groups felt that teachers and administrators cared about students. The survey indicated that, overwhelmingly, students felt safe in their own school. With this data and the idea that students felt safe in the schools, the student interviews were significant when it came to safety and how issues affected their academics. Thirty-eight students were interviewed and asked how a safety concern, such as being bullied, fighting, or out-of-school safety issues, affected them in the classroom. Thirty-four of the 38 students responded that little or nothing would happen in the classroom because their minds would be on the safety issue at hand. When probed, the other four students all agreed that if something were going on, they would spend more time thinking or dealing with the issue at hand and schoolwork would come second. Student HS1S9, when asked about being bullied before a class, stated,

It’s like you don’t want to pay attention to your schoolwork because you keep thinking about the situation and what happened. It’s kind of hard to focus on your schoolwork and pay attention. I was bullied for one year, and you start seeing your grades get lower because you are not really focusing on schoolwork and not actually learning.

This one student expressed the views of most of the students interviewed. Another student (HS1S2) brought out the idea that when a student has been threatened before class and does not want to talk to others about it, when in class, the student cannot focus, but sits there lost in thought about the issue at hand. What was interesting about this question in the interviews was that all students had either experienced this type of safety issue or, like the four students who believed they were not affected by safety issues, all knew a friend who had gone through this
situation.

Student HS1S4 articulated a story of being in class recently where a student answered a question for the teacher and four or five other students in the class told the student to shut up and said the student was stupid. The student was being bullied during a class period right in front of the teacher, and nothing was done to stop it. The student felt stupid and completely shut out all schoolwork and the teacher and was not involved in the class. The student has continued to do little in that one class, it continued to affect the student’s academic performance. Many students made comments like the following when asked how they dealt with a safety issue, such as bullying, before a class period:

- HS1S5: “I just sat and cried and just laid my head on my table.”
- HS1S6: “Verbal abuse or getting bullied would drop someone’s academics because they would be depressed and be looking out for the person who was bullying them instead of doing their work.”
- HS1S8: “Some people I know can’t block it out, and they would have to go to the bathroom just to get a break from it all, and so yes, it would affect your schoolwork.”
- HS2S10: “You are not going to do much learning. You would be thinking about what they said, and you won’t really be paying attention to what the teacher is talking about.”
- HS2S3: “I would pay more attention to what if we do get in a fight, what if he cheap shots me or something. I wouldn’t be paying attention at all to the teacher or the classwork or anything.”
- HS3S2: “Students just want to go home when something like bullying or a fight
happens.”

- HS3S2: “It takes a couple of days to get over an issue.”

- HS4S1: “I would have a lot of problems dealing with all the people, so I would stay home, or when I went to school, I’d be really upset and stressed out, and I would stay in the counselor’s office for like two hours and freak out.”

- HS4S2: “I feel like it affects and especially if there’s two of the opposing groups in the same class. They are more worried about being mad at each other instead of focusing on what is going on in class.”

- HS4S5: “Yeah, I have a whole class where there are mean girls in there, and they harass me and it’s so hard to concentrate ’cause I am just trying to listen to see if they are saying anything about me while I am trying to learn, but it is so hard.”

- HS4S6: “They just get depressed and they don’t want to do anything, or they’re like I’m not feeling it today and do nothing in class.”

The student interviews were informative concerning issues that affected students directly. Every student had a story about himself or herself or another student when they were in a class where they could not concentrate or even care about what was being taught because of some safety issue that had happened. A follow-up question for many of these students was how long it would take to get over an issue and be able to refocus on their schoolwork. Answers ranged from 15 minutes, two days, months, and even one where a student moved to another state. Student HS2S3 told the story of his friend who constantly fought with his dad prior to school and could not focus on any of his schoolwork. Eventually, the student moved out of state to start over.

Students who feel unsafe have a difficult time focusing on anything academic, and these
38 students, all of whom believed their school was a safe school, had stories on how bullying, fighting, and other issues kept them from being able to do their work. Several had personal stories where they stated their grades had suffered; one student went from receiving A’s to receiving C’s due to bullying. This is the issue that needs to be addressed in schools to create the classroom environment that is needed to make students feel safe.

**Research Question 2: Is there a difference in perception of school safety by students, teachers, and administrators?** The data for this question were gathered from the surveys of both students and teachers and administrators. Table 22 illustrates the views of teachers and administrators and the views of students and the differences in their perceptions. Results represent the perceptions of teachers and administrators about whether students like their schools. Almost half of the teachers (48%) perceived that students found school boring. This is a compilation of all four high schools, and it is almost a 50/50 spread. One study conducted by Indiana University surveyed 110 high schools, reaching 81,000 students and found that one in three students is bored in class, or around 30%, and that 20% of students had considered dropping out of school (Bryner, 2007).
Table 22

*Teacher and Administrator Views on How Students Like School*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Somewhat Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree, Agree, Somewhat Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students generally like this school.</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>98%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students are proud to be at this school.</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students feel that school is boring.</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students finish their homework at this school.</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students hate going to school.</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting good grades is very important to students here.</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research has shown that students do better academically when they know they are connected to at least one significant adult in their educational experience (Blum, 2006). The 76 teachers who participated in this study responded with a rate of 92% that students knew who to go to for help if they had any type of safety issue. Ninety-three percent also reported that the teacher or administrator would step in to help if an issue arose. Students learn more, attend school more often, and perform better academically when they have adult support from parents, teachers, counselors, and school principals (Blum, 2006). The area of concern from these survey results is that teachers and administrators said students knew who to go to if there was a problem, but 53% of the teachers and administrators believed that students do not report an issue, such as hitting someone, when it arises. During the interviews, several students reported that teachers did not do
anything to stop the bullying; they just looked the other way. Another student (HS1S2) stated, “I feel like that all the staff cares about everyone and everyone tries to care for everyone, but there is a lot of bullying that goes around that people don’t talk about.” Teachers and administrators also split on whether they knew when a student is being bullied. Forty-three percent of teachers and administrators were not clear on this, and more training is needed in all four high schools.

Table 23

Teacher and Administrator Views on Student Willingness to Talk to Adults

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Somewhat Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree, Agree, Somewhat Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students know who to go to for help if they have been treated badly by another student.</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students feel comfortable asking for help from teachers if there is a problem with a student.</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students report it when one student hits another.</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students are encouraged to report bullying and aggression.</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers take action to solve the problem when students report bullying.</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers know when students are being picked on or being bullied.</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this study, 95% \( (n = 38) \) of the students reported in the survey and almost 100% in the interviews reported that they perceived their schools as safe. Students also said they could talk to an adult or had an adult they could talk to in the schools; 84% agreed with this. Students reported that if they told teachers about being bullied or picked on, the teacher would step in and 97% of
students agreed with this.

Table 24

Student Ability to Talk to Teachers and Adults in the School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Somewhat Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree, Agree, Somewhat Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>There are adults at this school I could talk with if I had a personal problem.</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If I tell a teacher that someone is bullying me, the teacher will do something to help.</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am comfortable asking my teachers for help with my schoolwork.</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is at least one teacher or other adult at this school who really wants me to do well.</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If another student talked about killing someone, I would tell one of the teachers or staff at the school.</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel safe in this school.</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 25 illustrates there is a division between teachers’ and administrators’ perceptions of bullying in the high school. All of these survey questions received a very even split on bullying with 66% of teachers and administrators believing bullying is a problem in their schools, while almost half of this group do not know why students are being bullied. One study shows that 77% of students have been a victim of one type of bullying (Bullying Statistics, 2013).
Table 25

*Teacher and Administrator Views on Students Being Teased or Bullied*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Somewhat Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree, Agree, Somewhat Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students in this school are teased about their clothing or physical appearance.</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students in this school are teased or put down because of their race or ethnicity.</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is a lot of teasing about sexual topics at this school.</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullying is a problem at this school.</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students in this school are teased or put down about their sexual orientation.</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data in Table 26 indicate the students’ views about bullying were fairly positive. Results indicated that 24% of students believed it was okay to hit someone if that person threatened them and agreed that it was not okay to bully, with a rating of 97% of students agreeing that bullying was never okay.
Table 26

*Student Views on Being Teased or Bullied*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Somewhat Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree, Agree, Somewhat Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>If someone threatens you, it is okay to hit that person.</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It feels good when I hit someone.</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If you fight a lot, everyone will look up to you.</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If you are afraid to fight, you won't have any friends.</td>
<td>97%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good fighters are popular in our school.</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullying is okay sometimes.</td>
<td>97%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullying is really not that bad.</td>
<td>97%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some people deserve to be bullied.</td>
<td>97%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is your own fault if you let someone bully you.</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 27 represents issues that have happened to teachers during the past school year. It is significant that almost half of the teachers have experienced students saying something rude or insulting to the teacher. Forty-nine percent of teachers reported students had said something rude to them. Table 28 also reveals where 31% of teachers reported that parents had made a derogatory comment towards them. Teacher and administrators have to work on appropriate comments from teachers to students and vice versa to build the safe school climate.
Table 27

*Issues That Happened to Teachers During the School Year (Students)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>One or More Times</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A student stole or damaged my personal property.</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A student said rude or insulting things to me.</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A student said rude or insulting things to me.</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A student physically attacked, pushed, or hit me.</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 28

*Issues That Happened to Teachers During the School Year (Parents/Colleagues)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>One or More Times</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A parent said rude or insulting things to me.</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A parent threatened to complain about me to the administration.</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A parent threatened to harm me.</td>
<td>97%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A parent physically attacked, pushed, or hit me.</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A colleague said rude or insulting things to me.</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A colleague threatened to harm me.</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students also responded that other students had been rude to them. Just under half (40%) reported that rude things were said to them. It is not just an issue for teachers but for students in all four high schools. Another telling report was that half (50%) of students reported having something stolen from them.
Table 29

*Issues That Happened to Students During the School Year*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>One or More Times</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A student stole or damaged my personal property.</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A student physically attacked, pushed, or hit me.</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A student threatened to hurt me.</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A student said rude or insulting things to me.</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Teachers’ reactions were split on how they felt to being treated poorly during the school year, whether it was being talked back to, insulted, or confronted by students or parents. Half of the teachers were bothered by how they were treated, while 65% felt angry about the way they were treated. Teachers put up with a lot on a day-to-day basis, and 37% reported feeling burned out. This is a huge number when considering these are four rural high school where almost 40% of teachers feel burned out. This is an issue that must be addressed by administration and teachers.
Table 30

Impact of Issues on Teachers During the School Year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>One or More Times</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>They bothered me a lot.</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I felt frustrated.</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I felt sad.</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I felt angry.</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I felt burned out about my job.</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It made me think about whether to continue teaching.</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Research Question 3: What is the impact of school safety policies on students?**

Schools have turned to policies to overcome many safety issues in the schools. Policies on zero tolerance, anti-bullying, attendance, fighting, and many other policies have been implemented in schools to help deal with the problems of school safety. The student interviews were instrumental in understanding the effect the policy has on the students. When asked what school policies students knew off the top of their heads, only 18% of students \((n = 7)\) interviewed had any idea what a policy was. School policy was reviewed in at least one of the high schools each year and not a single student knew of a safety policy off the top of their heads. The researcher provided examples of what a school safety policy may be, and then all students replied with ideas on fire drills and no weapons, with five students bringing up no fighting. Overall, schools have not done a good job of educating students in a way the students understand and know school policies dealing with school safety. Table 31 represents how teachers and administrators...
responded to how they view student discipline and school policy.

Table 31

*Teachers’ View on How Students View on School Discipline*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Somewhat Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree, Agree, Somewhat Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The punishment for breaking school rules is the same for all students.</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students at this school only get punished when they deserve it.</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students know the school rules for student conduct.</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If a student does something wrong, he or she will definitely be punished.</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students can get away with breaking the rules at this school pretty easily.</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students get suspended without good reason.</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The adults at this school are too strict.</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When students are accused of doing something wrong, they get a chance to explain.</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students get suspended for minor things.</td>
<td>97%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Teachers and administrators agreed on most school policies and how they are upheld. The one interesting percentage is whether students get away with breaking school rules, where 23% of teachers believe this is the case. All of teacher and administrators (100%) believed they are not too strict and that students are suspended for a good reason. Twenty-four percent of students
believed that students are suspended without a good reason (see Table 32). This means that 28% of these students did not agree with the teachers and administrators on why students are being suspended. There is also the fact that 22% of the students believed the teachers and administrators are too strict.

Table 32

*Student Views on School Discipline*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The punishment for breaking school rules is the same for all students.</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The school rules are fair.</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students at this school only get punished when they deserve it.</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students get suspended without good reason.</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When students are accused of doing something wrong, they get a chance to explain.</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students are treated fairly regardless of their race or ethnicity.</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The adults at this school are too strict.</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 33 addresses zero-tolerance policies and suspensions in the school. Thirty-five of the students interviewed were not even aware of a zero-tolerance policy and had no idea what it meant. This was one of the few statistics with the teachers and administrators that was split on the responses. Sixty-five percent believed that a zero-tolerance policy affects order in the school, while 35% disagreed. Although a zero-tolerance policy lets students know what is considered inappropriate behavior, students in the four schools struggled to name any of the policies.
Weapons, such as guns and knives, eventually came up as the interviews went on; however, all but three students had to be prompted to get these responses. Another telling result of the survey is that almost half the teachers and administrators (43%) did not believe that a suspension would change behavior in the future. If this is the case, rules may not be enforced because the teacher or administrator may deem the outcome not worth the effort. Sixty-eight percent of the teachers and administrators found that suspension was necessary even with a positive, safe, school climate. Zero-tolerance policies need to be reviewed and weighed against what teachers, administrators, and students think about them. The few comments the researcher received from the interviews when asked about school policies resembled the following two:

- “Yeah, a little bit, but I don’t know. It’s just school policy not to have any weapons on it on yourself or anything” (HS2S10).
- “No weapons—nothing that can be used as a weapon, I know that. No drugs or anything like that” (HS3S6).

Schools have to better educate students on school policies in order to create a safe learning environment and have meaningful and effective school policies.
Table 33

*Teacher and Administrator Views on Zero-Tolerance Policies andSuspension*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Somewhat Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree, Agree, Somewhat Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zero tolerance makes a significant contribution to maintaining order at this school.</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zero tolerance sends a clear message to disruptive students about inappropriate behaviors in school.</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suspension makes students less likely to misbehave in the future.</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out-of-school suspension is unnecessary if we provide a positive school climate and challenging instruction.</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Conclusion**

In Chapter 4, the triangulation matrix served as a guide for investigating the various types of data sources used to answer the three research questions in this study (Mills, 2007). Data sources for all three research questions consisted of the following:

- electronic survey instrument for teachers and principals;
- paper-based survey instrument for students;
- individual, audio-recorded, interviews with 38 students; and
- participants from four rural high schools in Idaho.
The focus of Chapter 4 was to summarize the findings of both quantitative and qualitative results. The results focused on students’ perception of safety and teachers’ and administrators’ perception of safety. Finally, the data revealed the impact safety has on student academics and how school safety policy plays into school safety.

**Summary of the data collection.** In the following chapter, the researcher provides a detailed look at how the perception of student safety affects academic performance. Additionally, the relationships between adults and students will be discussed. The final interpretation of the data will be of school policy and how it must be taught to all groups in order for it to be effective.
Chapter V
Discussion

Introduction

The intention of this chapter is to discuss the results of this study. A summary of the study includes a synopsis of the problem, purpose of the study, research questions, methodology review, and major findings.

Schools are responsible not only for educating students but for the well-being and safety of the students. Research conducted in 2010 has revealed that 10% of 15-year-old students polled reported they viewed school as a place where they do not feel safe and even fear being harmed (Akiba, 2010). Students’ fears of school or what goes on in school has created a concern for parents, teachers, principals, students, and law enforcement authorities and has had an adverse effect on students’ academic achievement (Kraft, 2003). Students who have safety concerns in school have trouble with their attendance, learning motivation, behavior, and academic achievement (Akiba, 2010; Kennard, 2009). Research has focused on data that support the idea that safety issues decrease the primary purpose of education and significantly inhibit teaching and learning (Bosworth, Ford, & Hernandez, 2011).

Scholarly research has focused on safety in American schools and reported students bringing weapons, committing crimes, fighting physically, and bullying have created an atmosphere where students are afraid to come to school (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2012; Cornell, 2013; Robers, et.al., 2013; Sprague & Walker, 2002). Eaton et al. (2012) introduced the problem that when students do not feel safe, they stay home from school due to safety concerns. The No Child Left Behind Act has created a requirement for students to
achieve proficiency on academic assessments in order to graduate. This current study delved into the correlations between students’ perception of safety and their academic achievement. A study by Lacoe (2012) found there is a direct correlation between students feeling unsafe in the classroom and their academic achievement. Cornell and Mayer (2010) reported that levels of school safety and school order are the basis for achievement gap, teacher retention, and student engagement and learning.

Research has indicated that unsafe schools, including environments where bullying and harassment occur from students or teachers, are associated with disengagement from school, increased absences, and the perception of students being intimidated or not achieving academically (Auty et al., 2008; Vooren, 2010). The learning environment, school climate, and school culture all affect students’ perception of school safety. Without a positive influence in these areas, learning and development do not take place (New Jersey Department of Education, 2011). Although research adequately has defined that an issue of school safety exists in the United States, the research lacks studies that examine students’ perceptions of safety and how those perceptions affect the students’ academic learning. Students suffer academically when they feel they are in an unsafe environment (Lacoe, 2012; Osborne & Walker, 2006; Kosciw, Greytak, Palmer, & Boesen, 2013). Due to the research that exists, it is reasonable to believe that teachers, students, administrators, and parents can have a positive impact on student safety through interaction and communication, school policy, and open communication with students, which fosters a positive school climate.

In this mixed-method study, the following questions were investigated in this study:

1. What is the relationship between students’ perceived safety and academic
performance?

2. Is there a difference in perception of school safety by students, teachers, and administrators?

3. What is the impact of school safety policies on perceived safety by students?

The completion of this study led the researcher to a deeper understanding and discovery of answers to these questions.

Summary of the Results

For the purpose of this case study, mixed methods afforded an in-depth examination of the perceptions of students, teachers, and administrators in four rural school districts on school safety, perceptions of safety, academic performance, and students’ interpretation of school safety policies. Using quantitative data to further explore students’ perceptions of school safety, which was discovered during student interviews, allowed the researcher to quantify the connections established during the qualitative phase (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). Specifically, the questions investigated in this study were the following:

1. What is the relationship between students’ perceived safety and academic performance?

2. Is there a difference in perception of school safety by students, teachers, and administrators?

3. What is the impact of school safety policies on perceived safety by students?

A mixed-methods design was employed for this study as it allowed the researcher to combine quantitative and qualitative data in different forms (Creswell, 2014; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). When created simultaneously, the research outcome is stronger than with either method.
performed separately (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007; Malina, Norreklit, & Selto, 2011). Furthermore, using this methodology revealed the perceptions of students on school safety and also how safety issues affect their academic learning.

In this study, two primary forms of data collection were conducted. The survey instrument was distributed electronically to four rural high school teachers and administrators, and interviews were conducted with students from the four rural high schools, followed by a paper survey that was given to each of the students interviewed. The questions asked on both the survey instrument and during the student interviews were designed to provide specific feedback to answer the three research questions. The survey instrument was completed using an online survey tool, Qualtrics. The data were then transferred to the SPSS software and analyzed using multiple statistical formulas. Student interviews were transcribed and responses were analyzed on a spreadsheet. Collecting and analyzing data gave the researcher a greater understanding of the research process.

The major findings from the three, primary forms of data collection were discussed individually and in the order the research took place in this study: (a) a survey instrument administered to 70 teachers and six administrators in four rural high schools; (b) student interviews where 38 students were interviewed, 10 students from each of the three high schools and eight students from the fourth high school; and (c) a Likert survey instrument used with the 38 students who were interviewed.

The number of teachers and administrators who received the online survey instrument via e-mail totaled 76 individuals. The survey was sent to four rural high school administrators to view prior to being sent out to teachers. The survey was then sent to the participants’ school e-
mail addresses using the Qualtrics software. Of the 76 surveys, 67 surveys were completed. This represents an overall participation rate from teachers and administrators of 88%. Table 6 summarizes the overall response and participation rate for teachers and administrators. The number of students receiving the survey instrument in the paper form totaled 38 students. Thirty-eight students completed the survey, which represents an overall participation rate from students of 100%. Table 9 summarizes the overall response and participation rate for students.

Regarding demographic data, the gender distribution was nearly equal for teachers and administrators with 47 males (47%) and 36 females (53%) completing the survey. Student demographic data were 16 males (42%) and 21 females (55%). All students participated in both the interviews and the paper survey.

The researcher utilized the three research questions to find trends in the responses by teachers and administrators. The first research question stated, “What is the relationship between students’ perceived safety and academic performance?” The survey instrument data were analyzed by the researcher. The Likert survey instrument questions were analyzed and compared between the teachers and administrators in the four high schools and then compared with the students from the four high schools. Once the data were analyzed and the researchers used the frequency analysis, the data revealed three themes that emerged from the students’, teachers’, and administrators’ responses on the Likert survey instrument and the student interviews. The following are the three themes that emerged on the first research question.

**Emerging Themes for Research Question 1**

1. Students, teachers, and principals believe their schools are safe.
2. Students believe teachers do not listen to them all the time.
3. Student academic learning does not take place if a student has any type of safety issue in his or her school day.

**Theme 1.** The surveys and interviews showed that 92% of students liked their school (see Table 14) and were proud to be students at their particular school. The majority of students, 71%, used similar responses, such as “I feel safe” or “I think it is pretty safe.” The other 11 commented, “We know everyone” or “It is a small school or town, and there are no issues.” All students believed their individual schools were safe, and they experienced feelings of safety within them. Table 17 represents teachers’ and administrators’ views on school safety, and 97% of teachers and administrators felt physically safe at their school. The data indicate they believed they had adequate disciplinary practices in the school and they were efficient with a rating of 87%. There are multiple statements by students and survey questions, showing that within their own schools, students, teachers, and administrators felt safe.

**Theme 2.** Students differed with teachers concerning students’ beliefs that teachers listen to them all the time. There is a need to ensure that students and teachers respect and trust one another and that students feel connected to the teachers (National Association of School Psychologists, 2006). Table 20 shows that 24% of the students did not believe teachers and administrators listen to what they have to say. This is a significant finding in this research because previous research indicates that students do not feel safe in schools when there is a breakdown of interpersonal and contextual variables that define a school’s climate (Thapa et al., 2012). Teachers and administrators differed from the students and 98% claimed they listened to students and heard what students had to say (see Table 21). Student HS1S2 stated during the interviews, “I feel like that all the staff cares about everyone and everyone tries to care for
everyone, but there is a lot of bullying that goes around that people don’t talk about.” Even though teachers appeared to care about students, it may occur only at a superficial level. The area of concern from these survey results is that teachers and administrators believe students come and talk to them if there is an issue, when students do not take that opportunity. This is an area that requires further investigating of why students don’t talk to teachers when a safety issue arises.

**Theme 3.** The final emerging theme that ties directly to Research Question 1 is that academic learning does not take place if a student has any type of safety issue going on in his or her school day. This is the most telling data the researcher found during the interview process. Ninety-two percent of the students claimed that school was a safe place, and 89% of students believed teachers wanted them to do well in their academics. Although the literature supports the importance of students feeling safe, the surveys and interviews showed an interesting correlation between how students perceived safety in their schools and how safety concerns affected their classroom work and academics. The interviews showed two totally different responses. The students being interviewed repeatedly responded that academic work depended on how they were feeling or what state of mind they were in going into the classroom.

The data from the surveys were in direct contrast of what students reported in the interviews. The academic conversation brought out a different response during the interview, and 36 of the 38 students responded that if some type of safety issue had happened during the day—an argument with a friend, girlfriend or boyfriend, parent, or staff member, being threatened or bullied, or any other type of safety concern—then there was very little academic learning. When asked how long it would take to cool down or get to a point where academic studies could commence, students responded from half a class period to multiple days. Students responded
they needed time to talk to a friend, teacher, or someone before there was significant attention given to the class and academic study. This was the opposite of feeling safe in the school and was an important finding in this research. Table 22 contains responses from students about how they dealt with safety issues that arise during the school day. The responses show how safety issues overshadow everything going on in the classroom and that students need time to deal with the safety issue prior to academic learning taking place. What is clear from their responses is that academic learning does not take place if a student has any type of safety issue going on in his or her mind.

The second research question to be analyzed was, “Is there a difference in perception of school safety by students, teachers, and administrators?” The survey instrument data were analyzed by the researcher. The Likert survey instrument questions were analyzed and compared between the teachers and administrators in the four high schools and then the students from the four high schools. Once analyzed, the data revealed two themes that emerged from the students’, teachers’ and administrators’ responses on the Likert survey instrument and the students’ interviews. The following are the two themes that emerged on the second research question: Students, teachers, and administrators felt similar about many areas of safety, but half of the teachers were confused about what bullying meant and whether it was happening. The following are the two themes that emerged from Research Question 2.

**Emerging Themes for Research Question 2**

1. Students only go to the teachers with safety issues 50% of the time.

2. Students and teachers both are verbally insulted and degraded by other students and sometimes parents.
Theme 1. Students reported to teachers with safety concerns only about 50% of the time. The data indicate that even though students believed they had a teacher or administrator they could talk to, they did not talk to them. There were 76 teachers who participated in this study and responded with a rate of 92% that students knew who to go to for help if they had any type of safety issue, yet 53% of the teachers and administrators believed that students do not report an issue, such as hitting someone, when it arises (see Table 23). Table 25 shows that 47% of teachers and administrators do not know when students are being bullied or picked on. The safety issue of bullying is brought out clearly that teachers and administrators struggle with identifying what bullying is and why students are being bullied. Table 25 represents that bullying or being teased is an area in which schools need to have more training. This is the only table where every response was evenly split between teachers and administrators on whether teasing and bullying even takes place. Forty-eight percent of teachers and administrators were in agreement that students in the school were teased about their clothing or physical appearance, 61% believed students were teased or put down due to their race or ethnicity, and 49% said students were teased about sexual topics. With a clear division in what students were being teased about, only 39% of teachers and administrators believed that bullying was a problem in the school, and 57% of teachers and administrators believed students were teased about their sexual orientation (see Table 25). Ironically, not one student during the interviews voiced a concern about being teased about sexual orientation; bullying was the main issue. Teachers and administrators need to be educated on what is considered bullying so adults and students know what the expectations are about bullying. Students, on the other hand, had very consistent ideas about bullying. Table 26 shows that 97% of the students agreed that bullying was not okay, and 76% of the students agreed that at no time was
it okay to physically hit someone, even if the student was threatened. Students seemed to have a better understanding of bullying than the adults.

Fifty-two percent of teachers and administrators reported they believed students were bored with school. The data in Table 14 show that 95% of students want to learn and 78% finish their homework. Eighty-nine percent believed getting good grades is important. These results suggest that students are engaged in the learning process and the idea students are bored is incorrect.

**Theme 2.** Students and teachers both were verbally insulted and degraded by other students and sometimes by parents. Table 28 represents different issues that arose during the past school year for teachers and administrators. Forty-nine percent of the teachers and administrators claimed they had a student say something rude or insulting to them, and 31% of them reported a parent being rude or insulting. The percentage went up when students were asked if other students were rude to them. Table 30 shows 60% of the students had received rude or insulting comments from other students. These are telling facts that there is clearly an issue with how students talk to each other and to teachers and administrators. Another area of concern that came out of the survey was that 50% of the students reported having something stolen from them by other students. This is an alarming percentage because having a fear of something being stolen will take the students’ minds off of schoolwork and affect their academics.

Twenty-six percent of the teachers and administrators reported they had had something stolen or damaged, with 50% reporting these types of issues bothered them a lot (see Table 31). Seventy percent of the teachers and administrators also reported being frustrated with this issue and with how they were treated by students, and this has led to 37% of teachers and
administrators being burned out of their jobs. Interaction between teachers and students is an area that must be addressed in order to make schools safer for both teachers and students.

The third and final research question stated, “What is the impact of school safety policies on perceived safety by students?” The survey instrument data were analyzed by the researcher. The Likert survey instrument questions were analyzed and compared between the teachers and administrators in the four high schools and then with the students from the four high schools. Once the data were analyzed and the researcher used the frequency analysis, the data revealed three themes that emerged from the students’, teachers’, and administrators’ responses on the Likert survey instrument and the students’ interviews. The following are the three themes that emerged on the third research question.

**Emerging Themes for Research Question 3**

1. Students are not familiar with school safety policies.
2. Zero-tolerance policies are not viewed the same between teachers and between students.
3. Half of the teachers (50%) do not believe student suspension will decrease future behaviors by the student.

The three themes that came out of the surveys and interviews and the disconnect between teachers and administrators and the students were enlightening for the researcher. Only seven students knew of any type of policy, and it was generally acknowledged by a very general comment like, “no fighting” or “no weapons.” “Yeah, a little bit, but I don’t know. It’s just school policy not to have any weapons on yourself or anything” (HS2S10). The researcher had to give specific examples to all of the students in order to get any kind of response that resembled a
school policy. Teachers and administrators, on the other hand, believed that school discipline was working. When asked if a student does something wrong, he or she will be punished, 80% of teachers and administrators said they would be punished (see Table 31). Teachers (88%) also believed that all students were treated equally when being punished for breaking rules. Students and teachers were consistent with their views of students being equally punished for breaking rules, as 78% of students believed this to be the case.

When talking to students about zero-tolerance policies, students went directly to no weapons and two commented on no drugs. Only 65% of teachers and administrators believed that zero-tolerance policies help maintain order in the schools. Zero-tolerance policies result in suspension or expulsion of the student. Teachers and administrators showed a 43% agreement that suspensions do not make a student less likely to misbehave in the future. Zero-tolerance policies need further research to determine the effects these policies have on students and their academic requirements. For this study, students had an idea of what zero-tolerance policies are, but only when prompted with examples. Schools have to better educate students on school policy in order to create a safe learning environment and have meaningful and effective school policy.

**Conclusion**

The conclusion focuses on recommendations to help students, teachers, administrators, and parents create a safe school environment where students do not have safety issues and student learning can take place. This mixed-methods research study investigated the following three research questions and discussed the summary of results:

1. What is the relationship between students’ perceived safety and academic performance?
2. Is there a difference in perception of school safety by students, teachers, and administrators?

3. What is the impact of school safety policies on perceived safety by students?

The first research question brought out three emerging themes and the results of the data collected were listed previously in the summary of results. The conclusion looks at specific areas rural schools in Idaho need to address to create a safe school environment.

The first research question had three themes that emerged from the research. The first theme was students, teachers, and principals felt that their schools were safe. Research has shown that school size, rural or urban, also plays a role on perceptions of how safe the school is and makes a great influence on educators’ safety perceptions of the school (Bakioglu & Geyin, 2009). Rural districts have the benefit that most teachers and students know each other. The area this research found that needs to be addressed by rural districts was that teachers and administrators believed students will come and talk to them if a safety issue arises, when the reality is that students fail to go to teachers or administrators. Students must feel both physically and emotionally safe from harm and believe the teachers and administrators have a genuine concern for their well-being (National Center for Technology Innovation and Center for Implementing Technology in Education, 2008). Schools must create a climate that promotes safety, where students believe it is safe to speak to adults. A positive school climate promotes students’ abilities to learn and encourages cooperative learning, group cohesion, respect, and mutual trust (Koth et al., 2008). Teachers and administrators must create a culture in the school that promotes safety and caring in order for students to be successful. Establishing and sustaining a school environment free of harassment, bullying, and discrimination should involve an
examination of a school’s climate and culture. School climate and culture have a profound impact on student achievement, behavior, and the school community’s culture (Elias et al., 1997).

The second theme that emerged was students believed teachers do not listen to them all the time. Previous research has indicated students do not feel safe in schools when there is a breakdown of interpersonal and contextual variables that define a school’s climate (Thapa et al., 2012). The trust must exist between teachers, administrators, and students. Students must know that when they report an issue to an adult in the school, the adult will take care of the problem. The biggest obstacles to effective discipline are inconsistencies of expectations and consequences (Lewis, 2007). Teachers and administrators must be consistent with the consequences of discipline and how they deal with safety concerns. Students must have the culture of trust in teachers and administrators or they are more likely to experience bullying and other types of peer violence, which may lead to absenteeism and reduced academic achievement within schools that do not create these types of safe classrooms where positive relationships exist (Thapa et al., 2012).

The final theme that emerged under the first research question was student academic learning does not take place if a student has any type of safety issue going on in his or her school day. Students, who have safety issues at school, also reported that they do poorly in school academically. Akiba (2010) found there exists a greater sense of fear within those students who perform at a lower academic level. The student interviews were the most telling when it came to safety issues. On the surveys, all but four of the 38 students commented on how hard it was for them or another student to do any schoolwork if there were safety issues going on. The students’
stories were clear about bullying and other safety issues that happen before, during, or after school. The response by one student sums up what most students commented on. Student HS1S5 stated,

    One time that happened to me right before class where someone was really rude. I think I cried the whole class, and I’m not usually a real sensitive person so things like that impact me hard, and I just laid my head on my desk the whole period, and there was no learning going on for me.

Schools must focus on the student’s issue at hand and deal with them when they occur. One issue students observed was that teachers will look the other way and not get involved. This was brought out in previous research that found many teachers try to avoid conflict or do not react to it when witnessed (Neeley, 2003). Another student (HS1S6) reported that safety issues had an effect on how he did in class. If he were being verbally abused or getting bullied, then it would drop his academics. The data from the surveys showed over 95% of the students believed their schools were safe on the survey instrument, but when interviewed, all but four students said their academics would suffer if they had a safety issue going on before, during, or after school.

Teachers and administrators must address the problem when it happens and get students back to feeling safe as quickly as possible. Most of the students reported in the interview they believed they could talk to a counselor, another friend, or even a teacher. These adults must be identified and students given time to talk to these people before learning can take place for that student.

Research Question 2 asked, “Is there a difference in perception of school safety by students, teachers, and administrators?” There were two emerging themes that came from the surveys and interviews. The first emerging theme was students only go to the teachers with safety
issues 50% of the time, which also deals with trust and concern for what will happen if a student reports safety issues to an adult. Students reported during the interviews that many of their teachers looked the other way or pretended not to notice when bullying or other safety issues occurred. Student HS1S7 described that many students brought knives to school because they are farm kids and have them in their pockets. When asked if teachers took those knives, the response was that most teachers pretended not to see them. When teachers or principals look the other way when bullying occurs or put certain students ahead of other students, it sends a message to the other students (Kelmon, 2014; Long, 2012; Wright, 2010). Teachers and administrators must be consistent in their discipline and create policies that address the safety issues of their school and community.

The second theme that emerged from the second research question was that both students and teachers were verbally insulted and degraded by other students and sometimes by parents. This is not something unique to rural school districts in Idaho. A researcher doing national research reported that 33% of females and 30% of males reported being bullied at school (Backus, 2010). Bullying, insults, and degrading were a common theme in the four rural school districts in this research. Administrators and teachers must create policies that address these issues and then uphold these policies. Teachers and administrators must take action when they hear these issues and cannot stand by and pretend they did not hear or take no action. This sends a clear message to all students and will define the culture of the school. Creating a safe, positive learning environment or school climate will reduce the amount of bullying and create success in academics. Lehr (2004), describing how the climate of the school is one factor that is always a characteristic of high academic performance, stated, “School climate is consistently identified as
a variable that is a characteristic of effective schools and one that is positively associated with academic success” (p. 76).

The final research question that was addressed in this study was, “What is the impact of school safety policies on perceived safety by students?” This was the biggest failure by the four districts that were part of this study. The students who were interviewed revealed that only seven of them knew a single school safety policy. With help from the researcher, all students identified a zero-tolerance policy as being “no weapons or guns,” but few could come up with other policies. School districts must create safety policies that are meaningful and address the safety issues that students are dealing with on a daily basis. Previous research concluded that only after violence happens does a district spend the time necessary to create the policy and programs needed to prevent such events (Eller, 2006; Juvonen, 2001). School districts have safety issues going on that range from bullying to carrying weapons in the school. Six of the students interviewed reported seeing knives in the school, and teachers reported that weapons were not an issue. This also is not uncommon. In other research, students reported seeing knives, drugs, or alcohol at school at a much higher rate than was reported by teachers in the same school (Booren, 2007). The safety issues are there and they must be addressed. One of the issues is that schools need to create policies to address school safety in order to help ease parents’ fear over the safety of their students in schools (Cowan et al., 2013; Muschert et al., 2014). The policies need to address the issues going on in the school. Zero-tolerance policies are not favored by teachers, and in this research, only half of the teachers thought that zero-tolerance policies would have a positive effect on students and keep them from doing the same thing in the future. Policies need to address safety issues directly. Research has been conducted on the implementation of
school-wide positive behavioral supports, which promotes enhanced outcomes in problem behavior, academic achievement, and perceptions of school safety (McIntosh et al., 2011). The policies need to be created collaboratively with parents, teachers, students, administrators, and local law enforcement. The policies then need to be taught to the same groups of people so everyone has an understanding of what these policies are and how they will affect students. Districts and schools must work collaboratively with parents and community stakeholders to create crisis plans, discipline policies, and ensure consistent enforcement of these policies (Diepenbrock, 2010). Ensuring schools establish effective discipline practices helps students understand how behavior relates to academic success and how a safe learning environment benefits all students (Luiselli et al., 2005). Policy is the key to creating the safe school environment students need to achieve success in school.

**Impact of Limitations**

Simon and Goes stated, “Every study, no matter how well it is conducted, has some limitations. It is always possible that future research may cast doubt on the validity of any hypothesis or the conclusions from a study” (2013). The first limitation of this study was the number of students who participated in the interviews and surveys. In order to have confidence that the survey results are representative, it is important to have a large number of randomly selected participants in each group. For a sample size of 20, the margin of error is a 22.4%, while 50 would be a margin of error of 10% (Niles, 2006). This research consisted of 38 student interviews and 38 student surveys. To reach a percentage of error that is better than a 14% margin of error, 50 or more students would need to be interviewed and given the survey. The researcher assumed that 38 student interviews represented the four rural high schools in this
The second limitation of this research was depending on the students to provide truthful and honest answers during the interviews. The researcher met each of the students and established a relationship with each of them. The questions during the interview were open-ended, and students were given time to discuss and elaborate on each and every question. The researcher spent the time to listen to what students were saying to help build the trust of each participant.

The third limitation to this study was the possibility for interview bias. Research design of any sort has to grapple with the issue of bias or the potential distortion of research outcomes due to unintended influences from the researcher as well as research participants (Roller, 2012). The researcher piloted the questions with students prior to conducting the interviews to deal with any biases or other issues related to the biases in the interview and questions.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

Further research could focus more attention on discovering the differences between a rural school and an urban school and the perceptions a student may have on school safety and how that perception impacts student achievement. Student perception of safety issues may differ between an urban school and rural school.

Second, further research is needed to focus on the exact issues that cause students to feel unsafe. The interviews brought out bullying as the top issue, and bullying would be another research topic on its own. There were, however, safety issues of fighting, resource officers in the building, and weapons that were also mentioned, as well as issues dealing with family members,
friends, enemies, and teachers and who caused the safety issue. All of these areas warrant future research.

Zero-tolerance policies are another area that demands future research. Zero-tolerance policies have been created in over 75% of schools in the United States (National Association of School Psychologists, 2001). Many educators believe that zero-tolerance policies have become a tool that school administrators use to remove difficult students from school but have no lasting effect on the student (National Association of School Psychologists, 2001). This policy needs to be addressed to determine the validity of a zero-tolerance school.

Finally, defining positive school culture and how that affects students in the classroom is a major theme from this research. When students know they are in a safe environment where they can trust adults and other students is when learning can take place. Defining exactly what that is will help school districts build the ultimate safe school environment.

**Implications for Professional Practice**

Implications for educational policy can be made as a result of this study. Given the numerous research studies that support the issue of student safety and the affect it has on academics, local school boards need to set school safety policy, create adult mentors, address the issue of bullying, and construct positive school climate (Lacoe, 2012; Osborne & Walker, 2006).

Students need to have an adult to talk to, and high school counselors and other mental health service providers need to be available to deal with the mental health of students. Cowan et al. (2013) stated, “Access to school-based mental health services and supports directly improves students’ physical and psychological safety, academic performance, and social–emotional learning” (p. 5). High schools must have adequate support in staffing for mental health. This
would include counselors, school psychologists, school nurses, and social workers. This group of mental health service providers need the opportunity to train teachers and administrators to help deal with the mental issues that arise with students (Cowan et al., 2013).

This study adds to current literature and fills in gaps that existed in research specific to the students’ perceived fears and how it affects their academic performance. School climate is the first area where school districts must address student safety concerns. Students need to feel safe in the school. School climate must create an atmosphere where students feel they belong, are emotionally and physically safe, and believe they are valued (Mwale, 2006; Trump, 2010). School climate will continue at the top of the list for creating a safe learning environment for all students. School leaders need to address policies, programs, and practices that create a school climate conducive to student learning. By creating and implementing good policy programs and practices, schools can create and improve school climate (Trump, 2010).

School safety policies must also be addressed and policies must be created that include participation and input from administration, teachers, students, parents, and law enforcement in order to create policies and interventions that will increase student safety (Bailey, 2002). Zero-tolerance policies need to be examined and updated. A recent article on zero tolerance indicated that the time has come to end zero-tolerance policies (Stack, 2015). Students who are suspended for a long term lose the connection with students and adults at the school, resulting in a disconnect from the school. Zero-tolerance policies suspend students for any issue that relates to the zero tolerance, and the main goal of schools should be keeping students engaged in learning and the school process (Stack, 2015). Policies must be taught and practiced by students and administrators in order for the policies to have any real meaning. Students must understand the
policies and why they are there. When districts discuss best practices in school safety, the following eight processes outline areas that should be considered:

- Integrate services through collaboration.
- Implement multi-tiered systems of supports.
- Improve access to school-based mental health supports.
- Integrate school safety and crisis or emergency prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery.
- Balance physical and psychological safety.
- Employ effective, positive school discipline.
- Allow for consideration of context.
- Acknowledge that sustainable and effective improvement takes patience and commitment (Cowan et al., 2013, pp. 4–8).

Schools must create a school safety team, including teachers, administrators, counselors, psychologists, local legal authorities, students, parents, and other community members. This team must focus on the overall school climate, as well as crisis and emergency preparedness (Cowan et al., 2013). Students, teachers, and staff need to be trained in school safety so they understand how behavior relates to academic success and that the policy is created to promote a safe learning environment and be a benefit to all students and staff of the school (Luiselli et al., 2005). Policy needs to address issues such as school environment, bullying, problem behaviors, attendance, zero-tolerance, and mental health issues (Chen & Weikart, 2008; Diepenbrock, 2010; McIntosh et al., 2011; Shindler, Jones, Williams, Taylor, & Cadenas, 2009; Thapa et al., 2012). Teachers and administrators must understand the policy and then be consistent in upholding that
policy. Staff that will consistently uphold policy and hold students accountable in the school will help create a positive school environment where students know they will be held accountable for breaking policy (Brand, 2011; Gregory & Cornell, 2011; Thapa et al., 2012).

High schools need to address the issue of policies to create a positive school climate, which leads to better student engagement, less discipline, and high student academics (Akiba, 2010; Brand, 2011). Teachers need to be in the halls between passing periods, resource officers may be hired where appropriate, and policies need to be created that reduce the problems that exist in schools such as bullying, vandalized property, rumors, and degrading each other (Blosnich & Bossarte, 2011; Rippetoe, 2009; Sprague et al., 2000).

Finally, when policies are created to improve school climate and students, teachers, parents, administrators, and the community understand and follow this policy, student achievement will increase, students absences will decrease, prosocial and appropriate behaviors become a norm, and suspensions decrease while staff job satisfaction increases (Byrnes et al., 2009).

This study also adds to the literature on the impact of safety concerns on student achievement. The online, Likert-scale survey and the interviews highlighted themes about issues of bullying, fighting, and some hints to weapons, which all have an adverse effect on student learning. This information had been lacking from the literature. Bullying came out as the clear safety issue for the students who were interviewed. Good anti-bullying policy and training must happen for both teachers and students. Establishing and sustaining a school environment free of harassment, bullying, and discrimination should involve an examination of a school’s climate and culture. School climate and culture have a profound impact on student achievement,
behavior, and the school community’s culture (Elias et al., 1997). The significant, numerous findings in this study adds to the body of literature and provides the foundation for promoting the importance of students’ perception of school safety and the effect it has on their academics in a rural, high school setting.

**Final Reflection**

The final thoughts and reflection by the researcher over the past two years of study, which included long hours of sacrifice, working with administrators, teachers, and students, has been a rewarding experience where quality data were brought to light and significant information was recorded and can be used for the betterment of school safety, including school climate, policy, and student achievement.

Students must feel safe in school in order for them to be engaged in the learning process and for them to achieve academic success (Bucholz & Sheffler, 2009; Mayer, 2007; Parrett & Budge, 2012). The goal of schools should be to educate students from all backgrounds, economic status, and ethnicity. Mental health issues exist in students today, and schools need to have the resources and staff to address this issue (Cowan et al., 2013). The Pennsylvania State Education Association (2010) summed it up by stating, “Students learn best and achieve their full potential when they are physically, socially, emotionally, academically safe, and in safe and orderly classrooms (p. 1). This should be the goal and direction of all school leadership to create the school climates that adhere to good school policy and then uphold that policy in a consistent manner.

The researcher also reflected on the fact that both qualitative and quantitative data needed to be collected for this study because the data received from surveys and interviews contrasted
on multiple issues. This is important because the interviews told the story of the mental issues that the majority of students dealt with in the school. These students told stories that gave the researcher the direction and data for making schools a safer and better place where students can become engaged in the learning process. As stated by many researchers, using the concurrent procedure in this mixed method to converge quantitative and qualitative data can provide a comprehensive analysis of the research problem (Creswell, 2003, 2014; Driscoll et al., 2007).

The researcher would not have received the whole picture of students’ perceptions of safety without using a mixed-method approach, and even though it was frustrating, required long hours, and was exhausting at times, the interviews were crucial in determining what creates an unsafe feeling in students.

This journey to discover student’s perceptions of school safety and how these perceptions affect their academic performance has reached its destination with direction on policy, safety, and academics for school leaders to follow, but the journey does not come to an end. The enlightenment of the data has brought out new questions and concerns that have opened a new book of inquiry, discovery, and direction. The quest to become better, the need to learn more, and the ability to improve education have only created the will to continue on.
References


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http://www.qualtrics.com/researchsuite/#enterprise


etd-1027109-215805


http://researchdesignreview.com/tag/interviewer-bias/


Appendix A

High School 1 (HS1) Approval Letter

February 27, 2014

Northwest Nazarene University
Attn: HRRC Committee
Helstrom Business Center 1st Floor
623 S. University Boulevard
Nampa, Idaho 83686

RE: Research Proposal Site Access for Mr. Andrew Grover

Dear HRRC Members:

This letter is to inform the HRRC that Administration at New District has reviewed the proposed dissertation research plan including subjects, intervention, assessment procedures, proposed data and collection procedures, data analysis, and purpose of the study. Mr. Grover has permission to conduct his research with students, teachers and administrators in the school District. The authorization dates for this research study are July 2014 to April 2015.

Respectfully,

[Signature]

Exemplary Education Through Community & School
Appendix B

High School 2 (HS2) Approval Letter

February 27, 2014

Northwest Nazarene University
Attn: HRRC Committee
Helstrom Business Center 1st Floor
623 S. University Boulevard
Nampa, Idaho 83686

RE: Research Proposal Site Access for Mr. Andrew Grover

Dear HRRC Members:

This letter is to inform the HRRC that the Administration at the School District has reviewed the proposed dissertation research plan including subjects, intervention, assessment procedures, proposed data and collection procedures, data analysis, and purpose of the study. He has permission to conduct his research with students, teachers and administrators in the School District. The authorization dates for this research study are July 2014 to April 2015.

Sincerely,

[Signature]
March 5, 2014
Northwest Nazarene University
Attn: HRRC Committee
Helstrom Business Center 1st Floor
623 S. University Boulevard
Nampa, Idaho 83686

RE: Research Proposal Site Access for Mr. Andrew Grover

Dear HRRC Members:
This letter is to inform the HRRC that the School District has reviewed the proposed dissertation research plan including subjects, intervention, assessment procedures, proposed data and collection procedures, data analysis, and purpose of the study. Mr. Grover has permission to conduct his research with students, teachers and administrators in the School District. The authorization dates for this research study are July 2014 to April 2015.

Superintendent
Appendix D

High School 4 (HS4) Approval Letter

March 5, 2014

Northwest Nazarene University
Attn: HRRC Committee
Helstrom Business Center 1st Floor
623 S. University Boulevard
Nampa, Idaho 83686

RE: Research Proposal Site Access for Mr. Andrew Grover

Dear HRRC Members:

This letter is to inform the HRRC that Administration at the Marsing Joint School District has reviewed the proposed dissertation research plan including subjects, intervention, assessment procedures, proposed data and collection procedures, data analysis, and purpose of the study. Mr. Grover has permission to conduct his research with students, teachers and administrators in the Marsing Joint School District. The authorization dates for this research study are July 2014 to April 2015.

Respectfully,

[Signature]

OUR VISION
To provide effective schools that have the following characteristics:
Commitment to learning as the number one priority
Strong community involvement
Strong instructional leadership
High expectations for students and staff
Commitment to mastery of all basic skills by all students
Clear and focused school mission
Positive school climate
Consistency among staff in the treatment of students
Frequent and careful monitoring of student progress

OUR MISSION
To educate all students to lead productive, satisfying and responsible lives now and in the future.

WE MEASURE OUR SUCCESS ONE STUDENT AT A TIME
Appendix E

Parent Consent

Dear ________,

I am currently researching school safety and how it affects students’ academic achievement in rural schools districts. I will be conducting research in four local schools and it will include students from the 6-12 grades of school. This study is part of my graduate program at Northwest Nazarene University. The study has been reviewed by the Research Review Committee at Northwest Nazarene University and has been successfully approved.

The benefits that may result from the research are: improvement in school safety, students perceived feelings towards schools safety, and an increase in student academics.

The procedures are as follows:

- The research project will take place over the fall semester of school. During that time, I will send out a permission slip for selected students, grades 6-12 to participate in an interview on school safety.
- Data will be collected from the responses of the interviews, and compiled throughout the 2014 fall semester.
- Teachers and administrators will be given a survey on their perception of school safety.
- All survey data will be kept confidential and each of the surveys will be anonymous to make sure that students are protected.
- There will be no names used in the research or any publication of the results. It is confidential and will be kept that way.

I anticipate that there is minimal risk involved for your student’s learning over the course of the study. Interviews will be given individually at the end of a class period, at lunch, or before or after school, whatever is the most convenient for the student. The interviews will take 15 to 20 minutes to complete. The interview will be given by the same researcher each time.

Your student's participation in this project is completely voluntary. In addition to your permission, your student will also be asked if he or she would like to take part in this project. The choice to participate or not will not impact your student’s grades or status at school.

All information that is obtained during this research project will be kept strictly secure and will not become a part of any student’s school record. The results of this study may be used for a research paper and presentation. There will be no names on the surveys. There will be questions on age and gender.

In the space at the bottom of this letter, please indicate whether you do or do not want your student to participate in this project. The second copy is to keep for your records. If you have any
questions about this research project, please feel free to contact me either by mail, e-mail, or telephone. Please keep a copy of this form for your records.

The results of my research will be available after August 1, 2015. If you would like to have a copy of the results of my research or have any questions, please contact me at 208- -1141 or my advisor, Dr. Loredana Werth, at 208- -8062.

Sincerely,

Andrew E. Grover, Ed.S.
Doctoral Candidate
Northwest Nazarene University
E-mail: agrover@nnu.edu
Telephone: 208.275.

********************************************************************************

I have read this form. I understand that nothing negative will happen if I do not let my student participate. I know that I can stop his/her participation at any time. I voluntarily agree to let my student participate in this study as follows:

YES _______________________________ may participate in this study.
NO _______________________________ may NOT participate in this study.

Student’s printed name:  ___________________________________
Parent/Guardian printed name: ___________________________________
Parent/Guardian signature:  _____________________________________
Date: __________________________
Sincerely,

Andrew Grover
Appendix F

Participant Debrief

Thank you for your participation in this study. Student safety and student achievement have been shown to be correlated and this study will help identify some of the safety concerns that students have that may help to increase their academic performance. I appreciate your involvement in helping identify some of these safety issues and how to better meet the safety needs of students in today’s schools.

After I have the chance to analyze the data, if you would like a copy, please contact me and I will provide you a copy of the results. This study will be completed by August, 2015.

If you have any questions or concerns, Andrew Grover can be contacted by phone at 208.963.9634; e-mail at agrover@nnu.edu or you can contact my dissertation chair at lwert@nnu.edu and 208.467. .

Thank you for your participation.

Sincerely,

Andrew E. Grover, Ed.S.

Doctoral Candidate
Northwest Nazarene University
E-mail: agrover@nnu.edu
Telephone: 208.275.
Appendix G

Informed Consent Participant

Participant's name (Please Print): _______________________________________________

I authorize Andrew Grover of Department of Graduate Education, Northwest Nazarene University, Nampa, Idaho, and/or any designated research assistants to gather information from me on the topic of school safety.

I understand that the general purposes of the research are to gain an understanding of students, teachers, and administrators perceptions of school safety. I will be asked to be part of an interview and/or complete a survey. The approximate total time of my involvement will be 10-20 minutes.

I am aware that I may choose not to answer any questions that I find embarrassing or offensive.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may refuse to participate or discontinue my participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled.

I understand that if, after my participation, I experience any undue anxiety or stress or have questions about the research or my rights as a participant, that may have been provoked by the experience, Andrew Grover will be available for consultation, and will also be available to provide direction regarding medical assistance in the unlikely event of injury incurred during participation in the research.

Confidentiality of research results will be maintained by the researcher. My individual results will not be released without my written consent.

The potential benefits/risks of the research study are to identify what safety issues students, teachers, and administrators have and how these issues can be addressed to create a safe learning environment for students and help improve student academic achievement. The risks in participating are minimal, there will be no repercussion for not participating in this study.

______________________________________________    ______________
Signature of Participant                   Date

There are two copies of this consent form included. Please sign one and return it to the researcher. The other copy you may keep for your records.

Questions and comments may be addressed to Andrew Grover or Dr. Loredana Werth, Education, Northwest Nazarene University, 623 University Blvd, Nampa, ID, 83686, Phone (208) 275-. 
Appendix H

Informed Consent Minor

Student's name: ________________________________

Parent's/Guardian's name: ________________________________

I authorize Andrew Grover of Department of Graduate Education, Northwest Nazarene University, Nampa, Idaho, and/or any designated research assistants to gather information from me on the topic of school safety.

I understand that the general purposes of the research are to gain an understanding of students, teachers, and administrators perceptions of school safety. I will be asked to be part of an interview and/or complete a survey. The approximate total time of my student’s involvement will be 10-20 minutes.

My student and I have been assured that my student may refuse to discuss any matters that cause discomfort or that my student might experience as an unwanted invasion of privacy. I am aware that my student may choose not to answer any questions that my student finds embarrassing or offensive.

I understand that my student’s participation is voluntary and that my student may refuse to participate or discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which my student may be otherwise entitled.

This study is unlikely to cause my student distress. However, I understand that if, after participation, my student experiences any undue anxiety or stress or has questions about the research or his/her rights as a participant that may have been provoked by the experience, Andrew Grover will be available for consultation, and will also be available to provide direction regarding medical assistance in the unlikely event of injury incurred during participation in the research.

I understand that confidentiality of research results will be maintained by the researcher. No individual results will be released without my written consent as the parent or guardian of the particular student.

The potential benefits/risks of the research study are to identify what safety issues students, teachers, and administrators have and how these issues can be addressed to create a safe learning environment for students and help improve student academic achievement. The risks in participating are minimal, there will be no repercussion for not participating in this study.
There are two copies of this consent form included. Please sign one and return it to the researcher. The other copy you may keep for your records.

Questions and comments may be addressed to Andrew Grover or Dr. Loredana Werth, Education, Northwest Nazarene University, 623 University Blvd, Nampa, ID, 83686, Phone (208) -9634
Appendix I

Informed Consent Responsible Party

Responsible Party’s name
(Please Print): _______________________________________________

I authorize Andrew Grover of Graduate of Education, Northwest Nazarene University, Nampa, Idaho, and/or any designated research assistants to request volunteers and gather information from your student’s public school on the topic of: Safe Schools: Students Perception of School Safety and how it affects their Academic Achievement.

I understand that the general purposes of the research are to gain an understanding of students, teachers, and administrators perceptions of school safety. Volunteers will be asked to be part of an interview and/or complete a survey. The approximate total time of my student’s involvement will be 10-20 minutes.

I understand that my permission is voluntary and that I may refuse to grant permission or discontinue my permission at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled.

I understand that if I have questions about the research Andrew Grover will be available for consultation

Confidentiality of research results will be maintained by the researcher.

The potential benefits/risks of the research study are to identify what safety issues students, teachers, and administrators have and how these issues can be addressed to create a safe learning environment for students and help improve student academic achievement. The risks in participating are minimal. There will be no repercussion for not participating in this study.

______________________________________________    ______________
Signature of responsible party                   Date

There are two copies of this consent form included. Please sign one and return it to the researcher. The other copy you may keep for your records.

Questions and comments may be addressed to Andrew Grover or Dr. Loredana Werth, Education, Northwest Nazarene University, 623 University Blvd, Nampa, ID, 83686, Phone (208) -9634
Appendix J

Counselor Confidential Form

I, ________________, agree to keep all information confidential with the students, (three students from my school) I select to be interviewed by for Andy Grover, Doctoral Student at Northwest Nazarene University. All chosen students will be kept confidential and I will deliver these names to Mr. Grover.

Thank you,

Name:_____________________________________ Title:_________________________

Signature of responsible party: _____________________   Date:_________________________
Appendix K
Consent to Recording of the Interviews

I, ________________, understand and agree to have the interviews recorded. This is to make sure that all information in the interviews are remembered and will be transcribed to help with the research of school safety. All information will remain confidential only be seen by the transcriber and Andy Grover, Doctoral Student at Northwest Nazarene University. No names of students will be used in any of the research and everything will be kept confidential.

Thank you,

______________________________________________    ______________
Signature of responsible party     Date

______________________________________________    ______________
Signature of Student       Date

Questions and comments may be addressed to Andrew Grover or Dr. Loredana Werth, Education, Northwest Nazarene University, 623 University Blvd, Nampa, ID, 83686, Phone (208) 275-
Appendix L

Debrief Statement Letter

January, 2014

Thank you for your participation in this study. Student safety and student achievement have been shown to be correlated and this study will help identify some of the safety concerns that students have that may help to increase their academic performance. I appreciate your involvement in helping identify some of these safety issues and how to better meet the safety needs of students in today’s schools.

After I have the chance to analyze the data, if you would like a copy, please contact me and I will provide you a copy of the results. This study will be completed by August, 2015.

In the meantime, if you have questions or concerns, Andrew Grover can be contacted via e-mail at agrover@melbaschools.org, via telephone at 208-275- , or by writing: Andrew Grover, Superintendent Melba School District, PO Box 185 Melba, ID 83641.

Thank you again for your participation.

Sincerely,

Andrew Grover
Melba School District

- - @ - -
Appendix M

Survey Opt-In Form

My name is Andrew Grover a doctoral student in Educational Leadership at Northwest Nazarene University is conducting a research study related to Students’ perception of school safety and how it affects them academically. With this study, I hope to improve the educational experience and academic success students and create learning environments that are conducive to safety and learning. I believe that the pursuit of student wellbeing is vital to student and school success. I appreciate your involvement in helping me investigate how to better serve and meet the needs of students and their schools.

You will complete a survey instrument indicating your level of efficacy with school safety as well as some demographic information that will help me make further contributions to school safety programs and potential staff development.

You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a current teacher or administrator in one of the four rural school districts participating in this research. By continuing with this survey, you are agreeing to take part in the study.

If you have questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at: 208-9634 or via e-mail at agrover@nnu.edu.

☐ Yes, I agree to take part in this study.

☐ No, I will not take part in this study.
Appendix N

NIH Certification of Completion

Certificate of Completion

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research certifies that Andrew Grover successfully completed the NIH Web-based training course “Protecting Human Research Participants”.

Date of completion: 10/23/2013
Certification Number: 1308627
Optional Administration

Do not write your name on this survey, so that your answers remain private and confidential. The purpose of the survey is to help schools maintain a positive school climate that is conducive to learning. *Please answer these questions honestly.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Are you a teacher taking this survey?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Are you an administrator taking this survey?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Student Engagement in School Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How do students feel about going to this school? Although there will be differences among students, how do most students generally feel?</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Students generally like this school.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Students are proud to be at this school.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Students feel that school is boring.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Students finish their homework at this school.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Students hate going to school.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Getting good grades is very important to most students here.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### School Disciplinary Structure Scale

7. In some schools there is a great deal of consistency in discipline practices throughout the school, so that all teachers and staff have the same expectations for student behavior and there are well-established responses to misbehavior. In other schools, there is much less consistency in discipline practices. Rate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>There is little consistency in school discipline practices.</th>
<th>There is great consistency in discipline practices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Thinking about your school, would you agree or disagree with the statements below? Pick the answer that is closest to your view.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8. The punishment for breaking school rules is the same for all students.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Students at this school only get punished when they deserve it.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Students know the school rules for student conduct.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. If a student does something wrong, he or she will definitely be punished.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>12. Students can get away with breaking the rules at this school pretty easily.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>13. Students get suspended</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>14. The adults at this school are too strict.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. When students are accused of doing something wrong, they get a chance to explain.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Students get suspended for minor things.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Teacher Perceptions of Suspension Practices Scale
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do you agree or disagree with the following statements about your school?</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17. Zero tolerance makes a significant contribution to maintaining order at this school. (Zero tolerance is defined as the practice of imposing an automatic and severe punishment for any violation of a certain rule.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>18. Zero tolerance sends a clear message to disruptive students about inappropriate behaviors in school.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Suspension makes students less likely to misbehave in the future.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>20. Out-of-school suspension is unnecessary if we provide a positive school climate and challenging instruction.</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Teacher Respect for Students |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Most teachers and other adults at this school … | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Somewhat Disagree | Somewhat Agree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
| 21. …care about all students. | | | | | | |
| 22. …want all students to do | | | | | | |
23. …listen to what students have to say.

24. …treat students with respect.

**Student Willingness to Seek Help From Teachers Scale**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do you agree or disagree with the following statements about your school?</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25. Students know who to go to for help if they have been treated badly by another student.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. Students feel comfortable asking for help from teachers if there is a problem with a student.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. Students report it when one student hits another.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. Students are encouraged to report bullying and aggression.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>29. Teachers take action to solve the problem when students report</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30. Teachers know when students are being picked on or being bullied.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Prevalence of Teasing and Bullying

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>These questions are about teasing and bullying you see at your school. Do not include friendly teasing that does not hurt anyone's feelings.</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>31. Students in this school are teased about their clothing or physical appearance.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32. Students in this school are teased or put down because of their race or ethnicity.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33. There is a lot of teasing about sexual topics at this school.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34. Bullying is a problem at this school.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35. Students in this school are teased or put down about their sexual orientation.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Teacher Concerns About Discipline and Safety Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How much do you agree or disagree with these statements?</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>36. I am treated with respect by students at this school.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37. I feel supported by the disciplinary practices for students at this school.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38. I feel physically safe at this school.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
39. I worry about someone committing a shooting at this school.

40. I feel that there is adequate safety and security in this school.

41. The disciplinary practices at this school are effective.

---

**Student Aggression Toward Teachers Scale**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Have any of the following happened to you personally at school this year? This includes school events like field trips, school dances, and sports events.</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>One time</th>
<th>More than once</th>
<th>Many times</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>42. A student stole or damaged my personal property.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43. A student said rude or insulting things to me.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44. A student threatened to harm me.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45. A student threatened me with a weapon.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46. A student physically attacked, pushed, or hit me.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Parent or Staff Conflict Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Have any of the following happened to you personally at school this year? This includes school events like field trips, school dances, and sports events.</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>One time</th>
<th>More than once</th>
<th>Many times</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>47. A parent said rude or insulting things to me.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48. A parent threatened to complain about me to the administration.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49. A parent threatened to harm me.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50. A parent physically attacked, pushed, or hit me.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51. A colleague said rude or insulting things to me.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52. A colleague threatened to harm me.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Teacher Reactions to Aggression Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(If any of the above happened: ) You have just answered some questions about being insulted, threatened, or harmed in some way at school. Think about the overall impact of these experiences. How did they affect you?</th>
<th>Not true</th>
<th>A little true</th>
<th>Somewhat true</th>
<th>Definitely true</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>53. They bothered me a lot.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54. I felt frustrated.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55. I felt sad.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56. I felt angry.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>57. I felt burned out about my job.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>58. It made me think about whether to continue teaching.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Demographic Items

These final questions are used for demographic purposes to identify any trends associated
with gender or years of teaching experience.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>59. Are you male or female?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>60. How many years have you been teaching?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 10 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| 61. What are your suggestions for improving the school climate at this school? Please write this with the understanding that it might be quoted in a summary report to school administrators. |

Effectiveness of School Programs Ratings Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>62. Does your school have one or more of the following programs in place this year? For each program that you know about, please rate how effective it has been.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Don’t have it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-bullying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>training for teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict resolution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective School-wide Discipline (ESD) or Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individualized behavior plans for disruptive students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentoring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Method to report a safety concern anonymously</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer mediation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem solving or social skills curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student assistance programming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substance abuse prevention/intervention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Truancy prevention/intervention</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix P

Student Interview Questions

Authoritative School Climate Survey: Secondary School Version  (Grades 9-12)

Instructions
This survey is being given to students in grades 9-12. The questions will ask how you feel about your school and how students get along with one another and their teachers. We want to know your opinion in order to learn ways to improve your school.

It should take about 5-10 minutes to complete the survey.

1. Are you male or female?

   Male
   Female

2. What grade level are you in?

   9th
   10th
   11th
   12th

3. How long have you been at this school?

   This is my first year in this school.
   This is my second year in this school.
   This is my third year in this school.
   This is my fourth year or more in this school.

4. How many different schools have you attended, starting with Kindergarten and including the school you are attending today?

   I have attended one school since Kindergarten.
   I have attended a total of two schools including this one since Kindergarten.
   I have attended a total of three schools including this one since Kindergarten.
   I have attended a total of four schools including this one since Kindergarten.
   I have attended a total of five schools including this one since Kindergarten.
   I have attended a total of six schools including this one since Kindergarten.
   I have attended a total of seven or more schools including this one since Kindergarten.

5. What grades did you make on your last report card?

   Mostly A's
   Mostly A's and B's
   Mostly B's
   Mostly B's and C's
Mostly C's
Mostly C's and D's
Mostly D's and F's

**Student Activities scale**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>6. How many school activities have you participated in this year?</th>
<th>None</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of clubs, such as Key Club, Spanish Club, Honor Society</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of performing arts groups, such as band, chorus, or drama</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of sports teams, such as basketball or track</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of other activities, such as student government, ROTC</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>7a. How many days have you been suspended from school this year?</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I have not been suspended from school this year.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have been suspended for one day.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have been suspended for two days.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have been suspended for three days.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have been suspended four days.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have been suspended five or more days.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7b. (If answer above indicates a school suspension:) Think about the last time you were suspended. What was the main reason for your suspension? (Choose only one)

- Fighting or hitting someone
- Threatening to hurt someone
- Having a weapon
- Breaking a school rule about alcohol, tobacco, or drugs
- Being late or tardy, cutting class, or not being where supposed to be
- Using bad language, arguing with a teacher, or talking in class
- Lying or cheating
- Dress code violation (such as wearing something that is not allowed)
- Breaking a school rule about cell phones, music players, computers, or other technology
- Some other reason

**Threat Survey Questions** (Cornell, 2015)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>8. Has another student threatened to harm you in the past 30 days?</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I have not been threatened.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have been threatened, but the person did not really mean it.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have been threatened and it was serious.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>9. What did the other student threaten to do to you?</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Injure me without a weapon (e.g., hit me).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Injure me with a weapon such as a club, knife, or gun.
Nothing specific, just a threat to hurt or harm me.

10. Did you tell anyone about the threat?

Yes
No

11. What happened with the threat?

The threat is over and nothing happened.
The threat is not over and might be carried out.
Nothing specific, just a threat to hurt or harm me.

12. Please explain why you have not told anyone that you were threatened. Open-ended responses coded as:

1 Threat not that serious
2 Help not necessary
3 Fear of retaliation
4 Concern over snitching
5 Help would be ineffective
Other

Student Engagement Scale

How do you feel about going to this school? Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

13. I like this school.

14. I am proud to be a student at this school.

15. I feel like I belong at this school.

16. I usually finish my homework.

17. I want to learn as much as I can at school.

18. Getting good grades is very important to me.

School Disciplinary Structure Scale

Thinking about your school, would you agree or disagree with the statements below? Pick the answer that is closest to how you feel.

19. The school rules are fair.

20. The punishment for breaking school rules is the same for all students.
21. Students at this school are only punished when they deserve it.

22. Students are suspended without a good reason.

23. When students are accused of doing something wrong, they get a chance to explain.

24. Students are treated fairly regardless of their race or ethnicity.

25. The adults at this school are too strict.

**Student Support Scale—Respect for Students Subscale**

Most teachers and other adults at this school …

| 26. … care about all students. |
| 27. … want all students to do well. |
| 28. … listen to what students have to say. |
| 29. … treat students with respect. |

**Student Support Scale—Willingness to Seek Help Subscale**

How much do you agree or disagree with these

| 30. There are adults at this school I could talk with if I had a personal problem. |
| 31. If I tell a teacher that someone is bullying me, the teacher will do something to help. |
| 32. I am comfortable asking my teachers for help with my schoolwork. |
| 33. There is at least one teacher or other adult at this school who really wants me to do well. |
| 34. If another student talked about killing someone, I would tell one of the teachers or staff at school. |
| 35. If another student brought a gun to school, I would tell one of the teachers or staff at school. |
36. I feel safe in this school.

**Academic Expectations Scale**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How much do you agree or disagree with these statements?</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>37. My teachers expect me to work hard.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38. My teachers really want me to learn a lot.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39. My teachers are happy if I do just enough to pass.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40. My teachers expect a lot from students.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41. My teachers do not really care how much I learn.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42. My teachers expect me to attend college.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Aggressive Attitudes Scale**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do you agree or disagree with these statements?</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>43. If someone threatens you, it is okay to hit that person.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44. It feels good when I hit someone.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45. If you fight a lot, everyone will look up to you.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46. If you are afraid to fight, you won't have many friends.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47. Good fighters are popular in our school.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48. Bullying is okay sometimes.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49. Bullying is really not that bad.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50. Some people deserve to be bullied.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51. It is your own fault if you let someone bully you.</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Victim Experiences Scale**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Have any of the following happened to you personally at school last year? This includes while you are going to or from school. This also includes school events like field trips, school dances, and sports events.</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>One time</th>
<th>More than once</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>52. A student stole my personal property.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>53. A student physically attacked, pushed, or hit me.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54. A student threatened to hurt me.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55. A student threatened me with a weapon.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56. A student said mean or insulting things to me.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>57. During the past 30 days, on how many days did you carry a weapon such as a gun, knife, or club on school property?</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 days</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 day</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 or 3 days</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 or 5 days</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 or more days</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>58. During the past 12 months, how many times were you in a physical fight on school property?</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 times</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 or 3 times</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 or 5 times</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 or 7 times</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 or 9 times</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 or 11 times</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 or more times</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>