

Staff Preparedness for Acts of Violence in School Settings

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**Abstract**

This thesis addressed the topic of staff preparedness for acts of violence in school settings. A survey was sent to all staff members at a middle school in the northeast United States. The majority of participants disagreed that they have the professional knowledge to effectively deal with violence, have received appropriate training to deal with violence, and have the confidence to effectively handle violent situations at school. Recommendations for improving staff preparedness for school violence are offered and suggestions for future research are given.

### **Staff Preparedness for Acts of Violence in School Settings**

There is a famous quote that says, “A single death is a tragedy; a million deaths is a statistic.” While this was not originally spoken about school violence, it can be applied to the topic. In general, school is one of the safest places for children to be. However, heartbreaking situations such as the school shootings that happened at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado brought the issue of school safety to the national spotlight. One student death at school is too many. School should never be a place of violence, and instead, should be a place where students can focus their energies on education and learning.

To address this the importance of safe schools, this thesis will begin by reviewing the literature on school violence which includes defining the term, considering its history, looking at risk factors related to individuals likely to perpetrate violence and schools likely to experience violence, and examining prevention of school violence. A gap in the literature that exists on staff preparedness for handling violence will be examined with the researcher attempting to evaluate staff preparedness for acts of violence in school settings through the use of a survey. The researcher hypothesized that school staff members do not have the professional knowledge, have not received appropriate training, and do not have the confidence to handle school violence. The results of the survey will be given and recommendations for improving staff preparedness and ensuring the safety of students will be offered.

### **Review of the Literature**

School violence is a complex multifaceted construct, and therefore, this review will begin by attempting to define the term. The history of school violence will be considered while looking at how media attention has made an impact. Risk factors associated with school violence will be highlighted including risk factors associated with students who are likely to

become perpetrators of violence and those associated with schools that are likely to experience violence. Preventing school violence, including programs that have been used, will also be examined. Finally, gaps that exist in the current literature will be exposed in order for the researcher to support why examining staff preparedness for handling violent acts at school is important.

### **School Violence Defined**

School violence is a national problem that has affected countless schools and individuals across the United States. Schools from California to Colorado to Kentucky have experienced shootings that have resulted in student deaths (Young, Autry, Lee, Messemer, Roach, & Smit, 2002). Violence may come in less extreme forms as well, and in considering these instances, schools in almost all areas of the country have experienced violence. This leads to the question, what exactly constitutes school violence? School violence is a complex phenomenon that may exist in various forms of expression and levels of intensity (VanderVen & Torre, 1999).

School violence is broadly defined as youth violence that upsets or negatively affects the schooling process (Furlong & Morrison, 2000). It can be directed towards peers, educators, or on school property (Ting, Sanders, & Smith, 2002; Sela-Shayovitz, 2009) with the intent to harm. School violence can involve criminal acts, aggression displayed by students, and many other related factors (Furlong & Morrison, 2000) or violent actions (Sela-Shayovitz, 2009). Thus, school violence is a complex term and is not easily defined.

School violence has become a “catchall term that has little precision from an empirical-scientific point of view” (Furlong & Morrison, 2000, p. 73). In turn, school violence has been inconsistently studied because of different understandings about the term and due to a constantly changing definition (Warner, Weist, & Krulak, 1999). Additionally, school violence information

is collected by law enforcement agencies, schools, and researchers. These, along with other different sources, impact the consistency of reporting on this issue (Mayer & Leone, 2007).

Even though school violence is difficult to define and study, it is helpful to look at it as existing on a continuum rather than having a single unitary definition (Barnes & Bardick, 2007). At one end of the spectrum are nonphysical behaviors such as teasing and name calling which are forms of bullying. At the other end of the spectrum are severe actions such as physical fights and shootings (Mongan, Hatcher, & Maschi, 2009). Bullying and related behaviors are low-level acts of violence, and the use of weapons and physical attacks are high-level acts of school violence (Meyer-Adams & Conner, 2008).

Bullying can be defined as physical or verbal abuse that is used with the intent to harm or hurt another person or exclude that person from a group (Lawrence & Adams, 2006). These acts are intentional, repeated through either direct or indirect forms (Bradshaw, O'Brennan, & Sawyer, 2008), and may include actions such as threats and the use of intimidation (Meyer-Adams & Conner, 2008). A difference of physical or social power must exist between the bully and the victim, with the bully being considered more powerful (Jacobsen & Bauman, 2007).

Low-level acts of violence are the most common form of school violence (Bradshaw et al., 2008; Mayer & Leone, 2007) and therefore, cannot be omitted from a study on school violence. However, a detailed examination of the many different forms and types of bullying will not be offered here, but it is important to briefly consider possible effects of bullying. Included may be increased rates of truancy, dropping out of school, failing grades, low self-esteem, and difficulty forming and maintaining positive relationships. Further, low-level acts of violence, such as bullying, may be antecedents for high-level violent actions, such as school shootings (Meyer-Adams & Conner, 2008).

While all types of violence are detrimental to student learning and school climate (Furlong & Morrison, 2000), for the purposes of this thesis, severe acts of violence or high-level violence will be examined. Low-level acts of violence will only be further discussed in relation to how they may contribute to possible school shootings and other forms of high-level violence occurring.

### **History of School Violence**

Due to school violence being inconsistently studied (Bernes & Bardick, 2007; Furlong & Morrison, 2000; Meyer-Adams & Conner, 2008; Mongan et al., 2009; Ting et al., 2002; VanderVen & Torre, 1999) it is difficult to look at its history in entirety. Broadly speaking, school violence has existed in some form since schools were established in the 1800's (Wilson-Simmons, Dash, Tehranifar, O'Donnell, & Stueve, 2006) with the frequency, type, and degree of violence changing over time (Warner et al., 1999). Currently, more than 55 million students from kindergarten to twelfth grade are affected by school violence (Mongan et al., 2009). In addition, research has shown that school violence episodes have become increasingly fatal over the last several decades (Booren & Handy, 2009; Young et al., 2002).

Violence has become increasingly fatal because there have been significant changes in the types of problematic behavior that youth engage in. In the 1940's, troubled youth behavior at school included running in the hallways, chewing gum, and making disruptive noises while in class (Eisenbraun, 2007). In the 1960's, violence, especially against teachers, began to occur in many inner-city areas. The racial integration of schools during this time is thought to be a contributing factor because violence was often racially motivated. Violence continued to occur and increase throughout the 1970's (Warner et al., 1999) with the first highly publicized act of extreme school violence happening in 1974. This incident included a student bringing guns and



homemade bombs to school and proceeding to shoot at janitors and fireman who responded to the fire alarm he set off (Vossekuil, Reddy, & Fein, 2000).

Since school violence has been defined inconsistently over time, it is difficult to provide actual numbers on this phenomenon. However, in general, school violence seemed to level off in the 1980's. This decrease is due to unclear reasons, although heightened awareness of the issue caused by congressional action to investigate school violence has been a hypothesized reason (Warner et al., 1999). This was followed by a dramatic increase in the 1990's.

It was not until 1992 that the term "school violence" was widely used to describe violent acts on school campuses. A database from the University of California listed only 179 citations of school violence prior to 1992. From 1992 through 2000, there were 601 school violence articles listed in the same database (Furlong & Morrison, 2000). Much of this increase may have come from the incident of school violence that occurred at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado in 1999. This incident, while not the only school shooting, seemed to make school safety a national issue (Dwyer, Osher, & Hoffman, 2000; Gellman & Delucia-Waack, 2006).

#### **Littleton, Colorado incident of school violence.**

On April 20, 1999, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, two high school seniors, walked into Columbine High school in Littleton, Colorado with the intent to murder those inside. They set off numerous bombs and used guns to shoot at the students and staff members within the school (Frymer, 2009). By the time the attack was over, dozens were injured and 15 people were pronounced dead, including Eric and Dylan who committed suicide (Birkland & Lawrence, 2009). While this horrible incident has been heavily researched and reported on, many questions about why Eric and Dylan hated their school and wanted to kill all the members of its community remain unanswered. Unfortunately, answers may never be found.

Even though many questions still exist, Columbine is the most cited and referred to school shooting in the United States (Altheide, 2009). Further examining the details of this incident is beyond the scope of this thesis, but because of the impact Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold left on American schools, a brief summary could not be omitted. This school shooting shaped a cultural narrative about school violence that will undoubtedly continue to have an impact on the issues of school violence and school safety (Altheide, 2009).

### **Statistics versus Mass Media Attention to School Violence**

The violence that occurred in Colorado arguably brought the issue of school violence to the national spotlight (Young et al., 2002) and made students, parents, and educators increasingly concerned with school violence (Leary, Kowalski, Smith, & Phillips, 2003). Incidences of school violence, like Columbine, have placed great pressures on educators to take ownership of problems presented by violent youth (Sprague, Walker, Golly, White, Myers, & Shannon, 2001). Even so, school is still considered one of the safest places for children (Vossekuill et al., 2000) and has a lower rate of violence than most other settings (Allen, Cornell, Lorek, & Sheras, 2008). Less than one percent of all violent deaths of children and adolescents occur on school grounds (Dwyer et al., 2000; Mulvey & Cauffman, 2001).

However, high profile school shootings have resulted in increased fear at schools (Vossekuill et al., 2000) and students reporting a greater fear of victimization in school than elsewhere (Melde & Esbensen, 2009). This fear may be common due to the mass media attention that school violence receives (Altheide, 2009; Birkland & Lawrence, 2009). For example, stories on Columbine flashed dramatic images, including students and teachers fleeing the school and police officers attempting to deal with the crisis, across television screens and inside newspapers and magazines. After the incident had ended, there was a search to find a

cause to blame for this horrible tragedy. In turn, 68% of the American public reportedly paid close attention to the Columbine coverage (Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 1999). However, while extreme acts of school violence, such as the school shootings that occurred at Columbine, receive a disproportionate amount of media coverage (Eisenbraun, 2007), public fear seems to be greater than the prevalence of school violence (Melde & Esbensen, 2009).

### **School Violence and Academic Achievement**

While schools are relatively safe places, especially after the series of school shootings in the late 1990's, increasing school safety became a valid concern in many schools (Allen et al., 2008). It is not only important to protect the lives of our students and educators, but feeling safe in school also has a correlation with academic achievement. Ozer and Weinstein (2004) found that students who reported feeling safer at school showed better educational outcomes than those who reported feeling less safe. This statement is also exemplified in the work of Gronna and Chin-Chance (1999). The researchers found that after controlling for background characteristics and school conditions, students in schools with fewer suspensions for both minor and major offences had higher achievement scores in reading and mathematics than students in schools that were less safe. Similarly, Brand, Felner, Seitsinger, Burns, and Bolton (2008) found higher levels of academic adjustment to be associated with lower levels of problems related to disruptive behavior and personal safety. Further, Lapan, Gysbers, and Petroski (2001) analyzed the data from over 22,000 student surveys and found that believing one was safer in school was related not only to earning higher grades but also to believing that one's education was more relevant to one's future.

Safe schools allow students to engage in learning without being distracted with safety

concerns (Allen et al., 2008). Therefore, feeling safe in school is a prerequisite to a student being able to focus his or her energy on learning (Chen & Weikart, 2008). “Learning takes place better in a safe, especially perceived safe environment” (Chen, 2007, p. 40). Conversely, feeling unsafe at school often leads to concentration problems and an impaired ability to absorb classroom material (Warner et al., 1999). School disorder affects student achievement through disruption of instruction and distraction of student energy due to safety concerns (Gronna & Chin-Chance, 1999). Consequently, it is important for schools to be safe in order to protect students and staff and to provide an environment in which learning is possible.

### **Risk Factors Associated with School Violence**

In order to keep schools safe, many risk factors that precede school violence have been identified (Mongan et al., 2009). These risk factors include characteristics of perpetrators of school violence (Bernes & Bardick, 2007; Eisenbraun, 2007; Furlong & Morrison, 2000; Leary et al., 2003) and information about the schools in which violence is most likely to occur (Bender, Shubert, & McLaughlin, 2001; Dwyer et al., 2000; Eisenbraun, 2007; Fox & Harding, 2005; Furlong & Morrison, 2000). Numerous researchers have found relationships among risk factors and school violence (Bender et al., 2001; Bernes & Bardick, 2007; Dwyer et al., 2000; Eisenbraun, 2007; Fox & Harding, 2005; Furlong & Morrison, 2000; Leary et al., 2003). Risk factors may increase the probability that an individual will use violence or that violence will occur in a school, and multiple risk factors make that individual more likely to commit a violent act or that school more likely to experience violence (Bernes & Bardick, 2007).

#### **Risk factors associated with perpetrators of violence.**

Much research on school violence has focused on perpetrators of violence and risk factors associated with these individuals (Bernes & Bardick, 2007; Eisenbraun, 2007; Furlong

& Morrison, 2000; Leary et al., 2003). Over and over, it has been concluded that male students are more likely to be perpetrators of violence (Eisenbraun, 2007; Furlong & Morrison, 2000; Leary et al., 2003). Additionally, perpetrators of violence are likely to have been victims of bullying (Bernes & Bardick, 2007; Eisenbraun, 2007; Leary et al. 2003). They are also more likely to have had a high level of exposure to violence. In turn, they often have an accepting attitude of violence and are interested in or have possession of a weapon (Furlong & Morrison, 2000; Gellman & Delucia-Waack, 2006). This list of individual risk factors is neither complete nor comprehensive, but these aspects will be discussed because they have been shown to have a high correlation with committing a violent act in school.

### ***Gender.***

Whether it be due to biology, socialization, or other unknown factors, males are more likely than females to act violently. Leary et al. (2003) analyzed well documented cases of school violence in the United States from January 1995 to March 2001. Fifteen cases met the criteria for being included in the research which required that the incident happened within a school day and that the incident resulted in the injury or death of at least one student. All but one of the cases included the perpetrator of the violent act being a male. Vossekui et al. (2000) found an even greater correlation between school shootings and the male gender. The researchers studied 37 school shootings involving 41 attackers and found that all of the incidents were committed by boys or young men.

Similarly, significant differences ( $p < .00001$ ) between male and female engagement of high risk behaviors while in school have been found (Cornell & Loper, 1998). After administering a school safety survey to nearly 11,000 middle school and high school aged students, Cornell and Loper (1998) found that males are more likely to engage in physical

fighting and carrying a weapon than females. Similarly, Hemphill, Smith, Toumbourou, Herrenkohl, Catalano, McMorris, and Romaniuk (2009) conducted a longitudinal self-report survey of problem behaviors to approximately 4,000 students. One problem behavior included in the survey was acting violently. At each assessment, the researchers found that the rates of violent behavior were higher in males than females.

Overall, males are more likely than females to engage in problem behaviors such as physical fighting, carrying a weapon (Cornell & Loper, 1998) and acting violently (Hemphill et al., 2009). However, it is important to note that recent research has shown that girls are more likely to engage in indirect, social, and relational aggression (Archer, 2004; Underwood, 2003). Nonetheless, male students are much more likely to engage in extreme violent acts than female students while at school (Furlong & Morrison, 2000). Consequently, males are at a greater risk of becoming perpetrators of school violence than females (Leary et al., 2003; Vossekuil et al., 2000).

### ***Victim of bullying.***

Many perpetrators of school violence were past victims of bullying (Leary et al., 2003). A typical school shooter has experienced some form of bullying and consequently, feels isolated (Eisenbraun, 2007) and marginalized by their peers and the school environment (Newman & Fox, 2009). Marginalization is the attempt to confine individuals and push them outside of the realm of social significance (Mongan et al., 2009). This often leads these students to feel alienated from the larger school community and their classmates (Bender et al., 2001).

Soderstrom and Elrod (2006) surveyed 2,011 students from elementary, middle, and high school using many different instruments including the Alienation Scale (AS). The AS is an 11-item self-administered measure which is comprised of two subscales: internal alienation and

external alienation. The researchers found that approximately 30% of respondents indicated that no one cares what happens to them, that their teachers are not interested in their problems, and they often feel awkward and out of place at school. These feelings of alienation may result in perpetrating violent acts, like Vossekuil et al. (2000) found. The researchers discovered that in over 2/3 of school shooting cases studied, the attackers felt persecuted, threatened, or attacked by other students. In many of the cases, the bullying and harassment was longstanding, continuous, and severe.

Feeling rejected by classmates and others in the school often leads to feelings of shame and hurt. As a result, “Adolescents may express symptoms of depression and anxiety through externalizing behaviors such as aggression and irritability because they may lack the appropriate coping mechanisms to deal with their symptomatology” (Gellman & Delucia-Waack, 2006, p. 592). Therefore, being bullied may eventually provoke anger and aggression in its victims (Leary et al. 2003).

Bullying may lead its victims to feel psychologically victimized (Dwyer et al., 2000). Especially during adolescence, this victimization can act as a threat to a student’s emerging identity. In turn, this may increase feelings of powerlessness and hostility in that student. These feelings may contribute to a desire for revenge that escalates into a violent act being committed (Bernes & Bardick, 2007). Students may also react violently as a way of forming an identity (Bender et al., 2001). Finally, such students may think that violence is the only way to stop the bullying. They may either use violence as self-defense or as a justification for retaliation (Furlong & Morrison, 2000). Often, students who commit violent acts do so to “get back” at the school or the individuals or groups of students who they believed wronged them (Mongan et al., 2009, p. 639).

Overall, research has shown that victims of bullying have a greater likelihood of committing a violent act while in school than students who have not experienced victimization (Eisenbraun, 2007). In addition, students who are committed to school and feel that they belong are less likely to commit violent acts at school than those who are uninvolved or distrustful of the school community (Mulvey & Cauffman, 2001).

***Higher level of exposure to violence.***

Perpetrators of school violence are likely to have had more exposure to violence than those who have not acted violently while in school. Gellman and Delucia-Waack (2006) conducted a study to examine the relationship among use of violence and exposure to violence. Ninety males were divided into two even groups, perpetrators of school violence and the nonviolent control sample. Participants completed the Exposure to Violence Questionnaire and Use of Violence Scale. The perpetrator group and control group differed significantly in the variables studied with the perpetrator group indicating higher levels of exposure to violence than the nonviolent control group. These participants tended to view using violence as a means to survival.

***The media and violence.***

Students may be exposed to violence in many different contexts including their homes, the streets, and most notably, the media. The media has received much of the blame for exposing children and adolescents to violence. There are violent messages in the media on a daily basis. The news, films, television shows, music, and other forms of media often depict violence as the norm (Chapin, 2008) and may actually promote violence (Wike & Fraser, 2009). Video games have also been attacked for promoting violence. Unfortunately, many aspects of popular culture have glamorized death and violence (Leary et al., 2003). This leaves adolescents



“to decide for themselves what is accurate, what is real, and what it all means” (Chapin, 2008, p. 461). Unfortunately, how students perceive and interpret these messages may have real-world consequences.

*Accepting attitude toward violence.*

Exposure to violence may lead to a more accepting attitude of violence, and perpetrators of school violence are likely to have a more accepting attitude toward violence than those who have not acted violently while in school. Through administering the Attitudes towards Violence Scale and Use of Violence Scale, Gellman and Delucia-Waack (2006) found that perpetrators of violence indicated more accepting attitudes toward violence ( $p < .001$ ) than the nonviolent control group. Similarly, in a school safety survey administered to seventh, ninth, and eleventh grade students, Cornell and Loper (1998) found a significant correlation between engaging in physical fights and beliefs favoring physical aggression. They also found a significant correlation between weapon carrying at school and beliefs favoring physical aggression. Overall, beliefs favoring physical aggression can be used a predictor of future violence (Furlong & Morrison, 2000).

*Expression of violence.*

Both exposure to violence and attitude toward violence exist in a positive relationship with the use of violence (Gellman & Delucia-Waack, 2006). In turn, many students who commit violent acts may express their understanding of violence and thoughts about violence through drawings or in writings (Eisebraun, 2007; Fox & Harding, 2005). One student who committed a violent act while at school had previously written poems for his English class that revolved around the theme of homicide (Vossekuil et. al, 2000). Another student wrote stories that described a battle between two groups of students in graphic detail (Fox & Harding, 2005).

Expression of violence in writings and drawings may signal emotional problems and the potential for violence, especially when directed at specific individuals consistently over time (Dwyer et al., 2000).

***Access to or possession of a weapon.***

If a student has an accepting view of violence, he or she is more likely to have access to or possession of a weapon (Leary et al. 2003). Firearms are more widely and easily available in the United States than in any other industrialized nation. American children and adolescents have easy access to guns (Leary et al., 2003). Without this access, students would not have the resources to commit a seriously violent act at school. “Although limiting gun access would likely not stop those who are committed to an attack, limited access complicates the process and, in many states, brings to bear an added level of scrutiny that may deter a potential shooting” (Wike & Fraser, 2009, p. 164). Overall, access to weapons significantly increases the likelihood of a student committing a violent act while in school, and youth who own guns are disproportionately involved in aggressive behavior at school (Furlong & Morrison, 2000).

Forrest, Zychowski, Stuhldreher, and Ryan (2000) used data from a large, nationwide survey, the National Add Health Survey, to examine the prevalence and factors involved in adolescent weapon-carrying. Through the use of a multiple regression analysis, the researchers found that the prevalence of weapon carrying was more common for boys than girls on school property ( $p < 0.001$ ), and adolescents who carried weapons were likely to have reported easy access to a gun at home ( $p < 0.001$ ). Similarly, in their study of school violence, Leary et al. (2003) found that at least eight of the fifteen perpetrators of school violence had an interest in guns or bombs and possibly had easy access to these weapons. “Individuals who not only have access to guns but who are fascinated by firearms and explosives may be more likely to act on

their aggressive impulses because they are more comfortable dealing with instruments of destruction than those who are unfamiliar or uncomfortable with guns and explosives” (p. 211).

Considering why youth carry guns is also extremely important. Forrest et al. (2000) found that adolescents who carried weapons to school identified the reason for this being that they felt unsafe ( $p < 0.001$ ). Similarly, students who experienced a form of victimization, such as bullying, were also more likely to carry a weapon to school for protection (Furlong & Morrison, 2000). However, no matter what the reason, carrying a weapon while at school significantly increases the risk of school violence (Eisenbraun, 2007) and the risk of serious injury or death to both the weapon carrier and others (Forrest et al., 2000).

### **Profiling at risk students.**

While there are similarities between many students who commit acts of violence at school, there are also many differences. Through analyzing cases of school violence, Vossekul et al. (2000) found that the attackers came from a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds, came from family situations ranging from intact families with strong community ties to foster homes, and had academic performances ranging from excellent to failing. Therefore, while there are factors that may contribute to a student committing a violent act at school, there is no inclusive profile of such a student (Bernes & Bardick, 2007) and no set of individual characteristics that can be used to accurately identify school shooters (Allen et al., 2008).

Profiling can actually be problematic. The use of profiles carries a risk of over-identification. This could be especially harmful to a student who is not likely to commit a violent act but shows risk factors associated with violence. Profiling also may fail to identify a student who, in fact, does pose a risk of violence but may not have the characteristics associated with risk factors (Vossekul et al., 2000). “After all, for every killer youth, there are many others

with the same behaviors or attitudes who never come close to killing their classmates” (Mulvey & Cauffman, 2001, p. 797). Therefore, risk factors associated with perpetrators of school violence may be common but are insufficient measures of predicting violence (Dwyer et al., 2000) because even though the individual may be the perpetrator of violence, violence always occurs in a context (Johnson, 2009).

### **Risk factors associated with schools that experience violence.**

In considering violence, researchers have found many risk factors associated with the settings and structures of schools that may be contributing factors (Bender, Shubert, & McLaughlin, 2001; Dwyer et al., 2000; Eisenbraun, 2007; Fox & Harding, 2005; Furlong & Morrison, 2000). Size and location of a school (Eisenbraun, 2007; Furlong & Morrison, 2000), the physical condition of the building (Dwyer et. al, 2000), school environment (Johnson, 2009), and a lack of communication within schools (Bender et al., 2001; Fox Harding, 2005) may all contribute to a violent act occurring in a school. While not predictors of school violence, these factors are important because they may contribute to the occurrence of acts of school violence.

#### ***Size and location of the school.***

School size and location of a school may play a role in school violence. Eisenbraun, (2007) reported that 89% of larger schools surveyed had one or more violent incident over the course of a year, and only 38% of smaller schools did. Logically, there is a greater likelihood that a violent act may occur given a larger student body. Also, large schools may create an environment of impersonality and anonymity (Chen & Weikart, 2008; Warner et al., 1999), and if students do not feel connected to the school in one way or another, they are more likely to commit acts of violence (Furlong & Morrison, 2000).

Bowen, Bowen, & Richman (2000) found that school safety declines as school size

increases. Similarly, the researchers found that students in school with the largest enrollment size (1,000 to 1,399) felt less safe than students in schools with lower enrollment numbers. However, smaller schools may also experience violence based on the population of students. Overall, the effect of school size is often insignificant in affecting school safety (Chen & Weikart, 2008).

Many large schools are located in urban areas, and such schools may be more likely to experience violence than schools in rural or suburban settings (Furlong & Morrison, 2000). However, other research has found no significant differences between school violence in urban, rural, or suburban areas (Eisenbraun, 2007). Consequently, while size and location of a school may be factors in school violence, neither seems to be a significant correlate.

#### ***Physical condition of school building.***

The physical condition of a school building may contribute to the likelihood of a violent act occurring (Johnson, 2009; Melde & Esbensen, 2009). Students' motivation, attitude, and behavior while at school can be impacted by the physical condition of the building, and violence may increase as optimal environmental factors decrease. Buildings that need repairs, have uncomfortable temperatures, are polluted, have large amounts of graffiti, and are dirty or unsanitary are more likely to experience violence perpetrated by students (Dwyer et al., 2000). Poorly kept buildings have developed a reputation for high levels of deviant behavior, including school violence (Melde & Esbensen, 2009). However, even a school in the best physical condition could still experience student violence.

#### ***School environment.***

Johnson (2009) reviewed 25 studies of school violence and in each, found evidence that the school environment had at least some effect on the likelihood of violence. School

environment can be defined as the impressions, beliefs, and expectations of the school community related to the behavior that is displayed in the environment (Chen & Weikart, 2008). Brand, Felner, Shim, Seitsinger, and Dumas (2003) found the dimensions of school environment, including consistency/clarity of rules and expectations, disciplinary harshness, and safety, were systematically related to academic achievement and behavior problems within the school. Unhealthy school environments often have inconsistent rule enforcement, low expectations for student performance, and do not attend to problem behaviors that students may display (Reinke & Herman, 2002). Such environmental cues affect the beliefs and actions of those who are part of the environment (Melde & Esbensen, 2009).

Johnson (2009) found that lower rates of school violence were associated schools that promote unity and help students develop a sense of ownership towards the school. Further, "Schools that promote learning and academic achievement without encouraging individual competition are characterized by lower levels of violence" (Warner et al., 1999, p. 61). Conversely, a lack of involvement in the school and low levels of attachment to the school are related to higher levels of school violence being perpetrated (Soderstrom & Elrod, 2006). In many school shootings, the perpetrators did not have a strong sense of attachment to their schools, the staff members, and their peers (Wike & Fraser, 2009).

Melde and Esbensen (2009) developed and gave the Perceived Disorder Measure to 1,450 students from 15 schools located in 4 states across the United States. The researchers found that perceived disorder within schools is directly associated with the risk of victimization and self-reported school-based victimization. Similarly, Meyer-Adams and Conner (2008) found that the psychosocial environment of a school is a significant and negative predictor of carrying a weapon to school ( $p < .001$ ). Both of these studies lead to the conclusion that an unstructured

and uninviting school environment may be contributing factors in the likelihood of a violent act occurring in a school.

*Lack of communication within schools.*

How information is communicated within a school is also part of the school environment: are communication lines open and encouraged? Organizations often do not easily predict disasters because a well-defined problem receives the majority of attention while other dangerous but less noticed problems are not identified (Fox & Harding, 2005). Fox and Harding (2005) drew on data from qualitative case studies in two schools that experienced shootings to relate this theory to school violence. The researchers conducted extensive fieldwork using participant observations and almost 200 qualitative interviews with school faculty, families, police officials, and members of the community. The researchers found that the organizational structure and culture of these schools led to a loss of information about emotionally or socially troubled students.

“School shooters go unnoticed because many are not behaving in ways that interrupt the functioning of their schools, and then their behavior is not interpreted as indicative of a potential for violent behavior” (p. 82). Bender et al. (2001) referred to this type of perpetrator as an “invisible kid” (p. 107). These students are not noted by many of the school faculty prior to committing a violent act because they have never been in trouble for extreme behavior problems. They are able to “fly below the radar” of the school (Newman & Fox, 2009, p. 1294).

While “invisible kids” may not receive notable attention (Bender et al., 2001, p. 107), schools are not ignorant in regards to the issues of troubled students who may commit violent acts. Teachers, administrators, counselors, and other involved individuals often do notice a change in a student’s behavior prior to that student committing a violent act. Vossekul et al.

(2000) individually reviewed primary source materials including investigative, school, court, and mental health records of perpetrators of school violence and then came together to form a consensus on the cases. They found that in over 75% of identified cases of school violence, the attacker behaved in some way that caused concern to others. Examples include a teacher noticing the student withdrawing, a disturbing story written by the attacker describing death and weapons in extreme detail, and mental health problems.

Prior warning signs, sometimes simply giving hints as to their intentions (Mongan et al., 2009), are almost always present before students commit a violent act (Bender et al., 2001). However, identifying this information is not enough. If this information is not communicated to others, this leads to a loss of information. Small pieces of information present at best a weak signal that something is wrong (Fox & Harding, 2005). Therefore, this lack of communication that exists within schools may be a contributing factor related to a violent act occurring.

*Lack of communication about school building itself.*

Similarly, there is often a lack of communication about the grounds of school buildings and responsibility of the staff. In a survey given to school faculty, Pietrzak, Peterson, and Speaker (1998) found that hallways and restrooms were ranked as having the highest risk for school violence, 31% and 27% respectively. Violence is most likely to occur in these areas and similar locations such as cafeterias and just outside the physical building of the school. These are undefined places, and no one claims responsibility for these locations (Mulvey & Cauffman, 2001). Without clearly communicating to the staff their responsibility to patrol bathrooms, hallways, and similar locations, these areas will continue to be breeding grounds for violence. Students will continue to commit violent acts at these sites because without the presence of staff they are less likely to get caught.



**Profiling at Risk Schools.**

While many risk factors associated with the settings and structures of schools have been identified, it is important to note that there is no inclusive profile of a school that is likely to experience violence (Bernes & Bardick, 2007). Schools of any size, location, condition, and internal environment and structure may experience a violent act perpetrated by a student. No single sign or combination of signs can accurately predict the likelihood of violence occurring (Dwyer et al., 2000). Therefore, no school can be dismissed from the potential of violence occurring (Eisenbraun, 2007).

**Risk Factors do not Predict Violence**

While risk factors may be helpful in identifying possible violent situations, risk factors do not predict violence. It is impossible to pull apart and examine a single variable that can be used to predict violence. There is no evidence that one specific factor or group of factors can be used to predict a school shooting. “Identifying the etiology of school shootings is a difficult task owing to the amount of differences in shooters and the complexity of the cases” (Mongan et al., 2009, p. 636). Therefore, many schools have begun to use ongoing risk assessment to monitor for the likelihood of violence.

**Ongoing Risk Assessment**

Schools need to be aware of their relative risk associated with the likelihood of violence and be attentive in planning and monitoring for violence (Warner et al., 1999). It is important to use ongoing risk assessment rather than simply trying to predict who is likely to commit a violent act and which schools are most likely to experience violence (Mulvey & Cauffman, 2001). Staying current with violence risk assessment knowledge decreases the likelihood of a violent act occurring in a school (Bernes & Bardick, 2007). Ongoing risk assessment should be used in

order to constantly evaluate the potential for violence, and one useful form is threat assessment. “Threat assessment is designed as a multidisciplinary approach that requires the cooperation of school administration, law enforcement, and mental health professionals” to address whether violence is likely to occur based on risk factors present (Allen et al., 2008, p. 323). When using threat assessment, the focus is usually on individuals likely to perpetrate violence rather than factors associated with schools. Nonetheless, many schools have developed teams and plans in order to assess for such situations, with two examples provided here.

### **A.C.T.I.O.N. plan.**

Borum and Reddy (2001) developed a plan to help professionals consider areas of concern in assessing the likelihood of school violence occurring. This plan was created through the use of the acronym ACTION with possible perpetrators of violence being the focus. “A” stands for attitudes that support or facilitate violence. It is important to seek to understand a student’s beliefs about the use of violence. Capacity is the “C” in the acronym which addresses whether a student has the ability and necessary resources to carry out a violent act in a school. “T” is for thresholds crossed, and this looks at any steps the student has taken that contribute to the likelihood of committing a violence act. This can be as simple as the student breaking school rules and showing no remorse. The “I” is for intent, and this looks at what the student’s actual intention is. “O” stands for others’ reactions and responses. It is important for school faculty to communicate with one another about their perceptions of a student to form a well-rounded and accurate account of the student. Noncompliance with risk reduction interventions is the “N” of the acronym, and at this point, it is important to consider whether the student would be willing to discuss concerns that others have about his or her behavior or attitude. If the student is not, then other measures to prevent violence from occurring must be immediately taken.

**Stages-of-change model.**

Mongan et al. (2009) advocated for focusing on the behaviors that schools shooters often partake in before the attack through the use of the Stages-of-change model. The model is broken down into six stages with a clear distinction between the stages but an understanding that movement through the stages is often fluid. In stage one or precontemplation, the student does not have any valid thoughts about planning or engaging in a violent act. Contemplation or stage two involves the individual beginning to entertain the idea of perpetrating violence at school. At this stage the student often feels unfairly treated and wants to “get back” at students or the school (p. 639). During stage three which involves preparation, the student often will have morbid thoughts about death and destruction at school and will develop a plan of attack. In stage four, the action stage, the student often withdraws from others, obtains weapons and necessary materials, and commits to follow through on the plan. Maintenance is stage five which involves setting a date for the attack and rehearsing the plan. Termination is where the student completes the attack. Using this model to assess the likelihood of a violent act being perpetrated by a student while at school would allow for interventions to be implemented dependent on the level of threat determined as the student moves from stage to stage.

**Preventing School Violence**

While using ongoing risk assessment can be helpful in trying to prevent violence by constantly assessing its likelihood, many schools have begun to take more proactive measures. Ongoing risk assessment can be used as part of a prevention program (Bernes & Bardick, 2007), but considering the complexity of school violence, many other different factors are usually taken into account.

There are many different violence prevention programs that currently exist within schools

(Park-Higgerson, Perumean-Chaney, Bartolucci, Grimley, & Singh, 2008). At the individual level, education of the students and staff have been identified as extremely important in preventing violence (Booren & Handy, 2009; Bradshaw et al., 2008; Lawrence & Adams, 2006, Park-Higgerson et al, 2008). At the school level, opening communication lines and encouraging communication (Wike & Fraser, 2009; Young et al., 2002;) have been identified as ways to prevent violence. Additionally, increasing security measures on school grounds is often used but has received criticism and skepticism related to effectiveness (Shelton, Owens, & Song, 2009; Time and Payne 2008; Wike & Fraser, 2009). Finally, decreasing optimistic bias is often not discussed but can be an important tool in preventing a violent act from occurring at school (Chapin, 2008).

#### **Violence prevention programs.**

In order to prevent school violence, theory-based programs or non-theory based programs may be used. Theory-based programs rely on previously studied theories as the basis for the program while non-theory based programs are not backed by empirical research. Universal programs versus selective programs also exist. Universal programs target everyone in the schools while selective programs target only the at risks groups of students. Finally, programs with multiple approach interventions versus single approach programs have also been used (Park-Higgerson et al., 2008).

Park-Higgerson et al. (2008) looked at violence prevention programs of all types and found many differences in the effectiveness of each. For example, they compared 19 selective programs and 7 universal programs and found that the selective programs showed a larger effect size than the universal programs. They also found that single-approach programs had a more positive effect on reducing violence in children and adolescents compared to programs that used

multiple approaches involving family, peers, and the community. However, other researchers have found that effective prevention programs that focus on multiple points of intervention are more effective than those that do not (Sela-Shayovitz, 2009).

It is often difficult to truly assess the effectiveness of violence prevention programs because of small effect sizes, differences in outcome focus, and missing pretests (Park-Higerson et al., 2008). In addition, it is difficult to see if the programs were implemented correctly and how the impact might change based on those involved in the implementation and running of the program. Because it is difficult to assess violence prevention program effectiveness, it is helpful to look beyond the programs themselves and focus on other factors that may help prevent violence.

### **Education.**

Education is essential to violence prevention in schools, and targeting both students and school staff members is important (Sela-Shayovitz, 2009). Booren & Handy (2009) surveyed 182 students from a school in the northwest United States and found that students believed that education had the highest level of perceived importance related to school safety strategies. While it is important to educate students, the staff should not be excluded. Unfortunately, many teachers and school faculty members receive no form of violence prevention training in their undergraduate or graduate studies (Sela-Shayovitz, 2009).

Students should be educated about the harmful effects of bullying (Bradshaw et al., 2008). Gini, Pozzoli, Borghi, and Franzoni (2008) administered a questionnaire to 217 students about being a bystander in bullying situations. A bystander is neither the bully nor the victim but is someone who watches the interaction and does not intervene. The researchers found that victim blame ratings were significantly higher when bystanders remained passively aside. While

the reason for this is not known, the researchers hypothesized that when nobody intervenes, observers are more likely to think that the victim deserves the bullying. Therefore, educating students about how they can stop bullying (even as the bystander) can help prevent increased victimization of targets.

Students also need to learn skills such as conflict resolution and problem solving which can help them deal with bullying and similar situations (Sprague et al., 2001; Wiek & Fraser, 2009). Training students in anger management can lead to problems being worked out in a constructive manner (Lawrence & Adams, 2006; Sprague et al., 2001). Staff should work with students to build and hone their communication skills so that problems can be addressed in a way that is productive and positive (Eisenbraun, 2007). All of these skills fall under character education which can help students get along with one another and effectively communicate with each other (Booren & Handy, 2009).

Educating students may not stop bullying from occurring, and therefore, it is important to screen students for victimization of bullying (Lawrence & Adams, 2006). Staff members need to be aware of what goes on between and among the students. They should be watching to see who is being bullied and by whom so that additional steps can be taken to deal with this. Staff members need to be taught positive behavior strategies to use with students who are bullying others or presenting problematic behavior (Bradshaw et al., 2008) and engage in targeted approaches that “build environments that enhance the learning and safety of all students” (Conoley, 2008, p. 220) which can be done through professional development and other learning experiences.

Overall, teaching various attitudes and skills (Park-Higgerson et al., 2008) to both students and staff can reduce the likelihood of violence occurring. Fostering a positive learning

environment, where all students feel welcome and safe, creates a community that is able to work towards a common goal. Johnson (2009) found that school norms that existed against violence were associated with a decrease in school violence. Therefore, this belief should be encouraged and promoted in schools, especially because educating students about violence can decrease the desire that students have to choose a violent response (Young et al., 2002).

### **Opening communication lines.**

Educating students and staff is one of the first steps that can be taken to prevent violence. However, this tactic may not always work. Therefore, it is important to open communication lines with schools and break codes of silence related to violence (Wike & Fraser, 2009). The entire staff of a school needs to work together to open communication lines. Mongan et al. (2009) advocated for creating a multidisciplinary team within a school to address the issue of violence. This team should include administration, school counselors, social workers, and teachers who can work together to address potentially violent situations.

Students should not be left out of this equation. Students are essential in the development, implementation, and enforcement of school violence policies (Young et al., 2002). In their study, Vossekuil et al. (2000) found that in over 75% of incidents of school violence other students knew about the attack beforehand. Therefore, the most reliable source of information about the activities of students is other students (Mulvey & Cauffman, 2001). Students are the most effective “eyes” and “ears” of schools (Bender et al., 2000, p. 109). Consequently, it is important for students to feel comfortable going to a teacher, counselor, or administrator about their concerns (Eisenbraun, 2007).

Often students are afraid of being stigmatized or rejected by other students for telling what they have heard or seen and therefore, do not report what they know (Wilson-Simmons et

al., 2006). Students are more likely to report concerns if the school provides an anonymous way that they can voice their concerns (Wike & Fraser, 2009). This can include telephone calls or written referrals. Students should also be given the opportunity for in person-appointments if they do not wish to remain anonymous. No matter how their concerns are made known, instituting a formal referral process to report questionable statements and behaviors noticed by students is essential (Mongan et al., 2009).

A “positive reporting climate” should be go beyond students though, and “teachers should make it a point of duty to inform administrators of any threats or conversations that related to weapons and violence” (Time & Payne, 2008, p. 301). Everyone should be allowed and encouraged to discuss the events at the school, especially concerning safety measures and the likelihood that a violent act may occur. Unfortunately though, there is often an inadequate understanding of what school staff should and should not do related to school violence (Wilson-Simmons et al., 2006), and therefore, openly communicating about this should be a priority.

Staff members also need to communicate about the school building itself. An environmental assessment should be conducted to identify where students are less supervised and may be more isolated (Warner et al., 1999). If certain staff members or the entire staff works collectively to supervise cafeterias, hallways, and other areas in which violence is most likely to occur in a school, the likelihood of violence in these areas will decrease. Further, with everyone working communally and cooperatively, the overall climate of the school could be improved (Eisenbraun, 2004). This would make the school a more inviting place and hopefully help students to develop a connection to the school. Thus, they may be less likely to commit a violent act while at school against classmates, teachers, or other staff members (Mulvey & Cauffman, 2001).



**Additional security measures.**

Many schools do not believe that violence prevention programs or other preventative factors that can reduce the likelihood of violence are suitable enough to protect students and staff members. In turn, many schools have adapted the use additional security features on school grounds (Booren & Handy, 2009). However, there are no national standards for dealing with safely implementation, and schools tend to employ different strategies dependent on believed needs (Shelton et al., 2009).

Some schools have implemented the use of metal detectors and use policies such as using transparent backpacks and student locker searches (Young et al., 2002). In their study of various school safety strategies, Time and Payne (2008) found that almost 95% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that reasonable suspicion is an appropriate standard to search student's belongings, and 60% said they believed school officials should be given more liberty in deciding when to search a student's belongings. The researchers argue that appropriate searches are justified on moral and legal grounds because school authorities have an obligation to protect the members of their school community.

Other schools have implemented the use of blast-proof doors and windows (Time & Payne, 2008), video surveillance, and involving security guards (Shelton et al., 2009). The use of security guards or police who act as school resource officers may provide a sense of security to students and educators. They can also quickly respond in the case of a violent episode because of their location within the school (Wike & Fraser, 2009).

All of the above techniques may work and be necessary in certain situations but may also be seen as oppressive, demeaning, and a violation of students' rights. In turn, they may "inadvertently instill more fear and mistrust in students" (Young et al., 2002, p. 107). These

techniques may make students and staff feel helpless or even threatened while in school (Time & Payne, 2008).

In addition to increased security measures, many schools have implemented zero tolerance policies and procedures (Meyer-Adams & Conner, 2008). While there is no universally accepted definition of zero tolerance (Mayer & Leone, 2007), generally, zero-tolerance means that school rules must be followed without exception and with zero-tolerance for certain behaviors (Booren & Handy, 2009) regardless of individual, situational, or contextual factors (Mayer & Leone, 2007). Therefore, if a student acts violently or threatens to act violently, that student may be immediately removed from school. While many schools have adopted the use of these policies as the result of national headlines of extreme acts of violence (Meyer-Adams & Conner, 2008), there are no empirical studies demonstrating that zero tolerance policies increase school safety (Allen et al., 2008).

#### **Reducing optimistic bias toward school violence.**

While many preventative measures can be taken to try and prevent school violence, one of the most important ideas is often not discussed. Many students and school staff members seem to have optimistic bias concerning the likelihood of school violence occurring. This is the belief that one or one's school is invulnerable or less likely than other individuals or schools to experience school violence (Chapin, 2008). Pietrzak et al. (1998) gave a Likert scale survey on school violence to a random sample of 180 members of school faculty from 15 schools of varying sizes in 12 states. Fifty-six percent of respondents saw violence increasing or greatly increasing at the elementary level. At the middle school level, 71% saw a similar increase. Violence was seen as increasing or greatly increasing at the high school level by 66% of respondents.

Regardless of data on violence, many educators and students hold the perception that violence is unlikely to affect them or their school. Chapin and Coleman (2006) conducted a study on 1,500 students who attended grades 7 through 12 in public and private schools. They measured students' knowledge of school violence using a Likert-type scale. Through the use of a t-test, they found that students believed that violence was less likely to happen to them or happen in their school as compared to other individuals and areas. Therefore, many students may avoid taking self-protective measures to ensure the safety of themselves and their school. They may be less likely to report threats of violence or imminent warning signs that a peer may commit a violent act. Consequently, a violent act may be more likely to occur because protective measures are not taken.

### **Preparedness for Violence**

School staff and students need to change the "it is not going to happen to us" notion, because the reality is that violence can occur in any school (Eisenbraun, 2007, p. 467). Schools need to have a plan in case the unthinkable does become a reality. Fortunately, "A number of states now require schools to develop school safety plans. The extent to which such plans produce meaningful responses to school problems, however, are dependent on the development of sound measures that will assist local school systems in the effort to monitor levels of school violence" (Soderstrom & Elrod, 2006, p. 8). In addition, implementing a crisis plan is sometimes easier and more cost effective than implementing educational curriculum or addressing other areas of violence prevention programming (Booren & Handy, 2009). However, the main problem with school safety plans is that staff members do not know they exist and may not be prepared to actually carry out the plan in the case that a violent act does occur.

Sela-Shayovitz (2009) surveyed 147 educators and found that there were significant

differences between staff who received violence prevention training and those who did not with regard to perceived outcome efficacy in dealing with violence ( $p < .0001$ ). Similarly, Allen et al. (2008) had participants in their study attend a full-day training workshop on guidelines for responding to student threats of violence and found that after the training 90% of the participants said that the training “improved my understanding of school violence,” and 94% agreed that the training “will be helpful to me in responding to student threats of violence.” These studies lead to the conclusion that staff members can benefit from being prepared to actually handle violent situations. Very few other studies look at staff preparedness related to school violence, and this gap in the literature should be addressed because violence cannot always be predicted or prevented.

### **Summary of the Literature**

School violence is a complex topic that has been studied inconsistently over time due to varying definitions of the term and complex changes in the types of violent actions students have engaged in throughout history. Many risk factors associated with students who may become perpetrators of school violence have been identified. These risk factors include gender, being a victim of bullying, having a high level of exposure to violence and an accepting attitude toward violence, and having access to or possession of a weapon. Many risk factors associated schools that are likely to experience violence have also been identified. These risk factors include the size and location of the school, the physical condition of the building, school environment, and a lack of communication that exists within schools. In addition to identifying risk factors, many schools have implemented violence prevention programs. In order to try and prevent violence, education, opening communication lines, using additional security measures, and reducing optimistic bias toward violence have been deemed important.

Identifying risk factors to try and predict violence and using programs to try and prevent

violence do not always work. Violence can not always be predicted or prevented, and therefore, it is essential for school staff members to be prepared to handle a potentially violent situation. Very few researchers (Allen et al., 2008; Sela-Shayovitz, 2009) have address this aspect of school violence, and the current study attempts to determine whether or not school staff members are prepared to handle violent acts. The author of this research project hypothesized that staff members do not have the professional knowledge, have not received appropriate training, and do not have the confidence to handle school violence.

## **Method**

### **Participant Characteristics**

The subjects were selected for participation in this project by virtue of being a staff member at a middle school in the northeast United States. The school serves grades six, seven, and eight and has a student body of just over 700. While the majority of students are Caucasian, the school has a diverse population of students including African Americans (20%), Hispanics (12%), and individual students from countries such as Turkey and the Ukraine. In addition, the students come from varying socioeconomic statuses, with nearly 46% of the students receiving free and reduced lunches.

All staff members at the school were asked to participate in the current project. This included administrators, school counselors, the social worker, school psychologists, language pathologists, the school nurse, secretaries, paraprofessionals, and teachers. Teachers of all subject areas including both core subjects such as Math and Science and additional subjects such as Family and Consumer Science and Technology were asked to participate. All participants were over 18 years of age.

While each staff member of the school was given the opportunity to take part in the current project, the choice to participate was completely voluntary. Participants did not receive any type of payment or gift for participating in the study.

### **Procedures**

The researcher created a survey that addressed staff views toward school safety and school violence, problematic student behavior and problematic school conditions, understanding of school safety procedures, and preparedness to deal with potentially violent situations at school. This survey was constructed from scratch by the researcher because one that fully addressed the desired topics could not be found. The survey was made using Survey Monkey (<http://www.surveymonkey.com>).

The staff of the middle school was sent an email that contained a cover letter about the project. A copy of the cover letter can be found in Appendix A. The cover letter stated that participation was voluntary and that answering the survey questions signified as consent to participate. Participants were informed that their answers were not traceable to them and thus, their answers would remain anonymous. This was done to help the participants feel comfortable in answering the questions honestly. Finally, the cover letter stated that they could stop participating in the survey at any time, even after starting the survey.

Within the cover letter, a link was provided that took participants directly to the survey. The survey contained 10 questions which had multiple components totaling 32 forced choice responses. Several different Likert-type scales were used including 1) Always, Often, Sometimes, and Never, 2) To a large extent, To some extent, To a little extent, and To no extent, 3) Very likely, Somewhat likely, Somewhat unlikely, and Not at all likely, 4) Extreme Problem, Moderate Problem, Minimum Problem, and Not a Problem, and 5) Strongly Agree, Agree, Not

Sure, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. There was also a Yes or No question. A full copy of the survey that was sent to approximately 110 subjects can be found in Appendix B.

### **Results**

Out of the 110 surveys electronically sent, 35 were returned which is a response rate of 32%. A full breakdown of the responses to each survey question can be found in Appendix C. Significant findings will be highlighted here. When asked to rate the likelihood of a violent act occurring at their school, the greatest number of respondents (22 or 62.9%) marked “somewhat unlikely” as compared to “very likely” (1 or 2.9%), “somewhat unlikely” (11 or 31.4%), and “not at all likely” (1 or 2.9%).

Students’ bullying one another was seen as an “extreme problem” or “moderate problem” by 32 respondents or 91.4% of participants. Student use of physical violence was seen as a “moderate problem” or “minimum problem” by 94.1% of respondents. Students bringing weapons to school was seen as a “minimum problem” by 21 respondents or 61.8% of participants. A lack of student connection to their school was seen as an “extreme problem” or “moderate problem” by 70.6% of respondents. Deteriorating conditions of the physical facilities in the school was seen as “not a problem” by 78.8% or 26 respondents. Inadequate supervision of students before or after school and inadequate supervision of students during transition times were seen as “moderate problems” by 52.5% and 54.5% of participants respectively. However, unsatisfactory monitoring of school grounds was seen as a “minimum problem” by 39.4% of respondents which was the greatest percentage for the question.

Nearly 83% of participants “strongly agreed” that it is important for their school to have a safety plan in place to address the possibility of a violent act occurring. When asked if their school has a plan to be followed in case a violent act occurs, 24 people responded “yes” while 3

people responded “no.” Eight individuals skipped the question, and while the reason for this is unclear, it is hypothesized that these individuals did not know if there was a plan or not. When asked to respond to the following statement, “If a plan is in place: I know the steps involved in the safety plan” 48.5% of participants responded with “disagree” or “strongly disagree” while only 45.5% of respondents responded with “strongly agree” or “agree.” Participants were then asked to rate feeling confident in their ability to carry out the plan. The greatest percentage of respondents (11 or 32.4%) marked “strongly disagree.”

In assessing preparedness for acts of violence, participants were asked to respond to four statements. The first was, “I have the professional knowledge to effectively deal with violent situations at school.” While the greatest percentage of respondents (14) stated that they “agreed” with this statement, 19 respondents stated that they were “not sure,” “disagreed,” or “strongly disagreed.” The second statement said, “I have received appropriate training to deal with violent situations at school.” Eighteen participants or 52.9% of respondents “disagreed” or “strongly disagreed.” Thirdly, participants were asked to respond to the statement, “I have the confidence to effectively handle violent situations at school.” The greatest majority of respondents (42.4%) said they were “not sure.” Finally, “I am involved in the school’s efforts to deal with violent situations” was given as a statement to respond to. Twenty seven respondents or 81.8% of participants “disagreed” or “strongly disagreed.”

### **Discussion**

The author’s original hypothesis, that staff members do not have the professional knowledge, have not received appropriate training, and do not have the confidence to handle school violence, was supported by the results of the survey. Further, the results of the current study show that violent risk factors, both at the individual level and the school level, are present



at the school. And while there are preventative measures currently in place, the effectiveness of each varies.

Students bullying one another, verbal threats made by students, a lack of student connection to school, insufficient supervision of students before or after school, and inadequate supervision of students during transition times were seen as moderate problems at the school by the majority of participants. These factors are all violent risk factors and could possibly contribute to the likelihood of violence occurring. On the other hand, student use of violence and students bringing weapons to school were seen as minimum problems by the largest number of participants. In addition, deteriorating condition of the physical facilities in the school was not seen as a problem by nearly 80% of participants. Since these three items were not seen as issues, they are most likely not risk factors that would contribute to violence occurring at the school.

Nevertheless, the school clearly does have factors that make it at risk for the possibility of violence. The school does currently have preventative measures in place, and the majority of participants agreed that security devices (e.g. cameras or metal detectors), zero tolerance policy for weapon possession while at school, and students knowing where to report their awareness of violence all promote student and staff safety at the school. Interestingly though, while the above measures have been implemented, their ability to prevent violence has not been documented by research. Young et al. (2002) stated that additional security measures may actually instill fear in students and staff rather than promote safety. Additionally, there are no empirical studies demonstrating that zero tolerance policies increase school safety (Allen et al., 2008). Further, while staff members feel that students know where to report their concerns of violence, most participants (88%) were not sure or did not think that students would feel comfortable reporting their awareness of violence. Students knowing where to report their concerns is not helpful if

they do not feel comfortable actually doing so. According to Wike and Fraser (2009), students are more likely to report concerns if the school provides an anonymous way to do so. The lack of a similar procedure at the school where the survey was administered may be one reason why students would not be comfortable reporting their concerns.

Positively, the majority of participants agreed presence of school security officers, having counselors available to help students with issues related to violence, and having a trained crisis intervention team available to assist with problems of violence all promote student and staff safety. Having school security officers is often a benefit because they can quickly respond in the case of a violent episode because of their location within the school (Wike & Fraser, 2009). School counselors should be a part of a violence intervention team and be available to help students with issues related to violence. Allen et al. (2008) stated that taking a multidisciplinary approach, requiring the cooperation of many different individuals, can help prevent school violence from occurring.

Negatively, the majority of participants disagreed with the following statements: that consistently implemented suspension/expulsion of students who commit acts of violence occurs, that students are supervised across all settings, and that students are trained in anger management techniques and conflict resolution/peer mediation. These factors may contribute to increased occurrences of violence.

While there are clearly violent risk factors present at the school and many problems with the preventative measures that are currently being taken, the majority of participants (nearly 66%) believed that it was somewhat unlikely that a violent act would occur at their school. This is consistent with the research of Chapin and Coleman (2006) who surveyed students and found that the majority believed that violence was less likely to happen to them or happen in their

school as compared to other individuals and schools. This optimistic bias belief often prevents the members of a school community from taking protective measures to ensure the safety of themselves and their school.

In turn, the results of the current survey showed that the staff is generally unprepared to deal with a violent act perpetrated at school. They feel that they do not have the professional knowledge to effectively deal with violent situations at school, have not received the appropriate training to deal with violent situations at school, and do not have the confidence to effectively handle violent situations at school. Further, nearly 82% of participants disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, I am involved in the school's efforts to deal with violent situations. This is especially troublesome because most participants agreed that having a trained crisis intervention team available to assist with issues of violence is important. Yet, the majority of the staff is not involved.

Since violence cannot always be predicted or prevented, it is important for schools to have an implemented safety plan in the event of a violent act. While nearly 90% of participants said that their school does have a safety plan and the greatest percent of participants (40%) agreed that they know the steps involved in the plan, 49% disagreed or strongly disagreed that they knew the steps involved. Additionally, the greatest number of participants (32%) strongly disagreed that they feel confident to carry out the plan.

As evidenced from the results of the survey, the school could be at risk of a violent act being perpetrated and does not have many sound preventative measures in place. Unfortunately, if a violent act were to occur, many of the staff would not feel prepared to handle the situation or carry out the school's already proposed plan. Therefore, steps need to be taken to ensure the safety of the staff and students at the school.

**Implications**

In order to promote school safety, the staff of the school should be provided with relevant school violence information. This could be offered in numerous different formats including emails, presentations, or handouts. Emails could be sent to the staff, presentations could be done at faculty meetings, or handouts could be provided. No matter how this is done, school violence facts should be reviewed by faculty members on a regular basis. An example of a fact sheet is provided in Appendix D. Such information should be updated regularly and made available to the staff.

A staff training that teaches how to deal with violent situations at school should also be implemented and made mandatory. Different training opportunities that currently exist include having outside agencies or organizations come to the school to present or watching relevant videos available on DVD or online. Through trainings staff should be taught how to deescalate potentially violent situations and how to respond if violence does occur. Staff should have the chance to practice these techniques and become comfortable using them.

Providing information and trainings are two new additions that the current school could make. However, to build off of what the school is already doing related to violence, the school safety plan should be considered. The staff should be educated about the plan and improvements should be made. When asked for a copy of the plan, the researcher was not able to obtain one, and this leads to the conclusion that many staff members do not know where to locate the plan. In turn, even fewer staff members have probably recently reviewed the plan. Therefore, the school safety plan should be presented to the staff of the school and then improvements should be made to the plan. This should be an ongoing process.

Finally, all staff members should be included in dealing with safety efforts of school.

School Counselors could offer to participate in or run a multidisciplinary violence prevention team. They could take the lead on staying current with school violence information and presenting this information to the staff. They can communicate with staff members about potentially violent situations and meet with students who may be at risk of becoming perpetrators of violence. Because of their training, School Counselors should not be idle participants in the school's safety efforts. Instead, they should be active leaders.

### **Limitations**

While recommendations have been offered based on the results of this study, the limitations of the research should be considered before implementing any changes. Limitations for the current study include the creation of the survey and the sample used. Unfortunately, because this survey was specifically created for this project, it was not tested for validity or reliability of any form. Therefore, the survey's results may not be meaningful to the topic. Also, if the survey was given to the same group of people again, the results may not necessarily be consistent. In addition, important information was inadvertently left off the survey. It would have been helpful to include gender, position at the school, and years working at the school of each survey taker. Unfortunately, the researcher did not realize this until looking at the results of the completed surveys.

The study was also limited by the sample used. Of 110 participants asked to participate, only 35 chose to do so. Further, the participants were all staff members at a school that is considered suburban, and thus, the results would have been different if it were in an urban or rural setting. Also, since all the participants were members of the same school community, their experiences may have been similar. The sample size could have been expanded by using the entire school district, other schools in the area, or even a national sample which would make the

results more meaningful.

These limitations regarding the survey and sample have an impact on the current project. Therefore, they should be considered when considering the results and recommendations offered. In addition, changes to improve these limitations should be taken into account for further research on this topic.

### **Future Research**

School violence is an issue that can affect any school in any area, and staff preparedness is essential in handling it. Therefore, more research should be conducted in this area. However, first and foremost, school violence needs to be more strictly defined when being used in a research project. While many components may be included in its definition, each study needs to provide information on what is being constituted as school violence. Is bullying included in the definition? What about school shootings? Are both of these examples of school violence? If so, what can be done so that each different aspect of this term can be looked at independently to get a solid understanding? No matter what the answer to these questions is, school violence needs to be defined in more concrete terms in order for future research to occur. This would allow relevant statistics, programs, and recommendations to be more easily offered based on what constitutes school violence.

Preparedness should also be examined in more detail. For what aspects of school violence are staff members unprepared for? Are there specific violent actions they do not feel comfortable dealing with? Are there others that they do feel comfortable dealing with? What would make staff members feel more prepared to handle school violence? Trainings? Gaining knowledge? The many different facets of being prepared should be further examined.

Also staff preparedness might be better addressed by providing staff with a pretest,

implementing an educational session or training on school violence, and then administering a posttest. This would allow the researcher to see the effects of education or trainings on staff preparedness for school violence which is more beneficial than merely stating if staff members are prepared or unprepared. As researchers gain knowledge of how education and trainings impact preparedness for handling violence, a better understanding of what needs to occur so that staff members feel prepared will transpire.

In conclusion, while it is important to address if school staff members feel prepared to handle violence, it is more important to consider how to better prepare them for this possibility. This should be the focus of future research because no school is exempt from the possibility of a violent act occurring. Therefore, staff members should be prepared in order to protect themselves, their students, and their school community.

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**Appendix A: Cover Letter for Participants**

Dear Faculty and Staff,

I am conducting a research study on Middle School Staff Preparedness for Instances of School Violence. The following link will take you to a survey of 32 questions that will take approximately 5 minutes to complete:

[http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=8GIewY9HcxGzmbAocZPH0w\\_3d\\_3d](http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=8GIewY9HcxGzmbAocZPH0w_3d_3d)

The answers to this survey are important because school violence is a national problem and preparedness for handling it is essential to the safety of students and school staff. The results of this survey will be used within my thesis, which is part of the final phase of my graduate program in Counselor Education at The College at Brockport.

Your answers to the survey signify your consent to participate. Please do not type your name on the survey. There will be no way in which you will be connected to this survey, and results will be reported in aggregate form only. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not want to answer, and you may stop participating in the survey at any time by clicking “Exit this Survey” in the top right hand corner of the screen.

If you choose to participate, please read each question and respond as honestly as possible. Left click your mouse in the circle which best describes your opinion of the topic being addressed. You may only choose one answer for each question or statement. When you have completed the survey, please click “Done” to ensure that your answers have been recorded.

Thank you for your participation in the survey. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.

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### Appendix B: Staff Preparedness for School Violence Survey

#### 1. School Safety

	Always	Often	Sometimes	Never
Do you feel safe at school?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

#### 2. School Violence

	To a large extent	To some extent	To a little extent	To no extent
Do you think violence is an issue at this school?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

#### 3. Likelihood of Violence

	Very likely	Somewhat likely	Somewhat unlikely	Not at all likely
What is the likelihood of a violent act occurring at this school?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

#### 4. Indicate the extent to which the following are problems within your school.

	Extreme problem	Moderate problem	Minimum problem	Not a problem
Students bullying one another	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Student use of verbal threats	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Student use of physical violence	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Students bringing weapons to school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



	Extreme problem	Moderate problem	Minimum problem	Not a problem
Lack of student connection to school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Vandalism of school property	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Deteriorating condition of the physical facilities in the school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Insufficient supervision before or after school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Inadequate supervision of students during transition times	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Insufficient monitoring of school grounds	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**5. School Safety Plan**

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I think it is important for this school to have a school safety plan in case a violent act occurs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**6. This school has a safety plan in place in case of a violence related emergency**

- Yes
- No

**7. If a plan is in place:**

	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Not Sure</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
<b>I know the steps involved in the safety plan</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**8. If a plan is in place:**

	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Not Sure</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
<b>I feel confident in my abilities to carry out the plan in the case of a violent act occurring</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**9. Preparedness for Acts of Violence**

	<b>Strongly agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Not Sure</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>
<b>I have received appropriate training to deal with violent situations at school</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>I have the professional knowledge to effectively deal with violent situations at school</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>I have the confidence to effectively handle violent situations at school</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	<b>Strongly agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Not Sure</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>
<b>I am involved in the school's efforts to deal with violent situations</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**10. This school uses the following strategies to promote student and staff safety**

	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Not Sure</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
<b>Security devices(e.g. camera, metal detectors)</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Presence of School Security Officers</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Students knowing where to report their awareness of weapons or violence</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Students feeling comfortable reporting their awareness of weapons or violence</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Zero tolerance policy for weapon possession while at school</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Trained crisis intervention team available to assist with problems of violence</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Supervision of students across all settings</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Not Sure</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
<b>Training students in anger management techniques</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Training students in conflict resolution and peer mediation</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Having counselors available to help students with issues related to violence</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Appendix C: Survey Results**

**Staff Preparedness for School Violence**

1. School Safety					
	<i>answered question</i>				35
	<i>skipped question</i>				0
	Always	Often	Sometimes	Never	Response Count
Do you feel safe at school?	45.7% (16)	51.4% (18)	2.9% (1)	0.0% (0)	35

2. School Violence					
	<i>answered question</i>				35
	<i>skipped question</i>				0
	To a large extent	To some extent	To a little extent	To no extent	Response Count
Do you think violence is an issue at this school?	2.9% (1)	28.6% (10)	60.0% (21)	8.6% (3)	35

3. Likelihood of Violence					
	<i>answered question</i>				35
	<i>skipped question</i>				0
	Very likely	Somewhat likely	Somewhat unlikely	Not at all likely	Response Count
What is the likelihood of a violent act occurring at this school?	2.9% (1)	31.4% (11)	62.9% (22)	2.9% (1)	35

4. Indicate the extent to which the following are problems within this school:					
	<i>answered question</i>				35
	<i>skipped question</i>				0
	Extreme problem	Moderate problem	Minimum problem	Not a problem	Response Count
Students bullying one another	20.0% (7)	71.4% (25)	8.6% (3)	0.0% (0)	35
Verbal threats made by students	14.7% (5)	61.8% (21)	23.5% (8)	0.0% (0)	34

4. Indicate the extent to which the following are problems within this school:					
Student use of physical violence	2.9% (1)	35.3% (12)	58.8% (20)	2.9% (1)	34
Students bringing weapons to school	0.0% (0)	2.9% (1)	61.8% (21)	35.3% (12)	34
Lack of student connection to school	14.7% (5)	55.9% (19)	23.5% (8)	5.9% (2)	34
Vandalism of school property	3.1% (1)	21.9% (7)	59.4% (19)	15.6% (5)	32
Deteriorating condition of the physical facilities in the school	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	21.2% (7)	78.8% (26)	33
Insufficient supervision of students before or after school	12.1% (4)	51.5% (17)	24.2% (8)	12.1% (4)	33
Inadequate supervision of students during transition times	6.1% (2)	54.5% (18)	33.3% (11)	6.1% (2)	33
Unsatisfactory monitoring of school grounds	3.0% (1)	36.4% (12)	39.4% (13)	21.2% (7)	33

5. School Safety Plan						
	<i>answered question</i>					35
	<i>skipped question</i>					0
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Response Count
I think it is important for this school to have a safety plan in place to address the possibility of a violent act occurring	82.9% (29)	14.3% (5)	2.9% (1)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	35

6. This school has a safety plan to be followed in case a violent act occurs at the school:			
	<i>answered question</i>		27
	<i>skipped question</i>		8
		Response Percent	Response Count
Yes		88.9%	24
No		11.1%	3



7. If a plan is in place:						
	<i>answered question</i>					33
	<i>skipped question</i>					2
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Response Count
I know the steps involved in the safety plan	6.1% (2)	39.4% (13)	6.1% (2)	21.2% (7)	27.3% (9)	33

8. If a plan is in place:						
	<i>answered question</i>					34
	<i>skipped question</i>					1
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Response Count
If a violent act were to occur at this school, I feel confident in my ability to carry out the plan	5.9% (2)	26.5% (9)	23.5% (8)	11.8% (4)	32.4% (11)	34

9. Preparedness for Acts of Violence:						
	<i>answered question</i>					<b>35</b>
	<i>skipped question</i>					<b>0</b>
	<b>Strongly agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Not Sure</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
I have the professional knowledge to effectively deal with violent situations at school	5.7% (2)	40.0% (14)	37.1% (13)	11.4% (4)	5.7% (2)	35
I have received appropriate training to deal with violent situations at school	2.9% (1)	20.6% (7)	23.5% (8)	38.2% (13)	14.7% (5)	34
I have the confidence to effectively handle violent situations at school	3.0% (1)	24.2% (8)	42.4% (14)	21.2% (7)	9.1% (3)	33
I am involved in the school's efforts to deal with violent situations	0.0% (0)	15.2% (5)	3.0% (1)	54.5% (18)	27.3% (9)	33

10. This school uses the following strategies to promote student and staff safety:						
	<i>answered question</i>					35
	<i>skipped question</i>					0
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Response Count
Security devices (e.g. camera, metal detectors)	20.0% (7)	68.6% (24)	0.0% (0)	11.4% (4)	0.0% (0)	35
Presence of School Security Officers	18.2% (6)	75.8% (25)	3.0% (1)	3.0% (1)	0.0% (0)	33
Students knowing where to report their awareness of weapons or violence	12.1% (4)	54.5% (18)	24.2% (8)	6.1% (2)	3.0% (1)	33
Students feeling comfortable reporting their awareness of weapons or violence	0.0% (0)	42.4% (14)	45.5% (15)	12.1% (4)	0.0% (0)	33
Zero tolerance policy for weapon possession while at school	30.3% (10)	42.4% (14)	18.2% (6)	6.1% (2)	3.0% (1)	33
Consistently implemented suspension/expulsion of students who commit acts of violence	12.1% (4)	24.2% (8)	9.1% (3)	48.5% (16)	6.1% (2)	33
Supervision of students across all settings	0.0% (0)	27.3% (9)	33.3% (11)	36.4% (12)	3.0% (1)	33
Training students in anger management techniques	0.0% (0)	15.2% (5)	24.2% (8)	54.5% (18)	6.1% (2)	33

10. This school uses the following strategies to promote student and staff safety:						
Training students in conflict resolution and peer mediation	0.0% (0)	27.3% (9)	21.2% (7)	39.4% (13)	12.1% (4)	33
Having counselors available to help students with issues related to violence	21.2% (7)	72.7% (24)	3.0% (1)	3.0% (1)	0.0% (0)	33
Trained crisis intervention team available to assist with problems of violence	12.1% (4)	39.4% (13)	9.1% (3)	27.3% (9)	12.1% (4)	33

### **Appendix D: Fact Sheet on School Violence**

#### Risk factors for perpetrators of school violence:

- Male gender
- Victim of bullying
- High level of exposure to violence
- Has an accepting attitude of violence
- Is interested in or has possession of a weapon

#### Risk factors for schools that experience violence:

- Size and location of a school: including large schools, schools in urban areas
- Physical condition of the building: including those needing repairs, with uncomfortable temperatures, that have large amounts of graffiti or are dirty/ unsanitary
- School environment: including inconsistent rule enforcement, low expectations for student performance
- A lack of communication within schools

#### Relevant Websites:

- Students Against Violence Everywhere
  - [www.NationalSAVE.org](http://www.NationalSAVE.org)
- Constitutional Rights Foundation
  - [www.crf-usa.org/school-violence/](http://www.crf-usa.org/school-violence/)

#### Recommended Reading:

- Allen, K., Cornell, D., Lorek, E. & Sheras, P. (2008). Response of school personnel to student threat assessment training. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 19(3), 319-332. doi: 10.1080/09243450802332184