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# Understanding School Social Workers' Roles in Bullying Prevention and Intervention

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Understanding School Social Workers' Roles in Bullying  
Prevention and Intervention

by

Jessica L. Staples, B.S.

MSW Clinical Research Paper

Presented to the Faculty of the  
School of Social Work  
St. Catherine University and the University of St. Thomas  
St. Paul, Minnesota  
in Partial fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Social Work

Committee Members

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The Clinical Research Project is a graduation requirement for MSW students at St. Catherine University/University of St. Thomas School of Social Work in St. Paul, Minnesota and is conducted within a nine-month time frame to demonstrate facility with basic social research methods. Students must independently conceptualize a research problem, formulate a research design that is approved by a research committee and the university Institutional Review Board, implement the project, and publicly present the findings of the study. This project is neither a Master's thesis nor a dissertation.

### Abstract

The primary purpose for this research was to gain a better understanding how school social workers are assisting in bullying prevention and intervention efforts at schools. Semi-structured interviews were done with three school social workers and three school administrators from school districts around the Twin City metropolitan area, in Minnesota. Interview questions were asked regarding: understanding of roles, consideration of school bullying prevention programs, exploring opinions about bullying prevention policies, understandings of laws and policies, talking through the successes and lack of success of the current bullying program in the school and lastly, exploring roles in policy making. Findings from this study were analyzed, coded and were compared and contrasted with the literature review. Three themes appeared throughout the interviews: use of curriculum, reporting and policy, and bullying vs. conflict. The results are stated in length, followed by a discussion and the implications of the study. It is important that school social workers continue to evaluate their own bullying curriculum within their school, looking at the school's climate, positive relationships with students and staff, and how they may be able to utilize the key principles towards fighting bullying within their school, as well as using a curriculum that makes sense. Special attention should also be placed on diversity and age appropriateness of what is being given to the students.

*Keywords:* bullying, cyberbullying, mental health, disabilities, school social work, school administration, parental involvement, policies, bullying prevention programs

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## Understanding School Social Workers' Roles in Bullying Prevention and Intervention

The U.S. Department of Education's School Crime Supplement of the National Crime Victimization Survey reported that during the course of the 2009-2010 school year, 23% of the students reported being bullied either *daily or weekly*, and of the 12-18 year old age group, 28% reported being bullied at some time throughout the school year (Robers, Kemp & Truman, 2013). Bullying can be found in schools throughout the spectrum: elementary, secondary, colleges, universities, public, private, alternative or religious schools; no matter what school you look at you will run into various forms of bullying (Avi Astor, Benbenishty, & Nunez Estrada, 2009). Bullying is also brought on for a variety of different reasons; social status, racial tensions or sexual identification are some examples (Klein, 2012; O'Malley Olsen, Kann, Vivolo-Kantor, Kinchen, & McManus, 2014). Large scale incidents of school bullying can impact schools and their students especially when they include things such as cyberbullying, suicides and school shootings (Kalish & Kimmel, 2010; Rice et al., 2015).

Dramatic school shootings seem to be a norm in the United States and are continuing to bring attention to the violence relating to bullying within schools. The 1999 school shooting at Columbine High School, in Littleton, Colorado, in which two students brought a large amount of ammunition and weapons into their school and opened fire on students and staff throughout the building, before turning the guns on themselves, often serves as a benchmark, in terms of school bullying. This rampage left twelve students and teachers murdered and wounded twenty-one others. The shooters, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold made statements to students and even made a video the night before the shooting took place. Their quotes: 'People constantly make fun of my face, my hair, my shirts' 'I'm going to kill you all. You've been giving us shit for years' and

‘This is for all the shit you put us through. This is what you deserve’ bring their bullying to light. Other shootings within the last decade have included a student, Cho Seung-Hui at Virginia Tech. Cho shot two students in a dorm room and then within hours went through an engineering building, shooting staff and students. Once finished he had killed 32 people, injured 17 and then took his own life (Kalish & Kimmel, 2010). And in 2001 a female student, attending a Catholic school in Pennsylvania, who was only 14 years old, shot a fellow classmate during lunch hour, in the school’s cafeteria (Wike & Fraser, 2009). The media has also helped to sensationalize these incidents as they highlight these stories and pull the public’s attention to this topic. Many feel the impact of these stories on our country and our communities, with those most concerned and impacted being students, parents and anyone working within a school setting. Schools should be a safe haven and anyone setting foot inside of a school should feel and be safe (Robers & Truman, 2013). These are just a few examples of how bullying can become very serious and why school social workers can play a key part in its prevention.

Victims often times have a certain characteristic that the bully picks out, such as being thinner, over-weight, having a gender identification that is different than their own, a physical disability, a student whose academic performance is much better or much worse than that of other students, and/or a student who has little to no social skills (McNamee & Mercurio, 2008). However, sometimes it is not always known why a victim is selected by the perpetrator.

Both the victim and the perpetrator who are involved in bullying can develop symptoms of serious mental health issues later in their lives if their mental well-being is not addressed. Victims could have symptoms relating to isolation, depression, anxiety and/or suicidal feelings, whereas bullies could start to abuse alcohol or drugs and/or start to act out with violence. This is why it is important that when bullying occurs that both parties are helped to get through the

incident, by a professional, often times by a teacher, school counselor or social worker (Wang & Iannotti, 2012).

Cyberbullying is a type of intentional bullying in which the individual uses electronic technology to feel powerful towards another person; examples include spreading rumors or sharing embarrassing photographs. More than just computers, electronic devices can include cell phones, tablets and e-readers. These devices have the ability to message other devices; have a wide variety of applications that can be downloaded to them, such as Facebook, SnapChat, Instagram and Twitter; and have the ability to access websites. With the variety of ways to communicate, children are now opting to use their devices to communicate instead of picking up a phone and calling their friends. This allows for communication, anytime, day or night. It can happen alone, or with a group of friends. A problem with this is that parents are buying their children these devices, with little or no supervision (Upton Patton, Sung Hong, Ranney, et al., 2014). Another issue is that cyberbullying is not just being done at home, but it's being done at schools as well. Sometimes, cyberbullying even turns violent (Waasdorp & Bradshaw, 2015). According to the Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 15% of high school students have been cyberbullied in the last year (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, n.d.). The government has tried to assist schools in establishing policies on cyberbullying, but these problems are still very present inside of U.S. schools (Borum, Cornell, Modzeleski, & Jimerson, 2010)

Victims see suicide as a way to escape bullying, as well. In September of 2013, Rebecca Sedwick, who was only 12 years old, jumped from the top of a cement factory in Lakeland, Florida, after facing both face-to-face bullying and cyberbullying. Even after repeated attempts by her mother to remove Rebecca from these situations, like changing her school and deleting



her Facebook account, she still had bullies making comments to her, like “maybe you should just die” and “would you please just die” (Dahler, 2013, p. 1).

For school social workers, these incidents occurring within schools should allow them to utilize their education, experience and expertise to assist the school in prevention and intervention techniques. Whitted and Dupper (2005) discuss how social workers could be integral in this and state the variety of different roles that a social worker could hold; they could do things such as becoming a member of a task group or a committee, assist in obtaining monies, such as grant writing, assume a role in evaluating a program and lastly, be present for long-term planning of the program. Schools could also have social workers assess students’ risk factors for potential problems. Additionally, school social workers could work with the parents of victims and bullies in educating them and in providing them with resources.

The purpose of this study is to further the knowledge of the role that school social workers play in bullying prevention and intervention and to look at anything that may be improved upon. This study will try to determine what components school social workers assist with and what they don’t assist with, regarding bullying prevention and intervention in schools throughout Minnesota. The research question for this research is: What are the roles of a school social worker in prevention and intervention of school bullying?

### **Literature Review**

The significance of bullying has come to light in the last three decades. In the early 1980's, research started looking at bullying, which at that time was verbal, physical and relational in nature. Then the first suburban school shooting, carried out by a Caucasian male in 1982 (Kalish & Kimmel, 2010) had researchers looking more into the causes of bullying. During the 1990's bullying really started to change its form to include cyberbullying.

Perpetrators can bully for a wide variety of reasons, but oftentimes there is a genetic predisposition or environmental factors that lead to the bullying. These environmental factors can include things such as family dynamic issues, attachment issues in relationships, lack of positive feedback, lack of positive role models and/or lack of or inability to keep friends.

School social workers have the ability to assist in bullying prevention in schools: they are able to assist in implementing anti-bullying programs, assist victims, bullying and individuals who are present in a bullying incident, by providing counseling services, and they can also be utilized to teach students skills relating to their social contexts. The concrete reason that bullying within schools matters is that bullying interrupts the social and emotional health of students and when that happens it interrupts the student's ability to be able to learn (Minnesota Department of Education & Minnesota School of Social Workers Association, 2007).

There were five themes that were found in the literature regarding bullying within schools. Those themes are characteristics of bullying; school climate; school social workers' history and laws; assessments and interventions; and values of school social workers. In reviewing the literature there were some obvious gaps that were present and those are discussed, as well.

The term "bullying" has a lot of ambiguity. The U.S. Department of Education even cited in 2011 an article that analyzed bullying laws and policies in different states. It noted that of the

states that had bullying laws, that there was no uniformity in the definition for the term “bullying”. The other issue that was noted was that the term “harassment”, although it has a very specific definition and laws relating to it, was used interchangeably with bullying when looking at educational policies (U.S. Department of Education, Office for Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development, & Policy and Program Study Service, 2011). Later in this paper, the importance of the term “harassment” relating to bullying will be discussed. The literature regarding bullying also has a lot of terms that are associated with it, some of which have the same meaning and have a variety of definitions. Because of the many terms and definitions, the definitions that will be used throughout this study will be included in Appendix A.

### **Characteristics of Bullying**

To better understand the specific characteristics of bullying several pieces of literature have been analyzed. The themes that came up were: gender differences, sexual orientation in bullying and friend and acquaintances in bullying.

#### **Gender Differences in Bullying.**

There are many differences in how a female student handles a situation from how a male student handles a situation. This has to do with hormones, puberty and a variety of other things that may be going on in the body at any given time. The U.S. Department of Education’s School Crime Supplement of the National Crime Victimization Survey (2011) reported that during the course of the 2009-2010 school year, female students had a higher likelihood of being made fun of, being the subject of a rumor and/or excluded purposely from an activity, whereas male students were reported to more likely be involved in physical bullying of some type (Robers, Kemp & Truman, 2013). Waasdorp & Bradshaw (2015), utilizing a survey from the Maryland Safe and Supportive Schools Initiative, found that girls have a higher likelihood to be a

victim of relational, verbal and cyberbullying, whereas boys have a higher likelihood for being a victim of physical bullying.

### **Sexual Orientation in Bullying.**

Studies have been done that specifically target the responses of students that identify as a lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender or questioning (LGBTQ). This group is a target because they are considered a minority within a school, and are seen as an easy target because they are different than other students. O'Malley Olsen et al. (2014) found after reviewing data in the Youth Risk Behavior Survey, which was given in ten different states and included ten large urban schools, that male students who identified as gay or bi-sexual had a higher chance of being bullied on the school property. A quarter of the bi-sexual male students had been in a physical fight and/or been threatened or injured on school property, which was significantly higher when compared to heterosexual males. Moreover, bullying occurs on school grounds approximately 75% of the time to boys who identify as being either gay or bi-sexual. The findings are similar with the Upton Patton et al. (2014) study, finding upon reviewing literature, that there is a substantial overlap between face-to-face bullying and cyber-bullying, including a higher rate of cyberbullying in those reported to identify as LGBTQ.

### **Friend and Acquaintances in Bullying.**

Kids growing up are often very easily influenced and they are trying to find their niche, their friend group for the rest of their school career. It happens when children fall in with students with a different set of morals, a different way of doing things; and, sometimes students are trying to "earn" their reputation. When that happens, students are victimized by people who they think are friends or are known to them. Rice et al. (2015) utilized a Youth Behavior Survey and found that over sixty-five percent of the bullying cases were done by someone that was

known to them. Waasdorp & Bradshaw (2015) also utilized a survey, from the Maryland Safe and Supportive Schools Initiative, which found over 72% of students surveyed knew or thought that they knew the perpetrator, with over 33% of students reporting that they thought that they were friends and almost 10% reporting that they were in fact friends.

### **School Climate.**

School climate is important when looking at bullying. O'Malley Olsen, et al. (2014) concluded that based on the findings of their study that a school's climate has a direct link to the rate of victimization within a school. There are many pieces to the school's climate that should be considered: the culture within the school, staff/student relationships, student/peer relationships, parental involvement and student perceptions. When we look at a school's culture each school is going to look and feel different for a variety of reasons. The general look of a school is important, including positive posters hanging on walls. A natural environment that includes plants or trees and is inviting for students, and elicits a positive response from those at school for anyone entering the building. But when the walls are bare and the posters that hang on the walls are not welcoming or warm, then feelings of negativity or lack of care may come to mind (Avi Astor, Benbenishty & Nunez Estranda, 2009). Also, when speaking about the culture of a school, it also included things like the relationships that can be seen during passing hours, or at the beginning or end of the school day. Nation, Vieno, Perkins & Santinello's (2007) study showed that teachers play an important role in the student's bullying behavior. Teachers who kneel down to speak with students and teachers talking to students at their eye level, meeting the child at where they are physically, is important (Avi Astor, et al., 2009).

The way in which principals and teachers, as well as teachers and other teachers respond to each other when the students are watching is also very important. Students' observations of

teachers smiling, hugging, laughing and putting their arms around each other are all examples of this positive type of reinforcement (Avi Astor, Benbenishty & Nunez Estranda, 2009). Also, students who perceived their teachers and other school staff to be supportive were more likely to validate positive attitudes towards seeking help for bullying threats of violence. If the students felt as though the teacher truly cared, respected them or was genuinely interested in them, they were more likely to report cases of bullying, threats or notify staff if a gun was brought into the school (Eliot, Cornell, Gregory & Fan, 2010). Principals who are respected by their staff also positively impact the school's climate. Avi Astor et al. (2009) found that one school with a positive climate was characterized by: the principal "sets the tone", "engages with student in the halls", allows the school to be a "value cultivating place", he/she is a "positive leader", the teachers' felt as though he/she "fully trusts" them, he/she "stands behind the schools educational vision" and he/she is "accepted by the teachers, students, and parents"(p. 442-444).

If rules or policies are set forth within a school and students, parents or community members do not agree with them this may sway the culture of a school, as it may breed hard feelings or feelings of unfairness. Cunningham, Cunningham, Ratcliffe, & Vaillancourt (2010) concluded based on interviews in their research with students in a middle school that often times meaningful consequences are not handed down to students and that parents and schools need to get on the same page with discipline of students. Although it might not seem as though parents impact a school's climate, they actually do in many ways. To give a few examples, parents have expectations of schools, rules at home for their children, rules that they expect that their children abide by and a wanting to be in a partnership with the school and share in the responsibility of educating their children. In fact, Nation, et al. (2007) found that the role of the parents is actually more important than the role of teachers over time, when it comes to schooling. It is often

difficult because parents, for a wide variety of reasons, seem as though they are not paying attention to their child (Cunningham, et al., 2010). That is extremely frustrating for the school, but more importantly, it is not fair to the child, who needs their guidance. Parents were also included in a study that found that they felt as though they needed direction when it came to bullying and also felt the need for resources and information on the topic. That study also found that parents were drawn to the feelings of a “shared responsibility” in wanting to fight bullying issues with the schools (Harcourt, Jasperse & Green 2014). Lastly, Sawyer, Mishna, Pepler & Wiener (2011) found that parents needing to be there for their child after an incident dealing with bullying was critical. They also found that the way that parents see things and their perception is significant for bullying interventions.

### **School Social Workers: History and Laws**

Beginning in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, social workers began working in large industrial cities along the east coast to determine the needs of children in their areas. None of the social workers were employed within the schools, but instead were employed by agencies within the area. In New York the social workers were supported by a settlement house. The primary responsibilities included working with immigrants on encouraging acceptance, language barriers, and activities that included both the school and the community at large. In Boston, Massachusetts the social workers were backed by the Women’s Education Association, and accompanied the “visiting teachers”, when they would visit the homes of students to meet with them and their parents. And lastly in Hartford, Connecticut the social workers were included in a program that assisted a psychologist’s office in obtaining information from their clients and also included the “visiting teachers” in this as well. This allowed the psychologist’s office the expedition of implementation of treatment plans and recommendations (Lide, 1959). Throughout the following

century school social workers would work with students on: inclusion of immigrants, recognizing differences in individuals, understanding the importance of the educational system, and creating a framework for schools (Constable, 2006).

In the first national study looking at the tasks of school social workers, Costin (1968) discusses the findings of her study, in which it was found that social workers that held a master's of social work were less likely to delegate tasks to other social workers who held a lower degree than them, and the same for social workers who had training that differed from their own. Costin (1968) also found that social workers' roles were the same or similar to what would have been accurate ten to twenty years prior, primarily doing individual clinical casework. The social workers did not appear to be following current literature nor were they following along with the change in the needs of the students (Costin, 1968).

In 1973, the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) convened for the first time. They met to discuss topics that were facing the school social workers directly: budget issues, discussions about feeling as though they were being highly criticized by the public school systems, and other positions within the schools claiming to possess the same roles as the school social workers (Allen-Meares, 2006). Within three years of this meeting the first standards of a school social worker were established by the NASW. The standards included professional practice, organization and administration, and competence, with an overlying theme of intervention (Allen-Meares, 2006).

Civil rights have been around for over sixty years, and were established to protect individuals' freedoms. There are currently civil rights laws that protect our students from harassment while they are in school and are enforced by the Department of Education and the Department of Justice; these are: Title IV and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964; Title IX



of the Education Amendments of 1972; Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973; Titles II and III of the Americans with Disabilities Act; and lastly, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1975. Students who are harassed based on their actual or perceived sexual orientation are protected under Title IX. (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2014) One of the issues with bullying is that there is no current federal bullying policy that protects our children while in school, and that is causing confusion and misunderstandings on how to handle certain situations. Goodemann, Zammitt & Hagedorn (2012) state the issue very clearly, “This inconsistent conceptualization of bullying creates an atmosphere of uncertainty for school officials in how to respond effectively and creates a dangerous atmosphere for students” (p. 124).

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) was the federal initiative that was created by President George W. Bush in 2001. President Bush stated that our country was in a crisis, that our country was divided, based on the ability to be able to read and have dreams, even after spending billions of dollars on our educational infrastructure. He created seven items that needed immediate attention. Item number five was encouraging safe schools in the twenty-first century, and it included four sub-themes, which were: teacher protection, promoting school safety, rescuing students from unsafe schools, and supporting character education (Bush, 2001). Although this initiative assisted schools in preparing their teachers and students for safer schools, some pieces, like an emphasis on bullying prevention, was not included.

In 2011 Governor Mark Dayton created a task force on the Prevention of School Bullying. After three years the bill passed through the House and the Senate and the bill was signed in April, 2014. The law includes prevention and intervention for students, parents and

school staff, and includes ways of reducing absences, suspensions, and students from dropping out of school. (Outfront Minnesota, 2015)

The Safe and Supportive Minnesota Law includes the following:

- Definitions of bullying and intimidation
- Certain protections against the most vulnerable populations of students to be bullied, about actual or perceived characteristics: race, color, creed, religion, disability, sex, age, national origin, immigration status, marital status, family status, socioeconomic status (regarding receipt of public assistance), academic status, physical appearance, sexual orientation, and gender identity or expression of it
- Prevention and interventions trainings and resources for students, staff and school volunteers
- A defined procedure that must be followed when bullying incidents are reported, including that of restorative justice behaviors (Outfront Minnesota, 2015)

### **Assessments and Interventions**

School social workers are able to work with students, teachers, school administrators and the community to try to prevent bullying from occurring in schools and also to assist school staff, when bullying occurs, to intervene with students and/or staff that are involved. Schools, for a variety of reasons, after an increase in violent bullying incidents covered by media and an increase in bullying related laws within the past ten to fifteen years, have school districts looking into the implementation of an anti-bullying program or programs. Programs have been developed to try to assist in this process.

The Minnesota Department of Education & Minnesota School of Social Workers Association (2007) has established the keys to a successful bullying program within a school.

The following keys include:

- implementation of the program school-wide
- discussion of prevention techniques with all students
- a healthy way to find ways to express emotions
- education on replacement behaviors of bullying
- involvement including family and the community
- building on acceptance and feelings of ownership towards the program by staff and an understanding that the changes in behavior can take time
- pushing the students and staff into a different and/or new mindset

Much of the current research on bullying prevention states similar findings.

There are many things to consider when looking at a bullying prevention program that must address social, behavioral, and mental health concerns (Bradshaw, 2015). When looking at programs that will address the needs of a school there are many factors that must be considered prior to its start. Those things include the school administration's full support of the program, support from staff and adequate training for those staff, support that the program that will be implemented has been tried before and has worked for other schools, is developmentally and culturally appropriate, is cost-effective for the school district, including on-going or recurring costs, has the ability to be integrated into the school's current curriculum, and lastly, is something that the students will have fun doing (McNamee & Mercurio, 2008).

Performing a needs assessment on students within a school is essential for bullying prevention. The assessment assists school staff in understanding things that they may not have

understood before, like the frequency and results of bullying within their school. When doing a needs assessment it is important to include things like the assets and resources that the school and its community bring. Interventions, such as a new program or other environmental interventions may be needed, based on the findings (McNamee & Mercurio, 2008).

There are also strategies that are not used for bullying prevention, approaches that may not work or could potentially be harmful to students: peer facilitated programs such as peer mediation, peer-led conflict resolution and peer mentoring do not work for students who are bullied. The reason that these interventions do not work is that bullies teach bullies, and it is possible that the students who are leading these programs could be teaching bullying behavior and possibly reinforcing aggressive behavior to the students in the program (Bradshaw, 2015 & Whitted & Dupper, 2005). Other strategies that should not be utilized are conflict resolution, group therapy, and restorative justice approaches. The reason is that the bullying is not a disagreement between two students of equal status or power; instead one student feels power over the other and this would not be helpful and may end up being harmful to the victim (Bradshaw, 2015 & Whitted & Dupper, 2005). There is also little evidence that one-day trainings regarding bullying for parents are beneficial, as parents often get caught up in the suicide prevention piece, which may result in misperception of the facts (Bradshaw, 2015).

Schools have different intervention methods that they have tried, in an attempt to reduce and/or eliminate school bullying. McNamee & Mercurio (2008) state that intervention should target and communicate the behavioral norms utilizing classroom and schoolwide rules that prohibit bullying and promote the modeling of a respectful and non-violent environment. Whitted & Dupper (2005) suggest to “bully-proof” the school, using zero-tolerance. Zero-tolerance would include things like positive interest, involvement and role modeling from adults

within the school, firm limits, non-punitive and non-physical sanctions. However, Bradshaw (2015) found that zero-tolerance policies may result in the underreporting of bullying incidents. She states that often times they are looked at as too harsh or punitive in nature, and there is also little supporting information regarding their effectiveness in curbing bullying.

The following are a couple of examples of programs that are currently used at schools throughout the country. Each of them has certain elements that may seem more appealing to one school district than another. The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program includes the training of staff, a bullying prevention committee, a school-wide kickoff event, parent involvement, staff discussion groups and a classroom piece, which includes meetings regarding bullying and the reinforcement of the school's rules. Bully-Proof your School stresses school as a safe and caring environment. It includes staff training, student instruction, support for victims, parent support, and development of caring communities. The Don't Laugh at Me Program stresses a safe and respectful school. It includes fourteen classroom sessions, which include the development of skills, awareness, and feelings of students. It also includes appreciation for diversity, emphasis of a caring classroom, and conflict resolution (Whitted & Dupper, 2005). Saarento, Boulton & Salmivalli's (2014) study examined strategies utilizing KiVa, an anti-bullying program. KiVa is a two part program that includes *indicated actions* and *universal actions*. Indicated actions are when the school identifies bullying incidents within the school and has conversations with all students who are involved, regarding the incident itself. Students who are more social are then asked to support students who have been victimized that are having a hard time after the incident. Universal actions are when the program is brought in at the school-wide level and then deployed within each individual classroom; this includes lessons and online learning. For this study schools were randomly selected to use the program and surveys were done at three

separate points during the school year, using a web-based questionnaire. The KiVa program was found to have worked to positively influence students' attitudes towards bullying, assisted students who were onlookers to bullying to step-up and say or do something and lastly, assisted teachers in how they looked at their students, regarding their attitudes towards bullying.

### **Values of School Social Workers**

It is important to define why social workers do what they do and to understand the mission that they work under. Social workers' mission is to "enhance human well-being and help meet the basic human needs of all people, with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty" (National Association of Social Workers, 2008). To accompany the mission is a set of core values which social workers have utilized during the course of the profession; they are service, social justice, dignity and worth of the person, importance of human relationships, integrity, competence (National Association of Social Workers, 2008).

#### **NASW.**

The National Association of Social Worker's is the nation's largest association of professional social worker's, with over 132,000 members. "NASW works to enhance the professional growth and development of its members, to create and maintain professional standards, and to advance sound social policies" (National Association of Social Workers, 2008). The NASW has six values that the ethical principles are built on: service, social justice, dignity and worth of the person, importance of human relationships, integrity and competence. Social workers also utilize specific ethical principles, which include the following:

- Social workers' primary goal is to help people in need and to address social problems.
- Social workers challenge social injustice.

- Social workers respect the inherent dignity and worth of the person.
- Social workers recognize the central importance of human relationships.
- Social workers behave in a trustworthy manner.
- Social workers practice within their areas of competence and develop and enhance their professional expertise.

(National Association of Social Workers, 2008)

The NASW also has guiding principles for which school social worker practice must be upheld, in addition to the Code of Ethics:

- Education / School Reform
  - Proactive in addressing issues relating to reform and policies impacting schools
  - Assist with mandates at the federal, state and local levels
  - Ensure a safe environment
  - Ensure school policies are equitable
  - Provide advocacy for early and positive behavioral interventions
- Social Justice
  - Equality of schooling for all students
  - Collaboration with students, parents, teachers, administration, and the community regarding equality of access to proper education
  - Use of the ecological perspective
- Multitier Interventions
  - Tier 1
    - Evidence-based, prevention programs promoting positive behaviors, social emotional development and a school climate that promotes positive learning for students

## Tier 2

- In an effort to promote early academics and behavioral based social-emotional engagement, using data to inform, short-term interventions using small groups

## Tier 3

- Evidence-informed and long-term individual interventions for students having on-going school issues due to the student's own issues: behavioral, academic or social-emotional

(National Association of Social Workers, 2012)

**MSSWA.**

The core values that are upheld by school social workers include service, social justice, dignity, worth of the person, importance of human relationships, integrity and competence (Minnesota Department of Education & Minnesota School of Social Workers Association, 2007). They bring together a student's home, school and community. They also work closely with the school's staff, as part of their team, to encourage and ensure the success of students academically and socially giving students' services that are unique to them, some of which are, and are not limited to:

- Assessments and Screenings
- Counseling and Support Groups
- Crisis Intervention
- Home / School Collaboration
- Advocacy
- Services to Families
- Services to School Staff



- Coordination of Community Agency Services
- Classroom Presentations
- Program, resources, and policy development

(Minnesota Department of Education & Minnesota School of Social Workers Association, 2007)

### **Gaps in Literature**

In researching the topic of bullying and its impact on school social workers I found very little literature that included school social workers, what they are included in when it comes to policy and procedures within schools or what they do to assist victims, bullies or bystanders. Slovak & Singer (2014) surveyed social workers, who work in schools and found that when it comes to school's policies on cyberbullying, there is a lack knowledge about policies' and that there is a lack of the policies' effectiveness. Moreover, three in four social workers' reported having no say in policy making, when it comes to cyberbullying. This is puzzling, given the person-in-environment perspective that informs social work practice, which includes special attention to vulnerable populations. The purpose of this study is to better understand the roles of school social workers in prevention and intervention of school bullying.

### **Conceptual Framework**

For the purpose of this research project the lens that is used to examine and advance this research study is critical theory. Critical theory looks beneath the surface of the current system, the way that things are currently running, in an attempt to understand the injustices that are present. The theory does not look at a specific individual's needs, but rather focuses on the needs of a population as a whole. This theory also looks at social justice issues, such as gender, race and class. The third piece of this theory ensures that power and oppression are not present. Lastly, it looks at the outcomes, and makes certain that knowledge and truth correspond with social justice (Keenan, 2004). The "application of critical theory corresponds with the profession's core value of social justice and aligns with such practice strategies as anti-oppression, anti-discrimination, advocacy, human and social rights, democratic participation, and redressing social injustice" (Miley, O'Melia, & DuBois, 2013, p. 31). This theory is used because it challenges the current systems, the ways that things are currently being run. For this paper the researcher will put the focus on understanding the role that school social workers have in bullying prevention and intervention.

As noted previously, the research has shown little proof of school social workers utilizing their resources in their work with students. When we think about the micro, mezzo and macro levels of school social work, we look at the variety of roles that school social workers may not be fulfilling.

At the micro level, school social workers are not able to advocate properly for students or their families. They are not able to provide access to resources that may be available to assist students through a bullying incident; this includes victim assistance as well as the bully or bystanders that may have been present. Resources may include things like mental health or

therapy referrals. We must also ensure that services offered for prevention are being equally accessible to all students, regardless of race, class, sexual orientation, or disability.

At the mezzo level, school social workers may not be providing assistance in organization of training for school staff and administration, or working with administration about a bullying prevention program that could be integrated after an assessment of the bullying within the school. School social workers are also not able to do classroom presentations regarding bullying prevention.

Finally, at the macro level, there is no voice in advocating for policies that support bullying prevention within schools. School social workers have the ability to be the voice, and lobby for bullying policies and laws changes. There also needs to be an understanding as to the availability of funding for school social workers.

School social workers have the ability to empower clients if they are allotted the possibility of systemic changes. School social workers could have the potential to assist with these issues but due to potential systematic barriers, are not able to move around and assist. As social workers there are ethical standards to uphold, and it is our duty to follow those principles for the betterment of the students, teachers, and administrators within the schools.

## **Methods**

### **Research Design**

The purpose of this study was to understand the role of school social workers in bullying prevention and intervention from school staff's perspectives. More specifically, questions regarding school policies and bullying prevention strategies were looked at further. The research is qualitative and was completed by conducting semi-structured interviews of participants (Appendices G & H). The questions focus on the respondents' opinions relating to their and others' involvement in bullying prevention and interventions. The survey was administered by the researcher in person and over the phone, depending on the availability of the respondent. An email was sent to school administrators (Appendix B) and school social workers (Appendix C) requesting their participation in the study and a second email (Appendices D & E) was sent out as a follow-up to the initial request. The email directed individuals with interest in participation to contact the researcher via email.

### **Sample**

The sample that was used was a non-probability sample. The contact information for potential respondents was obtained from publicly available websites. The population in this study was a convenience sample that consisted of school administrators and school social workers from around the Minneapolis and St. Paul Twin Cities. The size of the distribution was large, due to fear of lack of response because of the lack of down time that these individuals may have during the school day. Approximately 232 school administrators were sent one email (Appendix B) and approximately 54 school social workers were sent another email (Appendix C), requesting participation, which also contained the informed consent form (Appendix F).

### **Measurement**

The measurement tool for this survey is an interview, containing qualitative questions, and contains closed-ended questions focusing on the respondent's demographics, experience, and background. The questions that were created for this research were drafted after reviewing the literature and address various aspects of school policy, laws and intervention strategies. The first questions began relating to the demographics relating to the school: next, the questions moved towards the respondent's background; and finally, the questions got into the specifics relating to the prevention and intervention strategies within their specific school. Since this was a semi-structured interview, additional questions were asked and other points were discussed surrounding the topic of the research.

### **Protection of Human Subjects**

This study was reviewed both by the chair and committee members of this study, as well as by the St. Thomas University Institutional Review Board (IRB). The cover letter stated that by clicking on the link to the survey that the respondent was voluntarily consenting to participate in the study, that all information given during the time of the survey was confidential, and that the respondent would remain anonymous. The respondents were also informed that there were no benefits or risks associated with taking the survey. Respondents were able to exit from the study at any time, without repercussion. Respondents were told that the information collected during the course of the study would be kept on a password protected computer and in a locked cabinet within the researcher's home. The interviews were each audio-recorded and once transcribed, were destroyed. All identifying information was removed when the transcription was done, and the transcription will be kept with this study indefinitely (Appendix I).

Prior to the interviews, the consent form was reviewed with each respondent (Appendix F). They were assured of the confidentiality of the study, reminded that the interview would last forty-five to sixty minutes, and that the conversation would be audio-recorded.

### **Setting**

The interview was conducted either by phone or in person, depending on the request of the respondent. A time was set-up that worked for both the respondent and the researcher, which was a time that was free from other distractions. The setting was calm and comfortable for both the respondent and the researcher. If the interview was done by phone, it is important to note that the researcher was not able to see the respondent's facial or body cues, to assist in the interview process.

### **Data Collection**

The respondents agreed to take part in this study and signed the consent form. The interviews were a semi-structured format, guided by a set of questions, what were approved by the chair and committee members of this research (Appendices G & H). The committee chair is a licensed clinical social worker, who holds his doctorate in social work and the two committee members are both licensed independent clinical social workers, who hold their master's degrees in social work. The questions were created to attempt to be as neutral as possible and were also open-ended, in an attempt to have a free-flowing and open dialogue. The questions were intended to promote a realistic and accurate interpretation of the respondent's experiences with this type of work. The interview lasted approximately forty-five minutes to one hour and was audio-recorded for later transcription.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis was based on a grounded theory methodology. Grounded theory allows for the researcher to develop the theory, by allowing the theory to come out of the data, which allows the respondents' own words to be put directly into the body of the research (Monette, Sullivan, DeJong, & Hilton, 2014). Once the interview was complete a transcription was composed and the information was looked over, and when information seemed pertinent it was highlighted (Appendix I). Topics that were coded consistently throughout the text were grouped into themes, and later reviewed for accuracy.

### **Strengths and Limitations**

One of the strengths of this study is that there are so many roles within a school district, that each of them sees the different roles that social workers hold and are able to speak on the different ways that school social workers respond in bullying intervention and prevention strategies. Another strength seen by the researcher is that there is such little information on this topic that this survey can only benefit the field of social work, by getting more information about school social workers' roles in bullying.

### Findings

Three school administrators and three school social workers employed within various school districts throughout the Twin Cities were interviewed for this study. The respondents varied in experience, in that there was one participant who was just hired as a new school social worker at the beginning of the school year to an administrator who had been working in schools for over twenty years. Two of the school administrators were men and one was a woman. All three school social workers were women. Each of the participants varied in the setting that they worked at: one school social worker worked as both an elementary and middle school social worker, one administrator worked at a high school and the other four school social workers and administrators all worked in a middle school. One of the interviews was done with a school social worker and a school administrator at the same time and the rest were one-on-one interviews.

The researcher noted that during two of the interviews there was an acknowledgement of a lack of bullying from two of the respondents. The first respondent's school district does not have a student curriculum in place at this time and only indicated training of staff as part of their bullying prevention. The participants stated that "right now we don't have a huge bullying issue..." and also noted that "the definition gets muddy the longer we use it." This was also noted as the researcher reviewed the literature, in that the definition of bullying varied depending on the text. The other participant stated that

*...a lot of our kids are open enrolled from North Minneapolis, so they choose to come here. They would be going to like Edison or the rougher schools in Minneapolis, so kids just don't do a whole lot that's going to get them in trouble because they know that our principal is tough and if you choose a bad behavior you'll be potentially choosing another school.*

So there are varying reasons why this way be the case.



During two of the interviews, the respondents made mention to the importance of a positive relationship with students in the school and the staff. They both felt as though this positive relationship was crucial for a positive school environment. The other piece to this is that the kids have to have positive adults that they trust and can come to if they are having issues. One of the respondents stated, “They have to trust staff. There has to be a relationship with the staff. They have to have someone they can go to.” And the other respondent discussed at length how there are very strict consequences in their school, because prior to their current principal there were fights every day and they had to find a new principal,

*he is amazing, because not only is he strict with kids, but he also cares about kids, has relationships with kids. The kids really like him. He is not like a bad guy, they actually respect us all...*

The three themes that appeared throughout the interviews were identified as the use of curriculum, reporting and policy, and bullying vs. conflict.

### **Curriculum**

In each interview, the researcher explored the different aspects of the school’s bullying curriculum, if they had one in place. Depending on the district they all had different approaches, but they all had certain areas that were responsible for key pieces of their bullying prevention curriculum; those areas were able to be broken down into areas of involvement: district, whole school, administration, teacher, social worker and parent. Parental involvement in three of the five interviews was not present until a situation needed to be reported, and two participants reported that parents were invited to a bullying prevention night to be involved in the prevention efforts.

#### Curriculum 1

The first interview described a bullying prevention program that was not working for their school. They were using the OLWEUS bullying prevention curriculum and between the administration and the school social worker they found that it needed to be changed. Before the school social worker worked in her current position, there was a different approach to the bullying prevention curriculum, “last year...the social worker and the school psychologist did classroom presentations. They went into each classroom once, and while it was good material that was presented, a one-time presentation is not effective. So that’s why we wanted to do something more long-term and more repetitive.” Staff then worked with their district and a “...PowerPoint was created as a collaborative process with the Teaching and Learning Department...the support staff here was myself, admin, our behavioral specialist, and school psychologist.” They discussed how,

*...last year our district support team, which is all the school social workers and school psychologists, the Director of Student Services...spent a lot of time last year going over and creating plans for this year... They really left a lot of it in our hands, which was good.*

This year they started that program and called it Promoting Positive Peer Relationships. The social worker talked a little about her frustration with the process last year,

*...there wasn’t a lot of planning time that was given to us by the district but before the school year started. To really plan out a lot of structural things that we could do and not just bullying prevention, but just positive school climate stuff, which go hand-in-hand; it supports a lot of bullying. So that’s something for next...summer. We’re being given actual curriculum planning time, like that we’re being paid for. So I’m excited for that that we’ll actually have time for diving into it. I think there’s a lot more school-wide things that we could be doing. So far the district hasn’t said no to our ideas and the things we want to do, which is good.*

And then the school administrator stated that “We as a district have always felt like we’ve been on the front line, for bullying prevention.” They both then stated that they are doing things to

better their school on bullying prevention efforts even before there are laws or policies to support their efforts.

The researcher noticed that there were posters in the hallways and in the office that we were sitting in doing the interview. The social worker stated that “RISE UP is something that is taught every day, respect, integrity, strength, excellence, understanding, and pride. And that’s a new initiative that we have the school year, it’s kind of like a school mantra.” She stated that with this new mantra they have incorporated other pieces to the RISE UP curriculum.

*...we started with RISE UP breakfasts, every quarter. It’s a way to pull out the students who may not be on the honor roll, getting that kind of recognition, but we see them showing any of the RISE UP words throughout the day. So they could be doing something simple, like helping a new student around the school and a teacher notices, and they refer them for a RISE UP. So that seems to be something that we are catching a lot of the kids that might not always get that positive recognition.*

The administrator stated that they had started doing something that they had not done in years past, something quite radical, and something that the administrator thought made sense to him.

*...this year we started doing more restorative justice pieces too, mediations and having kids do physical work and really trying to help them understand how their behaviors are impacting others. And I think we have a long way to go with that, but I think we’ve made a lot of progress this year with some new ideas to handle people who are bullies and also people who are bullying victims. Really how I handle bullying is, because it doesn’t say if this happens do this, there’s just a million ways to deal with it. That’s what makes it so interesting. It’s kind of hard and complicated. Because there are sometimes that you wouldn’t want to put them in the room together. Right. They’re not ready for that, it’s clearly more power on one, so that’s a longer process to see change.*

At the beginning of the school year they required that every teacher, for the first two weeks of school take twenty minutes during homeroom and go over the PowerPoints and watch some videos with their students; they called it Friendship Week. After it was over they requested feedback about the things that they were given, they were told that

*...one of the biggest things that teachers felt was, a lot of the stuff out there, one of the videos that are out there are not reflective of our diverse student population, so was hard for the kids to actually see themselves in the videos and the current curriculums that are out there.*

The social worker thought that instead of the PowerPoints or videos that “The kids really learn good from role-playing, having a connection to it to actually understand how bullying can really impact someone’s life.” So she is excited to talk more with other school staff next summer to revamp their current work. She really felt as though they could do more great things next school year. And then through the rest of the school year every teacher has to incorporate RISE UP into their lesson plan,

*...every teacher is required to incorporate the pieces of RISE UP at some point into their weekly curriculum... [the] teachers have to show how they’re using those words, different activities and like teambuilding, things related to each word that we’ve given to teachers too, so that they can pull from those to figure out how they can relate a respect lesson with their math lesson.*

### Curriculum 2

The next respondent did not have a lot of knowledge about the bullying curriculum, despite her role as an administrator; and in addition to that their curriculum was minimal, including no involvement from the school, the administrators, the teachers or the social workers. She stated that, “The district does all of our bullying stuff. So they have a program, I’ll call it a homemade program that they do...They call it Safe and Supportive Schools...The district does all of our work on that. We haven’t really touched much of that unless they’ve told us.” So the schools in the district do not have the freedom to create something that is centered towards their kids; they instead are required to follow the lead of the district. The administrators in each building get trained by the school district, “It’s really like a PowerPoint presentation in a Professional Development Session. It’s not very extensive.” And then they are required to go back to their school “...it’s a train-the-trainer idea. And then it’s the admin’s responsibility to go

back to the buildings and do the trainings in the buildings.” The respondent agreed that their program was definitely lacking in many of the pieces, although this was one of the respondents that felt as though bullying wasn’t much of an issue at their school. The respondent felt as though these changes would be positive:

*I think that if the district did some different work with the community, discussion about it, you know maybe include a student lesson piece with it, a student knowledge about what bullying is and what it’s not that would be helpful. You know we have high school kids so I think if the tone was correct, if it was tied into reality if it was tied into graduation and being “College and Career Ready” then I think it would help. If it’s just an isolated piece about bullying no. Age-appropriate if it’s age-appropriate.*

And then she went on about how she could see it being integrated into her school.

*...we have an advisory here, so two times a week kids go to a separate, smaller group area with two teachers; if it was incorporated into the things we’re already doing in that, great. You know we are an IB school, we are international baccalaureate, if we were tying it in with the learner profiles, you know being caring, responsible and those sorts of things.*

### Curriculum 3

The next interview had had a very minimal bullying prevention curriculum. The respondent stated that their school had an extra-curricular group called by their school name: Leadership Academy. This group was in charge of over-seeing the anti-bullying promotions in the school. This group includes both teachers and students. This year the school has had a wear orange day, to promote bullying prevention efforts in their school and around the nation. That group has also made posters that were hung around the school. Lastly, the school promotes positive character with “character cards” which can be filled out by either other students or teachers, and are mailed home to the student and their family.

### Curriculum 4

The next respondent stated that their bullying curriculum is something that is brought up every school year and each student is given a bullying prevention presentation; she stated that

“...it is something that the students are well aware of. It is something that is starting to be part of the culture...” The teachers and all staff are also given a refresher every year and if you are a new hire, you are also given a presentation. As the school social worker,

*I went into each classroom and gave each homeroom classroom a bullying presentation. And that consisted of; what is bullying, what is not bullying, where does that happen, what can you do, what shouldn't you do, that basically. They give you a PowerPoint, basically. And as social workers we said that's not appropriate for elementary schools, we basically did, I was just in front of the classroom and we did a question-and-answer, and then I read a story about bullying. And then there was questions afterwards. And the book that I chose to read changed with the grade, kindergarten through first grade got this book and you know fourth and fifth grade got this book.*

It was interesting that since this was the social worker's first year in this district, she stated that it was so busy at the beginning of the school year that, “I ended up giving the presentation to the students before I had my own training. It was a little weird.”

#### Curriculum 5

Lastly, the final respondent discussed how all of the students in the school will be exposed to bullying prevention during their school year. For the ninth graders, they come in for an orientation, all day before the actual school year starts, and bullying and cyberbullying are both presented and discussed. They discuss the seriousness of bullying in their school and the consequences. Of the day of orientation, it is touched on for about twenty minutes. During this time “juniors and seniors who have been pre-approved as mentors...are there...and they play games and build relationships with these kids...” As for the tenth through the twelfth grades, they rotate monthly and have meeting in the auditorium with their Dean, and bullying is often addressed, “...remember guys we keep it REAL here, we don't tolerate bullying.” REAL is the school's slogan and it is all their own. They refer to it as:

*...Positive Behavioral Intervention, and it's called REAL, REAL Expectations. REAL stands for respect, education, attitude, and loyalty. And within those things bullying is part of that and we positively reward kids, we try to be proactive with kids, so we have reward tickets. They are called [school name] reward tickets. When kids are showing*

*appropriate behavior and respectful behavior, like they are helping a peer, or they are improving in some ways, from something that they weren't doing as well in, or just showing REAL Expectations, they can get a ticket. With one ticket they can get like a bag of chips, hot Cheetos, Doritos, we have a whole bunch of stuff. They can also use their tickets to get discounts on like school dances or afterschool activities, basketball games, football games. We also have a school run coffee shop, they can get coffee or other healthy snacks, with their tickets.*

They also have a committee that they call a positive climate committee, that consists of the school social worker and other staff members, and they work together to come up with rewards for the students, “we have grade level contests, like who has the least behavioral referrals, which class has the least attendance issues, which class has the least amount of F’s, we reward those kids” and the winners are positively rewarded at that time.”

## **Reporting / Policies**

### **Reporting.**

In three of the five interviews the respondents discussed forms that they fill out with the students, and one of the respondents has a form that they are required to fill out in addition to the form with the student, that allows the staff member to give their version of what happened. The document formalizes the process of reporting bullying incidents. Some schools even have online reporting and also allow for parents to fill out the form. These forms are consistently given to the Dean of the School for either an investigation or for them to hand them down to the school social worker, so that they are able to work with the student or students, if it is for more of a social emotional issue. If the Dean of Students makes the decision to do an investigation and bullying is found to have occurred, two of the school social workers mentioned during their interviews that they were happy that their role does not require the punishment of a student, and reinforces their role as someone that students can come to for anything and they will get the help they need or be directed to someone who can help them. One of the school districts

does not have forms that they fill out, but they do document situations in a student management system and in addition to that they have an anonymous reporting line through which anyone can make an anonymous tip. They call it their “Wellness Tip Line”. The Dean “monitor[s] the submissions which are automatically forwarded to Administration, Social Workers, and Counselors...the submissions are archived each year so we can review and assess trends.

One of the school administrators talked about the importance of communication when it comes to students who complete the reports, because often times in their school district a form is filled out and there is little or no more information given back to the staff person who filled it out, and sometimes it’s necessary.

*...sometimes (I) don’t know where this (incident report) goes or what happened to it. And maybe a database...it might just be nice to look up somewhere that’s confidential. Whatever happened, what were the next steps, what was found out, do I need to look for anything...I (also) want more dialogue than this on incidents. A history, like where it’s happening, when it’s happening, and follow-up. There is no follow-up. What if I suspended a kid? What if the results of this was a two-day suspension or something? There’s nothing on here (the current incident report) that has that. (It) could be valuable to whoever’s looking it up.*

### **Establishment of Policies.**

The participants did not have a good grasp of who actually establishes the policies in their district. One respondent stated that, “I think that they establish policies based on what our school board and what they feel that the best course of action is.” And then another respondent states that they were not involved in the establishment of the policies in the school because the policies were established for the entire school district. The respondent goes on to say that they think the policy is written the way it is because of the way that the laws are written regarding bullying prevention, “As far as the laws that are out there, so I’m sure we had to write it, the statutes and laws that are out there I’m sure initiated what we have.” Thereafter, they go on saying that “I feel like our bullying policy is more like once it’s happened this is what you do...”



and the respondent stated then they feel that their school district should have a proactive piece to their bullying prevention curriculum.

Another respondent voiced their frustration about their feelings regarding the district making changes, which are not for the betterment of their school.

*I have no respect for my district because of that, with all due respect they're all white upper-class people making decisions about a school that is so diverse, we have so many languages spoken, they are running a school district that doesn't look like our school.*

### **Roles in Establishment of Policies.**

The respondents seemed to lean one way with respect to establishing policies, and three of the five interviewees voiced things that they felt as though could be changed when it came to individuals who assist in the establishment of policy. One of the respondents did state that their school district did not go along with this. The respondent stated that school social workers were able to be involved. They stated that "It's kind of like whoever wants to be involved." They then went on that "...you could ignore emails if you want, and you could be like I want to help out with this. They do, I think this district is pretty good with incorporating social workers where we are needed."

The other respondents each varied in their responses regarding who they felt that could be of the most assistance. The first respondent stated that schools are just so institutional and that

*I don't really have a whole lot of power, all the power is in the district. They are the ones that implement policies and procedures and so I don't feel like I am a huge piece of that at all.*

The respondent then went on stating that the district is unaware or uninterested in seeing who the students in the district are,

*And like I said I don't think that the district is serving our students because they don't know who they are and I don't think they want to learn or care.*

The next respondent stated that they also thought that additional resources, from people who know the schools and know the district would be valuable.

*I believe it would have been valuable to have both student and parent involvement in drafting the policy, although it is relatively straightforward in that bullying is not tolerated.*

The last respondent also thought that additional resources from individuals who know the schools and are the first to respond to incidents in the building would be a benefit to include.

*...so we have licensed and unlicensed staff, our licensed staff are our teachers and social workers and counselors are unlicensed staff are educational support professionals. Our ESP's, Dean's, security staff, behavioral interventionists. I think that we often miss people that are in the unlicensed category. When our security goes in a classroom to check on the teacher for student's needs they're the first person on site, and so I think we kind of miss them and a lot of our practices, in our trainings and in our planning steps. I would include the non-licensed staff. Because we depend on them for everything, yet I think we often times forget to ask them.*

*...you have to be conscious of setting aside money saying we will pay to have our non-licensed staff have this training, but I would also put that back in the district saying that we need to include that group, when we do make policies when they do make protocol around policies...*

### **Knowledge of Policies**

Respondents in all of the five interviews thought that deans, principals, and social workers all had knowledge of the policies regarding bullying in their district. One respondent felt as though most people in these positions know the basics of the policy, because it is discussed during the beginning of the school year and that each professional should know their role.

*As administrators we've got to know them; the school social worker has a very good understanding of what we do here. I think that the Dean here too, she is well aware. I think the people that are part of our support staff are aware of what we expect of them and how to handle situations. We talk about it (policy) at the beginning of the year (but we probably don't talk about it enough the rest of the year, and it just goes away. It's something that we do go over at the beginning of the year; it's a process, you know what*

*to look for and stuff like that, what's their responsibility as...teachers, so everyone's kind of got their role.*

The respondent stated that they don't necessarily look at policy; rather they use their experience to do what is right for the student.

*...we do follow those things, but to be honest with you we do it a lot more than probably our policy says. We use the frame of mind what's right for kids. If it's a situation that's not right we don't use policy to back it up, or talk policy. We talk about this is why we do things. We would never communicate situations to parents about breaking policy; we talk about this is wrong, this is why it's wrong. Because parents say let's change policy then it's not a problem. We do what's right and wrong in our judgment with our experience.*

Another respondent talks about not necessarily needing to know policy, because the manual with all of the policies is in it. The respondent then goes on about how they are supportive of the law itself, but that there is a certain amount of hyper vigilance about bullying.

*I understand the purpose of the law, but it's gotten to the point of students cannot handle walking, students can't even walk down the hallway without being looked at funny and running to administration and saying so-and-so's bullying again.*

### **Bullying vs. Conflict**

During the interviews of both school administrators and school social workers there was this common theme about students not actually bullying or experiencing bullying; instead, these students had conflict with others and were not able to cope with these issues, perhaps because of a lack of social skills. This actually came up in four of the five interviews. I felt frustration in these respondents' voices as they talked about it. They often said that they think that students are calling conflict bullying which is possibly making the issue larger than it really is. The first respondent I feel really knows and understands the power imbalance that you look for when bullying is discussed, and they still are seeing this conflict issue.

*...there are some cases of bullying, but you find out that most stuff is just two kids not getting along...it doesn't happen a lot where there is...some kind of a power imbalance...that can be with size, age, grade, intellect...but if there isn't that it's just a lot of two kids not being very nice to one another.*

The next respondent talks about the word bullying being too widely used for all incidents of conflict, such as when a parent calls to report their child has been bullied.

*I think the word bullying has taken on a more simplistic tone so it's hard when a parent calls in and says that their child's being bullied. We are not still talking about bullying, your son just doesn't like somebody.*

The next respondent is feels as though students are just unkind to each other and we are calling that bullying. They also describe the issue not being a school issue, but rather a societal issue that needs to be addressed.

*...most of the time it's not bullying, most of the time its conflict. It's not true cases of bullying, it's cases of kids being unkind to each other. It's not bullying, it's kids that don't know how to be kind to each other. I get involved when these kids can't get along.*

*I see students that cannot handle conflict. They as soon as, this is more than just policy, this is a societal thing I think. I see students that can handle to be uncomfortable, who don't know how to be bored, they don't know how to be comfortable in their own thoughts, they cannot handle conflict, and they don't know how to handle conflict, as soon as students are uncomfortable with this conflict, mommy and daddy have always been there to make it better. Now with the incorporation of the bullying, as soon as somebody is looking at someone, now it's, and I see this more at the middle school, it's so much drama. I think our administration is constantly investigating day-to-day drama and they are calling bullying. And it's not bullying, it's conflict. It's students being unkind to each other.*

The last respondent states that when we look at where our children are growing up, in poverty and broken homes, we have to understand that these skills will be learned at school, and that is why the school environment needs to be consistent and have rules and policies that are strict.

*...they have really stressful homes and home situation sometimes. So a lot of their social skills and behaviors are learned in school."*

### **Discussion**

This research attempted to gain further understanding about bullying prevention and intervention efforts currently being utilized in a sample of schools in the Twin City metropolitan area, in Minnesota. An attempt was made to understand school social workers' perception of their bullying prevention efforts and their understanding of laws and policies. School administrators were also interviewed in an attempt to understand their perspective of social worker roles and responsibilities pertaining to bullying prevention efforts in their school. Previous research has been done discussing the presence of bullying within schools, the affects that individuals feel once being put into a bullying situation and the impacts bullying has on an individual later in life, if not properly addressed (Avi Astor, et al., 2008; Wang & Iannotti, 2012).

In the research that was previously discussed a variety of different curricula were discussed in detail, as well as different approaches that have been proven and disproven (Bradshaw, 2015; McNamee & Mercurio, 2008; Saarento, et al., 2014; Whitted & Dupper, 2005). Bradshaw (2015) discussed pieces of bullying curricula that need to be taken addressed those things include social, behavioral, and mental health concerns. There were differing opinions about using zero-tolerance when punishing students for incidents of bullying (Bradshaw, 2015; Whitted & Dupper, 2005). This study considered the anti-bullying efforts that are taking place in a sample of schools in the Twin City metropolitan area, in Minnesota, and considers the effectiveness of the curricula from the school social worker or school administrators' perspectives.

### **Analysis of Findings**

The respondents from two of the five interviews spoke about the importance of the relationship of the students and their school staff. Both felt as though the positive relationship between students and staff was integral for student success in their schools. They both felt as though a strong bond, including trust and mutual respect were key. O'Malley Olsen, et al. (2014) also concluded the same findings and stated in their research that the school's climate overall has a direct link to the rate of victimization of bullying within a school. Research also states that the principal "sets the tone" for the school and when principals positively engage with their students they are more likely to feel respected and trusted by their students and the staff (Avi Astor et al., 2009)

### **Curriculum.**

Upon interviewing the respondents there was a varied response regarding the curricula that are being used within the schools that the respondents work in. No one curriculum mirrored another. All of the curricula were homemade and none of the schools used any of the programs that have been established, that were discussed earlier in the paper. One of the schools uses pieces of a variety of the different programs; however it was unclear which pieces come from which program.

McNamee & Mercurio (2008) described pieces of the curriculum that should be included in a school's program. Those things included administration's support of the program, support from school staff, adequate training of the staff, support that the program will work and has been trialed by other schools, is developmentally and culturally appropriate, is cost-effective, can be integrated into the school's curriculum and will allow the students' to have fun doing it. A lot of all of these pieces are being missed by some of the schools. Since the school curricula vary so

much, the researcher will look at each curriculum and describe each piece of what the school is using.

Curriculum 1 included many of these pieces. Those involved created a curriculum, with plans of revising it based on feedback from teachers, staff worked with the school district, a school slogan was created and included school-wide rules and a school-wide breakfast was created to get students motivated to do the right thing. There was also discussion about the age-appropriateness and the cultural aspect of the videos. Due to feedback received from the teachers, that students did not actually watch the videos, the videos that the students were presented needed to be changed. The only two pieces that were missing included that it had not been trialed because they had made it themselves and that it was unclear if the students enjoyed it. It is also important to note that research found it important that school-wide rules and policies be included in interventions, which was the case for this school, as staff included the school slogan on posters, in teacher's classrooms and in the school-wide breakfasts (McNamee & Mercurio, 2008).

Curriculum 2 had no involvement from the school as a whole or the school social workers. The only piece included was training that was given from the district to administrators, which was then passed down to the school staff. It is not clear whether or not the administrators in the building overall were supportive of this program. This administrator stated that there were many pieces that they felt should be added to the current curriculum including a piece where the students are included and it would be tied to graduation and be age appropriate. They also felt that this piece could be done in the student's advisory, which takes place twice a week. No other pieces were included in their curriculum, based on the interview. Curriculum 3 was very basic. It

was not clear based on the interview with the school administrator that any of the pieces from the research were being done with the curriculum.

Curriculum 4 included some of the pieces including administration's support of the program, support from school staff, developmental appropriateness, and cost-effectiveness. This program was modified by the school social worker to be age-appropriate for the students that they were giving it to. When the district sent it out, it was clear to the school social worker that it was not going to work for their students, so it was changed. This school social worker also stated that they ended up giving the presentation before they were even trained, which does not fit with the principles of staff being adequately trained.

Curriculum 5 included administration's support of the program, support from school staff, integration into the school's curriculum and allowance for the students' to have fun doing it. The students start out in ninth grade learning about bullying in orientation and they continue to talk about it with their dean throughout high school during their monthly meetings. They also have a school slogan that incorporates school-wide rules and policies which research has stated should be included (McNamee & Mercurio, 2008). Lastly, students are given reward tickets and allowed to buy things or receive discounts on events, which allows the students to get motivated to receive those things.

One thing that was discussed in the research of bullying is the importance of a needs assessment to determine the frequency of bullying within the school. This piece is something that the social worker could do to understand the need for further bullying prevention within a school (McNamee & Mercurio, 2008). None of the respondents in the five interviews ever discussed doing needs assessments in their schools.



Respondents in this study stated in three of the five interviews that parents are not involved with bullying until a situation involving their student is present. Research states that parents have a want, feelings of “shared responsibility” when it comes to prevention of bullying (Harcourt, et al., 2014). Also, two respondents stated that parents are invited to a night to speak about bullying prevention. Research shows that a one-day trainings are also not beneficial, because parents can get caught up in larger items like suicide and misperceive the facts surrounding bullying (Bradshaw, 2015).

Restorative justice was another piece that was discussed in the literature, as something that should not be utilized in bullying prevention, as bullying is done to another student typically due to a power imbalance (Bradshaw, 2015; Whitted & Dupper, 2005). However, the Safe and Supportive Minnesota law includes a piece on restorative justice behaviors, so a respondent started trying it (Outfront Minnesota, 2015). They do not use it in every situation, but they feel as though the students who bully then understand how their behaviors are impacting other students. They have just used it a few times, in a few situations that they felt it worked for; consequently, there was no real feedback about it except the respondent stating that it’s “hard and complicated”.

### **Reporting / Policies.**

In the gaps in literature section of this study, the researcher talked about little research that was found that included school social workers that were involved with policy and procedures. Prior research found that three out of four school social workers have no say in policy making. It also found that school social workers lack knowledge of policies’ and their effectiveness (Slovak & Singer, 2014). In four of the five interviews, the participants stated that the school district handled all of the decision making regarding the bullying policies and that the

school social workers had no say in it. One of the participants voiced that the district was making policies that did not represent their school and they were very frustrated about that. Only one of the participants stated that they were able to be involved in policy making. They stated whoever wants to be involved in policy making, can be, and that the district is “pretty good with incorporating social workers where we are needed”. Importantly, four of the five interviews showed that bullying prevention did not reach the standards that research suggests it should.

When it comes to knowledge about policies, responses in all five of the interviews were that deans, principals and social workers had knowledge of the bullying prevention policies in their district. The researcher did not feel as confident in this. One of the school administrators stated that it is gone over once in the beginning of the school year, and then continued saying that they do not dictate policy but use their experience and talk about right and wrong to the student. Another respondent stated that between the four school social workers in the district that they could come up with an answer if being asked it. And then another respondent stated that they felt as though they really did not need to know it because they had a manual with everything in it; additionally they really are not supportive of the law because they feel as though students are utilizing the term bullying when it is not appropriate. There is some indication that even with bullying policies in place, staff do not necessarily understand or closely adhere to them.

School social workers were reported in three of the five schools to be filling out reports of bullying incidents in their schools. Another school has a “Wellness Line” that is anonymous and those reports are also sent to the school social worker and the school administrators. Social workers are not involved, in any of the schools, with the investigation or the punishment of the student. Two of the five respondents stated that they are happy that their role does not require them to be a part of that and that their role is strictly around advocating for their students.

**Bullying vs. Conflict.**

The researcher was surprised to see this theme come out of this study because the researcher did not find this theme present in any of the literature. This theme was present in four of the five interviews. In some of the interviews, I actually felt the frustration that the participant was feeling, based on their tone or facial expression. The respondents talked about the fact that incidents are often called bullying by students or their parents, when in actuality, it is typical conflict characterized by students just not getting along. Much of this occurs on social media and is brought into the school and it is impacting the student's ability to learn or is impacting the student in not wanting to go to a class or school at all. In the literature review it was noted that students are utilizing their electronic devices to communicate, which allows for 24/7 access to anyone and that these devices are often being used by students with very little or no supervision (Upton Patton, et al., 2014).

**Strengths and Limitations**

The strengths of this study include that it adds to the growing research that is being done surrounding bullying prevention and intervention efforts. Another strength is that it looks at the different curricula that schools are using, including things that work for certain schools, and this can be used by other school social workers who are looking at changing the curriculum in their school. The semi-structured interview questions allowed for exploration, some of which surprised me, and led to honest and open information from the participants.

There are some limitations to this study. The fact that four of the five interviews were done by phone took away the physical aspect of being able to read body cues and respond to them. The researcher could have conducted more probing questions relating to policies within the schools, as well as more specific questions relating to the school's curriculum and their doing a needs assessment. Perhaps questions relating to things the school has done in the past would

have helped determine why the school uses what they do for a curriculum. There were also times that a question was not answered fully, and the researcher could have dug into the question more; therefore more information that could have been obtained. Lastly, better screening of the school social workers on their experience may have led to a better interview, as two of the school social workers had only been a school social worker starting in the 2015-2016 school year.

### **Implications for Social Work Practice**

Bullying within schools happens too often, and affects students; if they are not worked with, the impacts could last a lifetime. School social workers need to continue to monitor bullying prevention and intervention efforts. They need also to ensure the social skills of students making sure that students are able to build on positive relationships and utilize positive coping skills. This study will be able to be included with current studies relating to bullying prevention and intervention efforts that are taking place in this state and around our country.

This study offers a variety of curricula that have been found to work in schools around the Twin City area. It is important that school social workers continue to evaluate their own bullying curriculum within their school, looking at the school's climate, positive relationships with students and staff, and how they may be able to utilize the key principles that Bradshaw's research shows to work towards fighting bullying within their school, and using a curriculum that makes sense. Special attention should also be placed on diversity and age appropriateness of what is being given to the students'.

School social workers should also continue to learn about the continuously changing updates to federal and state laws concerning bullying prevention efforts. They should also try to work with their school on being involved in making or changing policy for the betterment of their school and also work with their legislatures for changes to state laws on bullying. They

bring a different lens to the table that others do not have. This lens would provide new light, a different perspective and would bring experience to the table that would be invaluable.

There is also a lot that needs to be done in the education of parents. I think we assume that parents know what is going on, but as research has shown they often feel lost and if given the proper information may feel empowered. We also need to realize that there are parents that may not be available to their students, so often times they are looking to the schools for guidance or assistance with their student's social and/or coping skills. Lastly, school staff may need to talk more to students, educating them on the differences between bullying and conflict resolution.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

This study defines the term bullying, but it is very apparent that the definition is still not clear for school administrators and social workers. More work needs to be done on this. I also think work should be done to ensure that all schools are receiving some of the same curriculum guidelines. It is apparent from this study that there are students that are receiving a lot of education on bullying and some are receiving next to none. There should also be more work at the legislative level to bring social workers into the making of laws and ensuring that social workers are included in policy making at the district level. Social workers have a different level of training and a different code of ethics which they follow, and I feel that without this level it is not benefiting our children, who are a vulnerable population of people. I also think a quantitative research study with a larger population of participants would be beneficial to know what is going on in Minnesota and in our country as a whole. Lastly, I think we need to look into how to integrate teaching students' social and emotional skills; this seems to be something that students' are struggling with when they are in school. I would recommend piloting an approach in which skills are taught for conflict resolution and where students are also taught the differences

between bullying and conflict resolution. This could not only be taught to students, but also parents to increase their knowledge and skills.

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## Appendix A

## Bullying Definitions

**Bullying:** an imbalance of power that includes repeated physical, verbal or psychological attacks or intimidation that is intended to cause fear, distress or harm to the victim (Cornell & Limber, 2015; Kueny & Zirkel, 2012)

**Cyberbullying:** a type of bullying in which the individual uses electronic technology to feel powerful over another person. Cyberbullying can take the form of bullying by sending hurtful emails or text messages, posting insulting messages or sharing embarrassing photographs.

**Physical or Direct Bullying:** a type of bullying that threatens or uses physical actions against another person. Physical or direct bullying can take the form of bullying by pushing, punching, kicking, stealing, ruining someone else's property or making someone do something they don't want to.

**Relational or Indirect Bullying:** a type of bullying that hurts another person's social relationships. Relational or indirect bullying can take on the form of bullying by spreading rumors, excluding a person or persuading others to exclude someone.

**Verbal Bullying:** a type of bullying that is face-to-face with another person using words or hand gestures. Verbal bullying can take on the form of bullying by name calling, teasing, yelling or making derogatory remarks (Wang & Iannotti, 2012; McNamee & Mercurio, 2008; Waasdorp & Bradshaw, 2015).

## Appendix B

## Email Request to School Administrators

Dear School Administrator,

Hello. My name is Jessica Staples, and I am a social work graduate student at the University of St. Thomas and St. Catherine University. I am currently working on my research paper, which is a requirement for my degree. The purpose of this study is to try to get your perspective to better understand the roles of school social workers relating to bullying prevention and interventions. This research is being supervised by Dr. Lance Peterson, Ph.D., LICSW. I am requesting that you look over the attached informed consent form and respond to me if you may be interested in participating. You are eligible as a participant because you are a school administrator with responsibilities related to bullying prevention policy in your school. Should you decide to participate, I will ask you to take part in a 45 minute - 1 hour interview, which will be audio-recorded. I will follow strict protocols to keep your information confidential; both my phone and my laptop computer are password protected, and your consent form will be kept in a locked file drawer at my home. Also, please contact me with any questions you may have.

I look forward to hearing from you soon and thank you for your time.

Best,

Jessica L. Staples

Email: [stap3919@stthomas.edu](mailto:stap3919@stthomas.edu)

Phone: 651-325-1167

## Appendix C

## Email Request to School Social Workers

Dear School Social Worker,

Hello. My name is Jessica Staples, and I am a social work graduate student at the University of St. Thomas and St. Catherine University. I am currently working on my research paper, which is a requirement for my degree. The purpose of this study is to try to get your perspective to better understand the roles of school social workers relating to bullying prevention and interventions. This research is being supervised by Dr. Lance Peterson, Ph.D., LICSW. I am requesting that you look over the attached informed consent form and respond to me if you may be interested in participating. You are eligible as a participant because you are a school social worker in your school with responsibilities related to bullying prevention policy in your school. Should you decide to participate, I will ask you to take part in a 45 minute - 1 hour interview, which will be audio-recorded. I will follow strict protocols to keep your information confidential; both my phone and my laptop computer are password protected, and your consent form will be kept in a locked file drawer at my home. Also, please contact me with any questions you may have.

I look forward to hearing from you soon and thank you for your time.

Best,

Jessica L. Staples

Email: [stap3919@stthomas.edu](mailto:stap3919@stthomas.edu)

Phone: 651-325-1167

## Appendix D

## Follow-Up Email Request to School Administrators

Dear School Administrator,

Hello. My name is Jessica Staples, and I am a social work graduate student at the University of St. Thomas and St. Catherine University. I contacted you about five days ago requesting your participation in a study regarding school social workers' roles in school bullying prevention and interventions. I understand you are probably very busy, but if you might be able to take just one hour of your time for me to interview you, I would be very appreciative. If you have not had a chance to look over the consent form, it is attached to this email as well.

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Best,

Jessica L. Staples

Email: [stap3919@stthomas.edu](mailto:stap3919@stthomas.edu)

Phone: 651- 325-1167



## Appendix E

## Follow-Up Email Request to School Social Worker

Dear School Social Worker,

Hello. My name is Jessica Staples, and I am a social work graduate student at the University of St. Thomas and St. Catherine University. I contacted you about five days ago requesting your participation in a study regarding school social workers' roles in school bullying prevention and interventions. I understand you are probably very busy, but if you might be able to take just one hour of your time for me to interview you, I would be very appreciative. If you have not had a chance to look over the consent form, it is attached to this email as well.

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Best,

Jessica L. Staples

Email: [stap3919@stthomas.edu](mailto:stap3919@stthomas.edu)

Phone: 651- 325-1167

## Appendix F

## Informed Consent Form

**CONSENT FORM****UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS  
GRSW682 RESEARCH PROJECT****Understanding School Social Workers' Roles in  
Bullying Prevention and Interventions**

I am conducting a study about the roles of school social workers and bullying prevention and interventions. I am inviting you to participate in this research. You were selected as a possible participant because of your work within a school system. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by Jessica Staples, a graduate student at the School of Social Work, St. Catherine University/University of St. Thomas and supervised by Dr. Lance Peterson, LICSW. This project has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of St. Thomas.

**Background Information:**

The purpose of this study is to try to better understand the role of school social workers relating to bullying prevention and interventions. The information gathered in this study will help to bring to light gaps in our current system, in hopes to start conversations about how to better utilize school social workers in bullying prevention and interventions.

**Procedures:**

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to perform a forty-five to sixty minute interview with me, by phone or face-to-face. The interview will take place at a location of the participant's choosing. The conversation will be audio recorded and I will transcribe the interview.

**Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:**

The one slight risk would be an unintended breach of confidentiality. However, as described below, I will follow a strict protocol to avert that risk.

There are no benefits to this research.

**Confidentiality:**

The records of this study will be kept confidential. Paper research records and the portable audio-recorder device will be kept in a locked file cabinet in my home office. I will also keep an electronic copy of the transcript in a password protected file on my computer. I will delete any identifying information from the

transcript and once the transcript is composed the audio-taped interview will be destroyed. The transcript, excluding any identifying information, will be kept with this study indefinitely.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer and may stop the interview at any time. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with St. Catherine University, the University of St. Thomas, or the School of Social Work. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without penalty. Should you decide to withdraw, data collected about you will not be used. Should you choose to participate in this study and at any time decide to withdraw from this study you can email me at [stap3919@stthomas.edu](mailto:stap3919@stthomas.edu) and your information will be removed from this study.

**Contacts and Questions**

My name is Jessica Staples. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact me at 651-325-1167 or [stap3919@stthomas.edu](mailto:stap3919@stthomas.edu). If you have further questions you may contact my chair, Dr. Lance Peterson at 651-962-5811 or [pete2703@stthomas.edu](mailto:pete2703@stthomas.edu). You may also contact the University of St. Thomas Institutional Review Board at 651-962-6035 with any questions or concerns.

**You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.**

**Statement of Consent:**

I am at least 18 years old and have read the above information. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent to participate in the study and to be audiotaped.

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**Signature of Study Participant**

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**Date**

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**Print Name of Study Participant**

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**Signature of Researcher**

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**Date**

## Appendix G

## Interview Questions – School Administrators

1. How many full-time school social workers work within your school district?
2. How many part-time school social workers work within your school district?
3. How many students are in your school district?
4. When you are talking about school social workers, which age group are those social workers working with?
5. What is your current role?
6. What is your educational background?
7. How long have you worked in schools?
8. How long have you worked in your current school district?
9. What bullying prevention program does your school use?
  - a. Prompt: If there is not a name, please explain the components of what your school uses.
10. Which members of school staff have the best understanding of education laws and bullying prevention policy?
11. What has been your role in the development of your current bullying prevention program?
12. Who else was involved in the bullying prevention policy?
13. For those who were involved, what was their role?
14. Describe the final decision process for coming up with the bullying prevention policy.
15. What indicators do you have for the success or lack of success for your current bullying prevention policy?
16. Looking back on the decision-making process with hindsight, what would you like to have seen different about the decision-making process for the policy?
  - a. Prompt: Who else from your staff, if anyone, would you have liked to see involved?

- b. Prompt: To what extent do you believe the community/parents were involved in the decisions?

## Appendix H

## Interview Questions – School Social Workers

1. How many full-time school social workers work within your school district?
2. How many part-time school social workers work within your school district?
3. How many students are in your school district?
4. When you are talking about school social workers, which age group are those social workers working with?
5. What is your current role?
6. What is your educational background?
7. How long have you worked in schools?
8. How long have you worked in your current school district?
9. What bullying prevention program does your school use?
  - a. Prompt: if there is not a name, please explain the components of what your school uses.
10. To what extent do you need to know education policies as it relates to your job functions?
11. What has been your role in the development of your current bullying prevention program?
12. Who else was involved in the bullying prevention policy?
13. In what way do you feel satisfied about your involvement in your school's current policy?
14. In what way do you feel dissatisfied about your involvement in your school's current policy?

15. To what extent was your social work expertise used in developing bullying prevention policy?