Principal Perspectives About Policy Components and Practices for Reducing Cyberbullying In Urban Schools

DISSERTATION

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By

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Abstract

This qualitative study explores large, urban, mid-western principal perspectives about cyberbullying and the policy components and practices that they have found effective and ineffective at reducing its occurrence and/or negative effect on their schools’ learning environments. More specifically, the researcher was interested in learning more about how principals, serving in schools with some configuration of the six-12 grand span and high concentrations of students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, addressed off-campus cyberbullying incidents that had an on-campus effect in the absence of state- or district-level policy on the subject. The sample in this study was comprised of 23 principals (i.e. 11 females and 12 males) from the district under study. Five major themes emerged from the data: (a) Cyberbullying in the School Setting; (b) Cyberbullying Effects for the School Learning Environment; (c) Policy Components and Practices that are Effective and Ineffective for Reducing Cyberbullying; (d) Principal Authority to Address Cyberbullying; and (e) Principal Perspectives About State-, School District-, and Building-Level Anti-Cyberbullying Policies. Within these themes, subthemes also emerged.
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All my very best,

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Fields of Study

Major Field: Education
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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Context of the Problem

A study conducted by Carnevale, Smith, and Strohl (2010), indicates that 63 percent of the 46.8 million jobs available between 2008-2018 will require some form of postsecondary education degree or certification. This is in sharp contrast to the mid-1970s when less than 30 percent of jobs required anything other than a high school diploma (Carnevale et. al, 2010). The Carnevale et. al (2010) study also posits that the increase in educational attainment requirements for these jobs is a direct result of the technological advancements that have changed the U.S. and world economies from ones that were industrial-based in the 20th century to ones that are service- or information-based in the 21st century. In other words, the world is now more globally connected than ever before because the internet and other modes of electronic communication have diluted/removed the temporal and geographic restrictions that previously hindered or prevented business transactions (Carnevale et. al, 2010). Thus, educating students to meet the demands of the global marketplace is a prerequisite to maintaining the U.S. economy and has become a national imperative (The Big Goal, 2011).

The high-tech job demands of the future are the reason why the federal government has already begun pushing the infusion of technology education into public
school curricula (Clinton, 1998; Daniel & McCormick, 2009). One example is the enactment of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 that was reauthorized as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) (10 Facts About K-12, 2011). Daniel and McCormick write that although the stated purpose of NCLB was to raise achievement for all students and to close the achievement gap between traditionally underserved students and their wealthier peers, it also included requirements to ensure that public school buildings had access to technology. Moreover, NCLB mandated that access to, and the use of, technology be integrated into student coursework and school operations. NCLB also combined existing federal technology programs to establish the Enhancing Education through Technology entity that has the stated mission of ensuring that students are technologically literate by the end of middle school (Clinton, 1998; Daniel & McCormick, 2009).

While such information may seem informative and innocuous on its own, it becomes troubling when coupled with the fact that the U.S. continues to slip further behind other industrialized countries in higher education attainment (OECD, 2010). The Lumina Foundation reports that “the percent of the American population with a postsecondary credential or degree—has remained flat for 40 years…[m]eanwhile, higher education attainment in the rest of the world has increased—in some cases at dramatic rates” (Lumina’s Big Goal, 2011, http://www.luminafoundation.org/goal_2025/goal2.html). Likewise, the National Center for Educational Statistics, NCES, (2010) reports that between 1971 and 2000, the percentage of U.S. 25- to 29-year-olds who attained a bachelor’s degree or higher only
increased from 17 to 29 percent. Even more dismal is the fact that the 2009 attainment rate was about the same as the rate in 2000 (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Educational Statistics, 2010).

These alarming statistics suggest that the U.S. does not possess, nor is it currently producing, sufficient human capital to compete for the jobs of the very near future. Additionally, they are precisely why President Barack Obama committed to ensuring that America will regain its post as having the highest proportion of students earning some form of higher education credential by 2020 (Restore America’s Leadership, 2011). This goal is echoed in the Lumina Foundation’s Big Goal of increasing the proportion of Americans with high-quality degrees and credentials to 60 percent by the year 2025 (The Big Goal, 2011).

To date, it is unclear the extent to which schools, pursuant to federal mandate, have contributed to the upsurge of technology use among students. What is crystal clear, however, is the staggering rapidity with which the use of electronic digital devices has: (a) become the norm for millions of people at home, school, and work; and (b) dramatically altered the way we work, communicate, play, entertain, and educate our children (Chapman, 2000; Internet Growth Statistics, 2011; The Internet Big Picture, 2011). To be certain, it is the swift and exponential growth in access to, and the use of, electronic communication has outpaced specific education policy instruction that could have set expectations for its ethical use.

Contemporary technology use means that today’s students will live and work in a society that is more globalized and therefore more diverse than that heretofore
experienced by Americans. That said, it is logical to conclude that student proficiency in
the effective use of electronic communication is essential because of their increased
interaction with individuals from different geographic localities and cultural backgrounds
(Frey, 2011; U.S. Census Bureau, 2005-2009). This is especially so since many of these
digital communications could often be void of face-to-face interaction where speaker
tone and body language provide context about the communication’s intended meaning
(Kowalski, Limber, & Agatston, 2008; Willard, 2004). Put differently, in order to
navigate a more global, diverse, and electronically connected work environment, students
need not only be proficient in content knowledge and problem-solving skills; they should
also develop keen interpersonal skills so as to communicate effectively both in-person
and digitally.

Learning how to communicate effectively is part of the socialization process,
which is not a new feat for the nation’s public schools. In Bethel v. Fraser (1985), the
U.S. Supreme Court stated that because schools are the primary delivery mechanism of
education, “they are entrusted with the difficult task of educating children and preparing
them for full participation in adult society. In addition to transmitting necessary
information and techniques of learning to the students,” schools are expected “to instill
citizenship, discipline, and acceptable morals” (Bethel v. Fraser, 1985, p. 1367).

Lleras’ (2009) study states that these values have traditionally been practiced in
the nation’s schools via extracurricular and elective courses, where students spend more
supervised time engaging in civil discourse with adults and peers than they might in the
core subject courses. However, a study conducted by Sunderman, Tracey, Kim, and

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Orfield (2004) found that in many of the nation’s lowest performing schools, such coursework and activities have been cut from the school day in order to spend more class time on the content of the core subjects that are tested per state and federal accountability mandates (Lleras, 2009). More directly, this study indicates that the crowding out of elective and other extracurricular courses from the school day is in direct response to the heightened testing accountability measures and consequences imposed by the NCLB (Lleras, 2009; Sunderman et. al., 2004). Lleras (2008; 2009) states that the lack of educational focus on socialization and citizenship in the school setting renders students ill-prepared for their roles in both the workplace and society in general.

What is new for schools, however, is the fact that students should also receive socialization lessons—such as democracy, citizenship, community, respect and respectful discourse, and civility—in the context of digital communication. Research by Strom and Strom (2005) and Ybarra and Mitchell (2004) indicate that students experience a disconnect between their electronic/digital expressions and their real world affect. Instruction about civil and responsible electronic communication could make it more intuitive for students to think critically about the potential consequences their electronic and virtual expressions have in the real world for themselves, those they offend, and the community at large. That said, it is critical that 21st century students embrace this understanding and apply it in their daily lives in order to prepare for their adult roles in a global society.
Cyberbullying: A Salient Threat to Educating Students

Although there are several barriers to the academic and life success of 21st century students, there is consensus that a prerequisite to student learning is a safe and welcoming school environment. Today, one salient threat to student learning in the school setting is cyberbullying. Cyberbullying, electronic bullying, or online social cruelty, is defined as bullying that occurs through email, instant messaging, in a chat room, on a website, or through digital messages or images sent to a cell phone or personal digital assistant (Kowalski & Limber, 2007). Like traditional bullying, cyberbullying is distinct from normal childhood teasing or banter because: (a) there is an imbalance of power between the one who cyberbullies and the cyberbullied; and (b) the aggressive behavior is often repeated (Kowalski & Limber, 2007).

The Safe School Initiative Study (2002) conducted by the U.S. Secret Service and Department of Justice found that bullying leads to greater acts of school violence when left unaddressed. As explained in greater detail later in this study, even though cyberbullying can be more damaging than bullying, cyberbullying is bullying executed via digital communications in lieu of person-to-person interactions. Therefore, cyberbullying can negatively impact both the targeted student(s) and a school’s learning environment regardless of whether the expression originates on- or off-campus. In fact, student focus groups conducted by Kowalski, Limber, and Agatston (2008) found that cyberbullying most often originates off-campus through electronic devices that are not associated with the school.
Even though cyberbullying, by-and-large, originates off-campus, it can have grim effects on both individual student learning and the learning environment of the school (Kowalski et al, 2008; Willard, 2004). What follows are some notorious accounts of off-campus cyberbullying:

October 7, 2003: 13-year-old Ryan Halligan, a middle school student with special needs, committed suicide after being accused of being gay and incessantly taunted, threatened, and insulted both online and in person (Halligan & Halligan, 2010).

June 29, 2005: 15-year-old Jeff Johnston hung himself after enduring two years of physical and online bullying. The bullying began when Jeff’s tormentor learned of his relationship with a popular girl at school. Another tormentor hacked into an online video game that Jeff and his friends created and replaced it with a hate page about Jeff (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009, p. 67).

October 16, 2006: 13-year-old Megan Meier hung herself in her closet after receiving cruel online messages culminating with “[t]he world would be a better place without you” (Maag, 2007). This message was sent from whom she believed to be Josh Evans, a 16-year-old boy that she had been flirting with online for weeks. It was six weeks after Megan’s death before her parents learned that Josh never existed as he was an online character created by Lori Drew; the 47-year-old mother of a girl who was once a close friend of Megan’s (Maag, 2007).

July 3, 2008: 18-year-old Jessica Logan hung herself in her bedroom after she sent a nude photo of herself to her boyfriend’s cellphone that was then text to hundreds of students in at least seven Greater Cincinnati, Ohio high schools (Kranz, 2009).

January 14, 2010: 15-year-old Phoebe Prince hung herself in the stairwell of her family’s apartment after months of being bullied at school and through “taunting text messages and harassing postings on Facebook” (Huffpost Tech., 2010). Even after her death, Phoebe’s tormentors posted many rude comments on her Facebook memorial page (Kennedy, 2010).

February 23, 2010: 19-year-old Anthony Stancl was sentenced to 15 years in prison and another 13 years of supervision. In 2008, Stancl, posing as a female on Facebook, persuaded 31 fellow male high school classmates to send him nude photos of themselves. Threatening exposure of the photos to the rest of the school, Stancl coerced at least seven of them, ages 15 to 17, to perform sex acts with him (Walker, 2010).

September 22, 2010: 18-year-old Rutgers Freshman, Tyler Clementi, jumped to his death from the George Washington Bridge after live images of him engaged in sexual activity
with another male were broadcast online by his roommate and another Rutgers freshman (Hayes, 2010).

It is the rare yet indelible incidents like these that exposed the nation to the cyberbullying phenomenon (Tokunaga, 2010). Appalled by these disturbing accounts, there has been a groundswell of public outcry to stop cyberbullying before it leads to these tragic outcomes. Given that the relationships which lead to cyberbullying are most often formed and cemented as a result of school and school district policy, principals—as the administrative heads of school buildings with authority to set and execute policy—bear the brunt of the criticism for failing to protect cyberbullied students (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). This is particularly true for the cases in which it is believed that principals have knowledge that cyberbullying incidents were occurring prior to such tragic ends (Willard, 2006).

**Issues with How Cyberbullying is Currently Addressed**

However, in a fury and haste-filled demand to eradicate cyberbullying, the focus has too often centered upon whether and which disciplinary measures were imposed upon the perpetrator of cyberbullying in the form of suspension, expulsion, or subjection to criminal charges (Hu, 2011; Education News, 2011; Jabali-Nash, 2010; Shaw, 2010; Teicher Khadaroo, 2011). From an emotional standpoint it is easy to empathize with this approach. However, employing these tactics alone to reduce the potentially negative effects of cyberbullying on the student learning environment can be problematic.

Fixating on whether and how cyberbullying transgressions should be punished has diverted attention away from the fact that a broader societal harm results from the mere
occurrence of these incidents whenever they negatively impact the learning environment of a school. While the above accounts are jarring, it is critical to understand that more than 97 percent of American youth are connected to the internet and as many as 40 percent of them are affected by cyberbullying (Agatston, 2011). Equally significant cyberbullying background is that the most common effects include low self-esteem, depression, social withdrawal, school violence, higher levels of anxiety, and failing, avoiding, or dropping out of school (Agatston, 2001; Agatston, 2010; Mason, 2008; Tokunaga, 2010). Each of the harms associated with cyberbullying have the potential to halt, or at the very least complicate, students’ ability to learn; thereby making it more difficult for schools to achieve their purpose (U.S. Department of Education, 2010).

Moreover, whenever cyberbullying goes unchecked, or students have a perception that this is the case, the school becomes an unwelcoming environment where students—even those who only witness or later find out about the cyberbullying incidents—feel vulnerable to such attacks (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). When students feel unsafe in the school setting, the collective result is a diminished learning environment (U.S. Department of Education, 2010).

In summary, cyberbullying not only disrupts the learning process for the targeted individual(s), it also has the potential to disrupt the learning environment of entire schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). This is true even when the cyberbullying expressions originate off-campus, which is most often the case (Kowalski et al, 2008; Willard, 2004). As such, focusing on whether and how those engaging in cyberbullying are disciplined has overshadowed the fact that cyberbullying’s mere existence has real
potential to diminish the learning of individuals far beyond those who are directly involved. It is for this reason that principals should adopt anti-cyberbullying policies focused on prevention, intervention, consequences and discipline instead of simply suspending students after such incidents occur (Willard, 2007). A more comprehensive, proactive, and effective approach involves implementing policy that establishes and maintains a safe and welcoming learning environment through: (a) education; (b) expectation setting; and (c) establishing, informing, and enforcing consequences. These elements could foster a school environment where student learning is more likely to be achieved (U.S. Department of Education, 1998; Willard 2007). However, such action cannot occur without strong and dedicated leadership in a school building (Nance, 2002).

A principal, as the highest-ranking employee in a school building, is at the helm of ensuring that students in their building are academically successful. However, because a principal does not have the capacity to personally teach each student in their building and has other administrative and operational tasks to execute, they should aim to be skilled leaders who cultivate and inspire strong team leadership in their buildings to meet this monumental task. A large piece of this work is establishing and maintaining a school culture and climate around a set of behavioral expectations. This work requires strong partnerships and a common vision from individuals inside of the school building as well as those in the surrounding community. Additionally, Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, and Meyerson (2005) write that in order for principals to be successful in their pursuit of educating students, they must be educational visionaries, instructional and curriculum leaders, assessment experts, disciplinarians, community builders, public
relations experts, budget analysts, facility managers, special programs administrators, and expert overseers of legal, contractual, and policy mandates and initiatives. This desired skillset is in addition to having the political knowhow to navigate the often-conflicting views of parents, teachers, students, district administrators, unions, and state and federal agencies (Davis et al., 2005).

Given the level of responsibility that principals have and all that they must master to effectively educate students, it seems that their input would be brought to bear whenever policy is implemented that affects the school building environment. However, Nance’s study (2002) states that outside of some district- or school building-policies, that principals themselves implement, this is rarely the case. Consequently, one could predict that the same could be true the State of Ohio’s recently enacted anti-cyberbullying legislation.

At the onset of this study, there was pending anti-cyberbullying policy at the state level that was signed into law by Governor John Kasich, on Thursday, February 2, 2012. However, it does not become effective for school districts until November 4, 2012. As such, this study was not designed to elicit policy components and practices that effectively reduce the effects of cyberbullying on student learning from the perspective of principals in a large, urban, Midwestern school district that was not required to operate, nor did it have an official anti-cyberbullying policy. Accordingly, the participants responded to the semi-structured open-ended interview questions within this policy context.
1.2 Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this study was to identify, from the principal perspective, district- and building-level policy components and practice effective and ineffective for decreasing cyberbullying occurrences that have a negative impact urban middle and high school (serving grades six-12) learning environments. As principals are charged with ensuring that the students in their buildings learn, their role in setting and implementing effective building policy to educate their students cannot be overstated. As mentioned above, the State of Ohio recently enacted anti-cyberbullying legislation, entitled the Jessica Logan Act, that requires school districts to enact policies that would, among other things, include cyberbullying as prohibited expression/communication to the current anti-harassment, intimidation, and bullying law. (H.B. 116, 2012).

It is important to note that the effectiveness of a policy depends on what the specific policy components are and how they are interpreted and implemented at the school-building level. Effective implementation can only be accomplished with targeted and dedicated leadership of principals who collaborate with staff, parents, students, and community partners to set the expectation that cyberbullying is unacceptable and enact adequate prevention and intervention practices (Mason, 2008; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004; Willard, 2007).

However, and as is often the case, state-level policy rarely includes the voices of those who actually experience the issues for which policy is instated. Nance’s study (2002) suggests that such policymaking leads to mandates that are ill-suited to address the nuances and various issues that arise in the real-life situations that occur in school
buildings. Such policies can also be overly burdensome and/or overbroad. Hence, this study was designed to elicit the policy components and practices, informed from principal perspectives, that are effective and ineffective for reducing the effects of cyberbullying and negative cyberinteraction on their schools’ learning environments. Their perspectives added: (a) practical depth and knowledge to the anti-cyberbullying practices and policy components that the literature suggests are effective; and (b) have the potential to inform the State of Ohio’s recently enacted anti-cyberbullying legislation in addition to the forthcoming policy at the district level. The identification of these policy components was also critical given that there is very little research on effective cyberbullying policies in urban settings; especially those with high concentrations of students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds—and particularly from the principal perspective.

1.3 Research Questions

In identifying what should be included in an effective state- or district-level, anti-cyberbullying policy, the following research questions were investigated:

1) How has cyberbullying affected the learning environment in their schools?

2) Absent explicit anti-cyberbullying policy, how have principals addressed off-campus cyberbullying incidents that had an on-campus effect?

3) From the principal perspective, what should be included/excluded in state- and district-level anti-cyberbullying policies to decrease the effects of cyberbullying on student learning?
1.4 Significance of the Study

In regard to cyberbullying, “there is no empirical evidence that exists to validate effective prevention or intervention measures; therefore, research into these areas is warranted. Nevertheless traditional…bullying research will provide the foundation for cyberbullying prevention and intervention recommendations” (Mason, 2008, p. 333). Additionally, there is limited research that has been conducted about cyberbullying from the principal perspective. Therefore, this study contributed practical knowledge to the field of cyberbullying prevention and intervention in general.

Cardini’s (2011) study, Cyberbullying: School Principal Perceptions and Current School Policies, used survey methodology to assess principal perceptions of the effectiveness of existing anti-cyberbullying policy in Minnesota public schools. While this study had multiple findings, the one that related to this study was that principal perspectives about disciplining students who engage in off-campus cyberbullying are still developing. Although the set-up for this study sounds similar to the current study, there are some major differences. The first is that Cardini’s (2011) study used quantitative methodology for which a series of closed-ended survey questions were mailed to participants. This means that the participants were asked questions where they could only respond by selecting an answer from a finite list. In contrast, the current study asked open-ended questions which allowed principals to elaborate on their answers and provide follow-up information. The qualitative methodology of the current study also enabled the researcher to identify, from the practicing principal perspective, policy components and practices effective and ineffective for reducing cyberbullying and/or its negative effects.
on the school setting in lieu of only finding out whether anti-cyberbullying policies or curricula existed. In other words, the study at hand enabled the researcher to identify findings based on principal perspectives as detailed in their own words.

Another difference is that the State of Minnesota had already adopted anti-cyberbullying legislation at the time Cardini’s (2011) study was conducted. The current study was designed to elicit how principals have addressed cyberbullying in the absence of specific anti-cyberbullying policies at the state- and school-district levels. The current study also differs from Cardini’s (2011) because although it was a statewide study, only seven, of the 105 participants that responded, were from urban districts. In the current study, 23 principals from a single urban school district were interviewed about their perceptions of cyberbullying. Additionally, there was no mention in Cardini’s (2011) study about the rate of economic disadvantage in the urban school districts from which the seven urban principals responded whereas the target population and sample of this study was concentrated in a single urban district with a high concentration of students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds—an area ripe for research.

Wiseman’s (2011) study identified, from three one-on-one principal interviews, several policy components that were effective in mitigating the harms of cyberbullying. These principals were selected from a survey administered statewide for which only those that had formal and effective policies were identified. While the policy components identified in Wiseman’s (2011) study are discussed in the literature review of this study, the current study differs in that it focuses on how urban principals in a single district have, or may not have, responded to cyberbullying incidents. His study also differs from
this one in that it only interviewed middle school principals whereas the current study included both middle and high school principal perspectives. Additionally, the current study sought to identify the policy components and practices that principals use to combat cyberbullying in the absence of specific anti-cyberbullying policy. Finally, the study at hand focused on principals from a single urban school district.

Kowitz Orobko’s (2009) study interviewed principals from seven rural, two suburban, and three urban school districts in the Commonwealth of Virginia about the policies they used to address cyberbullying. The study found that all 12 school districts had anti-bullying policies that needed to be updated to effectively address cyberbullying and other negative behaviors. However, this study focused on the existence and extent of safe and welcoming school environments and anti-bullying as opposed to specifically focusing on anti-cyberbullying efforts. It was the goal of the current study to tease out, from the principal perspective, the anti-cyberbullying policy components and practices that were effective and ineffective at decreasing the negative effects of cyberbullying in urban middle and high school settings. The current study is also differs from Kowitz Orobko’s (2009) in that her study was limited to interviewing three urban principals from different school districts while this study focused on multiple principal perspectives from a single, large, urban, Midwestern school district.

Additionally, the current study is significant because it added knowledge to the field about reducing the effects of bullying and cyberbullying in schools with high concentrations of students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds—an area that
to date has garnered very little research (Hong, 2009) and was not explicitly addressed in Cardini’s, Wiseman’s or Kowitz Orobko’s studies.

The term digital divide connotes that students of economically disadvantaged backgrounds have limited access to technology as compared to their peers from wealthier backgrounds. Students attending urban school districts are much more likely to be from economically disadvantaged backgrounds—44 percent of students in urban public schools are eligible for free and reduced price lunch as compared to 23 percent in suburban and 30 percent in rural schools. Thus, these students often are at a cultural and educational disadvantage as technology skills are increasingly necessary for the enjoyment of a high quality of life in a global economy (Clinton, 1998; National Center for Education Statistics, 1994; Lippman, Burns, & McArthur, 1996).

Public policy is defined as “the principle that injury to the public good or public order constitutes a basis for setting aside, or denying effect to, acts or transactions” (Dictionary.com, 2011). This definition implies that policy develops to prevent conduct that would bring about a problem or undesirable result. Based upon this definition, the absence of policy on a subject could mean either that no such problem exists or that the magnitude of the problem is not yet great enough to demand policy.

Combining the digital divide notion with the definition/purpose of public policy and applying it to the lack of an anti-cyberbullying policy one of the largest urban districts in Ohio could suggest that: (a) there is no cyberbullying issue in this urban district because students of economically disadvantaged backgrounds do not have access to electronic communication devices; (b) that although urban students of economically
disadvantaged backgrounds have access to electronic communication devices, cyberbullying is a nonissue; or (c) that while cyberbullying within this context is disrupting the learning environments of most, if not all, middle and high schools, the district and the state have yet to realize the extent of the harmful impact that such expression(s) can wreak on student learning so as to warrant anti-cyberbullying policy.

The three possible reasons why an anti-cyberbullying policy had recently been enacted in the State of Ohio, and will be required in all the state’s school districts by November, 2012, could center around a lack of information for research that informs us that students who are economically disadvantaged—who’s demographics often overlap with being a member of a racial or ethnic minority group—have access to electronic communication devices. A study by the Pew Internet & American Life Project states that internet access via libraries and cell phones is particularly important to Black, and to a lesser extent, English-Speaking Hispanic students (Lenhart, 2010). Moreover, this study adds that one fourth of low income teens—defined as teens who are children in homes where the head of the household earns less than $30,000—and 25 percent of Black teens report that they most often access the internet from school as compared to 15 percent of teens overall (Lenhart, 2010). The qualitative methodology of this study was significant in that it sought to identify principals’ voices about: (a) how cyberbullying impacts student learning in an urban school district where the majority of the student population is economically disadvantaged; (b) how they are dealing or not dealing cyberbullying occurrences; and (c) the effective and ineffective practices and policies that they have employed in absence of an official anti-cyberbullying policy.
Further, no studies have been conducted that discern district-level anti-cyberbullying policy components through the combination of practical principal perspectives—gathered through qualitative research—in addition to reviews of the literature and legal analysis of recently enacted state statutes on the subject. Even though the State of Ohio recently enacted anti-cyberbullying legislation that all school districts are required to adopt by November 4, 2012, the model policy components and practices identified by this study could inform such policymaking with a vital yet too often excluded practitioner perspective. Principal input in shaping this policy could foster a greater sense of ownership and more thorough implementation than might otherwise be experienced.

The researcher’s primary hope is that the effective anti-cyberbullying policy components and practices that emerge from this provide guidance to principals as to how they can effectively minimize and perhaps control off-campus cyberbullying expression that disrupts the learning environment for one or more students.

1.5 Limitations of the Study

This study was limited in that it only sought the input of middle and high school principals in a single large, urban, Midwestern school district, even though there was evidence that cyberbullying occurs in elementary school, higher education settings, and the workforce. This study was also limited because qualitative research was only conducted with principals from a large urban setting with high concentrations of students were of economically disadvantaged backgrounds because there was little research on
this subject. Further, this study was limited in that it is did not take a deep dive into specific graduated disciplinary measures that students could encounter as a consequence of their cyberbullying engagement. Such consequences should be collectively determined by teachers, students, parents, and other community partners who have a vested interest in the school’s improvement and that are based on the data collected from the needs assessment discussed the literature review portion of this study (Smith, Smith, Osborn, & Samara, 2008).

1.6 Assumptions

The researcher holds the following assumptions:

1. Principal voices are key to decreasing the harmful effects of cyberbullying on student learning.

2. Principals—especially from large, urban, Midwestern school districts serving high concentrations of students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds—have insights about cyberbullying that have yet to be explored.

3. Principals desire policy guidance to address cyberbullying that they can tailor to their schools’ needs.

4. Principals are the right fit for the building that they are currently in and are strong enough leaders to create and implement policy and practices that would decrease cyberbullying’s negative effect on student learning (Policy Studies Associates, 1998).

1.7 Definition of Terms

Cyberbullying: [B]ullying through email, instant messaging (IMing), chat room exchanges, Web site posts, or digital messages or images sent to a cellular phone or personal digital assistant (PDA) (Kowalski et al., 2008). Cyber bullying, like traditional
bullying, involves an imbalance of power, aggression, and a negative action that is often repeated (Olweus, 2011).

**Discipline:** When the word discipline was used in this study, it referred to student suspension/expulsion unless otherwise noted.

**Due Process/Procedural Due Process:** “The minimal requirements of notice and a hearing guaranteed by the Due Process Clauses of the 5th and 14th Amendments, esp. if the deprivation of a significant life, liberty, or property interest may occur” (Black’s, 1999). In terms of public education, students who are suspended or expelled must be granted proper notice and a hearing with the administrator who suspends them in order to satisfy due process requirements.

**Electronic/Online expression:** Any communication or expression that occurs through the use of a electronic digital device. Examples include pictures, images, text or instant messaging, emails, blogging, or website postings and can occur through computers, cell phones, personal digital devices (pdas), mp3 players, and the like.

**Negative Cyberinteraction:** Any negative digital expression where those involved mutually send such messages back-and-forth as opposed to cyberbullying which is one-way harassment.

**Off-Campus:** Acts or expressions that occur outside of school hours, school-sponsored activities, in the absence of school property or internet service, and outside of the school’s purview. Depending on the factual circumstances, off-campus acts or expressions may or may not have an on-campus effect.

**Free speech:** The First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution states “[c]ongress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press…” (U.S. Const. Amend. 1).

**Stakeholders:** In this study, unless otherwise stated, the term stakeholders includes students, parents, school staff, and the community at large.

**State Statute:** Legislation or law at the state level.
Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter defined cyberbullying and highlighted that at the inception of this study, principals in Ohio’s largest district lacked uniform policy guidance about how to minimize the negative effects that cyberbullying expressions can have on student learning environment. To this end, this chapter further details: (a) the similarities and differences between bullying and cyberbullying; (b) how cyberbullying can be more harmful than traditional bullying; (c) cyberbullying prevalence; (d) issues with using suspension as a method to deter cyberbullying; (e) the uneven implementation of anti-cyberbullying state statutes and their significance; (f) the requisite policy components to effectively deter this always harmful activity; and (g) the importance of including principal voices in shaping and implementing effective anti-cyberbullying policy. Each of these sections have been developed from a review of the literature and an analysis of recently enacted state-level anti-cyberbullying legislation.

2.2 Distinguishing Bullying From Cyberbullying

Before digging into cyberbullying, it is first helpful for readers understand the similarities and differences between bullying and cyberbullying.
2.2.1 Bullying

“A person is bullied when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other persons, and he or she has difficulty defending himself or herself” (Olweus, 2011, http://www.olweus.org/public/bullying.page). Bullying can be direct or indirect through exclusion and/or starting rumors (Kowolski et. al, 2008). Olweus (2011) also writes that in order for aggressive behavior to be correctly labeled as bullying, as distinguished from age appropriate child’s play, three components must be present: (a) aggressive behavior that involves unwanted, negative actions; (b) a pattern of behavior repeated over time; and (c) an imbalance of power or strength.

Just as bullying behaviors vary greatly, the same can be said of the effects experienced by its victims. Bullying creates an intolerable and sometimes dangerous educational environment for all involved, causes physical, psychological, and emotional harm, and interferes with schools’ ability to teach and, therefore, students’ ability to learn (Elementary and Secondary Education Generally, 2011). Bullying also leads to other antisocial behavior such as vandalism, shoplifting, skipping and dropping out of school, fighting, drug and alcohol use, sexual harassment, and sexual violence (Bullying Prevention, 2011; School Bullying Prevention Act, 2011).

Research states that 60 percent of males who bullied in grades six through nine were convicted of at least one crime as adults, and 35 percent to 40 percent of this group had three or more convictions by the time they reached age 24 (School Bullying
Prevention Act, 2011). Bullying also has a negative effect on the social environment of schools and creates a climate of fear among students (School Bullying Prevention Act, 2011). The effects of bullying are intensified by the fact that it is commonplace. A study released in 2010, found that that 17 percent of 524,054 students from 1,593 schools had been bullied with some frequency (Olweus & Limber, 2010).

Nevertheless, bullying has been traditionally perceived as a rite of passage or an integral part of growing up (Whitehouse, 2011). It is important that stakeholders are educated to dispel this misperception because it has been known for quite some time that bullying is actually a gateway behavior on the school violence continuum (Jackson, 2011; U.S. Secret Service & U.S. Department of Education, 2002). If left unchecked, bullying can evolve into fighting, sexual harassment, drug abuse, gang involvement, and murder (Jackson, 2011). Evidence of how bullying can escalate to greater acts of violence was unearthed in the Safe Schools Initiative Study conducted by the U.S. Secret Service and the U.S. Department of Education to investigate the cause of the 1999 Columbine High School massacre and other incidents of school violence (U.S. Secret Service & U.S. Department of Education, 2002). The study concluded that bullying should be eradicated in order to prevent its ascension into greater acts of school violence and further deterioration of school learning environments (U.S. Secret Service & U.S. Department of Education, 2002).

As a result of the heightened awareness about the link between bullying and school violence, many legislators, school districts, and school buildings began enacting
policy aimed at maintaining or increasing school safety, including anti-bullying policies (NCSL, 2011). As of August 2011, the National Council of State Legislatures (NCSL) reported that all, including Ohio and the District of Columbia, but a few states had enacted anti-bullying legislation (Education, Board of Education, § 3313.66, 2011).

2.2.2 Cyberbullying

The definition of cyberbullying illustrates that, while it is a form of and involves all of the non-physical attributes of bullying, it is carried out through devices capable of electronic communication. Cyberbullying can assume many different articulations, thus it is difficult to define in a simple sentence (Kowalski, et. al., 2008). However, there are six forms of cyberbullying that are most common:

Harassment: Repeatedly sending offensive, rude, and insulting messages.

Denigration: Distributing information about another that is derogatory and untrue through posting it on a Web page, sending it to others through email or instant messaging, or posting or sending digitally altered photos of someone.

Flaming: Online “‘fighting’ using electronic messages with angry, vulgar language.

Impersonation: Breaking into an email or social networking account and using that person’s online identity to send or post vicious or embarrassing material to/about others.

Outing and Trickery: Sharing someone’s secrets or embarrassing information, or tricking someone into revealing secrets or embarrassing information and forwarding it to others.

Cyber Stalking: Repeatedly sending messages that include threats of harm or are highly intimidating, or engaging in other online activities that make
a person afraid for his or her safety (depending on the content of the message, it may be illegal) (Willard, 2007, “Cyberbullying,” para.1).

Cyberbullying can also be perpetrated through exclusion or ostracism. Examples of this include obviation from groups, chat rooms, or websites that can be the result of another person changing their password, exclusion or omission from a buddy list, and/or being ganged up on by other members (Kowalski et. al, 2008, pp. 49-50).

2.3 Cyberbullying can be more Damaging than Traditional Bullying

The range in the degree of harm experienced by those involved in cyberbullying can be similar to that of bullying. However, cyberbullying also embodies some distinct characteristics that render it more damaging than its parallel (Kowalski, 2008; Strom & Strom, 2005, When Teens Turn). For example, one distinguishing characteristic is anonymity. Students who cyberbully can often do so anonymously as they are not always as readily identifiable as compared to those who engage in traditional bullying. A survey conducted by Kowalski, et. al. (2008), found that nearly 50 percent of more than 3,700 middle school student respondents did not know the identity of the individual who was cyberbullying them. This figure is significant given that the targeted student often experiences a great deal of stress when they are unable to pinpoint the individual(s) who are cyberbullying him or her (Kowalski et. al, 2008).

Students who engage in cyberbullying also have greater, and perhaps unlimited, access to those they target as compared to students who engage in bullying. In bullying scenarios, the targeted student experienced torment during school hours and/or during commutes to and from school or school activities. Conversely, perpetrators of
cyberbullying have 24 hour, seven day per week, access to the targeted individual(s) that can persist throughout school breaks, including summer vacations. The result is that a student who is cyberbullied may not have the same, or in some cases any, reprieve from the torment.

Students who are cyberbullied often fear punitive action by caregivers or other adults. Because students use these devices as a way to socialize with their peers, they may not inform an adult of cyberbullying incidents for fear that, in an attempt to protect them, their access to electronic communication devices would be limited (Strom & Strom, 2005). Research by Strom and Strom (2005) suggests that such limitation would effectively cut the student off from their social circle in a way that most adults cannot fully comprehend. Another contributing factor to the underreporting of cyberbullying activity is that students who are cyberbullied often fear retaliation for reporting (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). The underreporting of cyberbullying bullying incidents results in its growth, increases the despair of those involved, potentially enlists additional participants, and negatively effects school learning environments.

Additionally, the effects of cyberbullying can be more intense than bullying because the number of bystanders of or witnesses to the cyberbullying activity can infinitely outnumber those in bullying scenarios. Cyberbullying expressions can be received and forwarded in a variety of ways including email, web pages, chat rooms, message boards, cell phones, instant messaging, etc. What is more, cyberbullying expression can be perpetual in nature in a way that bullying cannot. The digital nature of cyberbullying expressions enables it to be replicated and distributed far beyond even the
deletion of its original posting. This magnifies the harm caused by cyberbullying because it can be relayed indefinitely to countless individuals as opposed to bullying incidents that can only be observed by those present at the point and time of its occurrence unless verbal accounts of incident by those individuals.

Finally, because perpetrators of cyberbullying can do so anonymously, they can engage in a behavioral phenomenon termed disinhibition. Disinhibition enables individuals who would not participate in bullying to do so digitally. In other words, it is easier to engage in cyberbullying in lieu of bullying because there is no face-to-face interaction (Kowalski, et. al., 2008; Presenter Davis, 2011; Willard, 2004). The result is that today’s cyberbullies can be students who would traditionally have been victims or bystanders of bullying. This reality can make it much more difficult to identify the actual perpetrator of the cyberbullying expression (What is Cyberbullying?, 2011).

Disinhibition also allows individuals to relay more severe expressions than they would in face-to-face interactions. The online expressions could also be increasingly vicious because the individual engaging in cyberbullying activity may experience a disconnect between their virtual expression and its real world consequences (Strom & Strom, 2005; Willard, 2004). For example, because a student engaging in cyberbullying expression cannot physically see the targeted individual’s reaction, he or she may not fully grasp harm that they are inflicting (Kowalski, et. al., 2008; Olweus, 2011; Willard, 2002-2011; Willard, 2004). A focus group study, conducted by Kowalski et. al. (2008), affirmed this sentiment, when a middle school participant stated, “I personally think cyberbullying is not something you think about and say oh I feel like cyberbullying
someone. It might even be accidental but you might say something to someone that really
hurts them and you might just keep at it. You might think you are having fun but you
can’t hear their tone of voice over AIM or e-mail so you don’t even know you are doing
it” (Kowalski et. al, p. 65).

The amplified harms of cyberbullying are also evidenced by a National Institutes
of Health study, which found that cyberbullied students are more likely to suffer from
depression than those involved in traditional or other forms of bullying (U.S. Department
of Health and Human Services, 2010). Cyberbullying can also be more damaging than
bullying when the two methods are simultaneously employed against the targeted
individual, as was the case with Jeff Johnson and Phoebe Prince. Additionally, the
insidious nature of cyberbullying itself amplifies the harm that would result from bullying
because it goes unreported and therefore unaddressed; that is until it manifests as
symptoms also associated with bullying, such as poor school performance or attendance,
and other antisocial behavior including school violence and suicide (Willard, 2006).

2.4 Frequency of Cyberbullying Occurrences

2.4.1 Potential for Cyberbullying

Students have greater access to electronic communication devices than ever
before, the statistics for which are astonishing. In 2004, 45 percent of 12 to 17 year-olds
owned cell phones; in 2009 the number was 75 percent (Lenhart et. al, 2010). Lenhart et.
al (2010) research also states that from February 2008 to September 2009 the percentage
of teens texting daily jumped from 38 to 54 percent. Moreover, it is far more
commonplace for school-aged children to obtain cell phones at the age of 12 or 13 (Price, 2010). There are accounts that some students are receiving cell phones as young as eight years-old (Lenhart et. al, 2010).

In 2004, the Pew Center’s Internet & American Life Project found that fewer than 20 percent of 12 year-olds had cell phones as compared to nearly 60 percent in 2009 (Lenhart et. al, 2010). The Pew Center also reports that text messaging has become the preferred method of communication among teens over face-to-face contact, email, instant messaging, and voice calling (Lenhart et. al 2010). Even more surprising is the fact that “half of teens send 50 or more text messages a day, or 1,500 texts a month. One in three send more than 100 texts a day, or more than 3,000 texts a month” (Lenhart, et. al, 2010).

Moreover, students are also using other devices capable of electronic communication at an unprecedented rate. A recent study by the Kaiser Family Foundation found that Generation M2ers (“M” stand for media and the “squared” reflects their rapid expansion of media consumption), today’s eight to 18 year-olds, spend an average of seven hours and 38 minutes, or 53 hours per week, using entertainment media across a typical day (Rideout, Foehr, & Roberts, 2010). To be clear, the definition of digital or entertainment media is the use of electronic devices for anything other than talking on the phone, including, listening to music, gaming, and watching clips, TV shows, and movies on sites such as YouTube.com and Hulu.com. The study also states that due to multitasking, students actually average 10 hours and 45 minutes worth of entertainment media per day (Rideout, et. al, 2010).
Even more astonishing than the unsupervised amount of time that Generation M2
spends using devices capable of electronic communication, is that we as a society, do not
educate our students about responsible electronic expression and use of digital devices.
Given that students use digital or electronic media to socialize with their peers—as it is a
vital connection to their social circle—there is an absolute need to educate them about
electronic communication etiquette and the consequences of their engagement in
cyberbullying expression (Strom & Strom, 2005; Kowalski, 2008; Willard, 2007).

Preventative education on this topic could enable many students to avoid the
devastating effect that cyberbullying expression can have for themselves as well as those
on the receiving end. For example, preventative education could decrease the number of
cyberbullying occurrences because students would be aware that their seemingly tongue-
in-cheek comments could be interpreted as extremely hurtful by an individual on the
receiving end. Absent effective implementation of cyberbullying prevention and
intervention policy components and practices, the potential for cyberbullying
proliferation is indeed great. The treacherous combination: (a) of near constant,
unsupervised, uneducated; (b) and the sometimes ignorant or irresponsible use of devices
capable of electronic communication, results in an incalculable number of opportunities
for which cyberbullying can and does take place.

2.4.2 Cyberbullying Prevalence

As regards the specific frequency with which cyberbullying occurs, research
varies. As stated in Chapter 1, Carroll (2010), in the largest study of its kind, found that
six percent of more than 500,000 students experienced cyberbullying. Although six percent is a far cry from the lion’s share of the nation’s 71 million students (e.g., total U.S. first-grade through graduate school student population), it translates that in 2009, more than 4.2 million of them would have been affected by cyberbullying (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005-2009). Another study by the Cyberbullying Research Center (2010) reveals that out of 4,441 U.S. students, 20 percent either perpetrated or were victims of cyberbullying (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010). A Pew research study states that 26 percent have been bullied or harassed through text messages and phone calls (Lenhart et. al, 2010). Still another study by the National Crime Prevention Counsel (2007) reported that 43 percent of teens were victims of cyberbullying. One scholar writes that adolescents who socialize online are likely to have been involved in some form of cyberbullying (Willard, 2002-2011).

What is more, these incidents are actually underreported (Daniel & Greytak, 2011). Cyberbullying’s insidious nature envelopes its occurrence in a code of silence and shame that results in underreporting because children: (a) are embarrassed; (b) do not properly categorize what is happening to them; (c) fear retaliation; (d) do not have an adult they trust to confide in; (e) think that nothing can be done; and/or (f) are concerned that, in an effort to protect them, authority figures would limit or ban their use of the internet and/or other forms of electronic communication (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). Regardless of which rate of occurrence for cyberbullying is most accurate, it is clear that cyberbullying is a large dynamic problem that has costly consequences to individual students, school learning environments and thus, the nation as a whole.
2.5 Issues with Using Suspension Alone to Deter Cyberbullying

Given its dangers, its frequency of occurrence, and the fact that off-campus cyberbullying expression, like bullying, is most often born out of and maintained by relationships formed at school, one might assume that teachers have both a duty and the legal authority to decrease cyberbullying incidents whenever they negatively impact a school’s ability to teach and/or the ability of students to learn (Daniel, 1998). As stated earlier, educating students about cyberbullying, setting expectations that it will not occur, and enforcing consequences like suspension could be effective at combating cyberbullying. However, and as mentioned in Chapter 1, focusing on suspension alone is a mistaken approach primarily because it is a reactive measure that is no seen effective as preventative education. This sentiment is expressed by the axiom “[a]n ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure” (Willard, 2007).

Research by Brooks, Schiraldi, and Ziedenberg (2000) found that the use of suspension as a disciplinary measure actually decreases the likelihood that students will attain the requisite education they need to be successful adults. In the same vein, a study by the U.S. Department of Education (1986) found that sophomores who are suspended drop out at a rate three times that of their peers. These findings directly contradict schools’ purpose of preparing U.S. students to lead productive lives in a global marketplace. Ergo, it would be who of schools to employ proactive policy components and practices that diminish the effects of cyberbullying whilst enabling the education of students.
Finally, it is unsettled whether public school principals have legal authority to discipline students for cyberbullying expression that originates off-campus but has an on-campus effect (Daniel & Greytak, 2011). Because bullying occurs on campus, during school-sponsored activities, and/or during commutes to and from school, there is an obvious and direct connection between these expressions and their on-campus effect. In contrast, cyberbullying often originates off-campus or outside of school grounds, school hours, and/or the school’s purview, which results in a more protracted connection between the off-campus speech and its on-campus effect. Daniel and Greytak (2011) write that this unclear legal standard “forces administrators to walk a legal tightrope: for each lower court decision suggesting that administrators can effectively respond to cyberbullying, another lower court decision responds with a fervent defense of cyberbullying as protected speech” (p.3). The scholars later add “[n]ot surprisingly, other lower courts considering similar facts have come to completely different conclusions” (Daniel & Greytak, 2011, p. 3).


Unfortunately for school administrators, this legal uncertainty exists despite the fact that many states, school districts, and school buildings have enacted policies that “grant” principals to suspend students for off-campus cyberbullying expression that has an on-campus effect (NCSL, 2011).

2.6 Implementation of State Anti-Cyberbullying Statutes

Due to an increase in the number of violent crimes that have occurred as a result of bullying and cyberbullying, the heightened awareness of the effects of these phenomena, and the lack of on-point guidance from the federal government and case law on the subject, 34 states have either updated existing anti-bullying statutes or enacted new
legislation to address cyberbullying (NCSL, 2011). Moreover, even the coverage of the 34 state anti-cyberbullying statutes varies from state to state. Some only cover on-campus cyberbullying, some explicitly cover off-campus cyberbullying that have an on-campus effect, and still others are silent as to whether or not they cover off-campus cyberbullying. Additionally, some of the 34 state anti-cyberbullying statutes mandate the implementation of schoolwide anti-cyberbullying plans and outline the parameters that the plan must meet (Harassment, Intimidation, Bullying and Cyberbullying Prohibited, 2011).

Having read this research to this point, it would not be far-fetched for one to conclude that this variation leads to great inconsistency as to the existence and effectiveness of such anti-cyberbullying policies between states, amongst school districts within the same state, and between school buildings in the same school district. To ensure uniform implementation, at least among schools within the same district, school districts should adopt policy or practices, with principal input, that require its schools to create and enact anti-cyberbullying plans to reduce cyberbullying occurrences and their effects on the student learning environment.

2.7 Craft a Policy to Effectively Reduce Cyberbullying and/or its Negative Impact on Student Learning

As stated in Chapter 1, there has been little research conducted about effective anti-cyberbullying policies in general. Such research is even more limited in urban school districts with high concentrations of students who are economically disadvantaged. While more research needs to be conducted to identify empirical evidence about the success of
anti-cyberbullying programs, school districts and principals could borrow and incorporate some of the researched practices these programs have identified to proactively instruct students about responsible digital communication. Schools could also look toward each other to identify promising practices and lessons learned.

This portion of the research identifies and explicates, from a review of literature and recently enacted state anti-cyberbullying statutes, policy components and practices that effectively reduce the negative effects of cyberbullying on student learning environments. The research suggests that the most likely way to achieve this goal is to implement a school-wide anti-cyberbullying plan that creates a culture where such behavior is unacceptable (U.S. Department of Education, 1998). Schools that already have a bullying prevention program in place have an advantage in combating cyberbullying because the core components of these programs can be easily adapted to address cyberbullying as well (Kowalski et. al, 2008).

Because student learning peaks in a safe and welcoming learning environments where healthy relationships are formed between students and staff and students and their peers, schools should implement a plan to establish and maintain such an atmosphere (U.S. Department of Education, 1998). No doubt labor intensive, the development, implementation, ongoing evaluation, and adjustment of a safe and welcoming learning environment plan has the potential to radically reduce cyberbullying and other negative behaviors that could lead to the improvement of a school climates and thereby student performance.
2.7.1 Assess Cyberbullying at the School Building Level

The first step in implementing an effective cyberbullying prevention program is to assess cyberbullying in a particular school (Smith, Smith, Osborn, & Samara, 2008; U.S. Department of Education, 1998). Schools should administer an anonymous questionnaire to stakeholders to identify: (a) if cyberbullying is an issue at the school; (b) the frequency and the nature of the cyberbullying incidents occurring at the school; (c) the level of satisfaction that students, parents, teachers, staff, principals, school volunteers, and the community experience with regard to how cyberbullying incidents are resolved; (d) the extent to which students are being educated about acceptable social interaction and its direct applicability to virtual communication; and (e) suggestions from stakeholders as to how to better address the problem. Using this information, schools can then tailor their cyberbullying prevention and intervention methods to meet its specific needs, monitor its progress through ongoing assessment, and make adjustments as needed (Smith, et. al., 2008; U.S. Department of Education, 1998).

2.7.2 Craft a Schoolwide Plan to Reduce Cyberbullying’s Negative Effects on Student Learning

The compilation and analysis of the data gathered from the all-school cyberbullying assessment can be used to set benchmarks and assign accountability for the improvements to which the comprehensive school plan is geared (U.S. Department of Education, 1998). After the baseline benchmarks have been assembled, the next step is to collectively craft a plan to reduce cyberbullying with all parties who were assessed about its affect on student learning (Kowalski et. al, 2008; Willard, 2002-2011).
The importance of being so inclusive is to set the expectation that cyberbullying will not be tolerated in any setting regardless of whether it originates on or off a school’s campus (Davis and Davis, 2007; Presenter, Davis, 2011). It also brings the entire school-community around an issue that could negatively affect each of them.

There are several resources that schools can use to assist them in crafting their plan. In fact, some schools may be currently using them as a method to combat traditional bullying. Examples include bullying prevention and intervention programs such as the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program, character education programs such as Character Counts, Positive Intervention Plans as used in Individual Education Plans for students with special needs, and Social/Emotional Learning Standards such as those adopted by the Illinois State Board of Education in 2004.

2.7.3 Assign a Person to be Accountable for the Plan

It is vitally important to assign a point-person who is responsible for the implementation and evaluation of the of school’s anti-cyberbullying plan. While it does not have to be the principal, it does need to be someone who has the authority of the principal to ensure that everyone is onboard with the plan from inception, to implementation, and throughout evaluation and modification. This section has, thus far, described how to craft a plan to reduce cyberbullying’s effects on student learning. The subsequent sections of this chapter outline the specific policy components and practices that should be included to maximize the plan’s effectiveness.
2.8 Requisite Policy Components to Effectively Reduce Cyberbullying

2.8.1 Use Baseline Data to Identify and Adopt Policies Aimed at Effectively Reducing Cyberbullying in the School Setting

From the previous sections, it is clear that a school’s anti-cyberbullying plan will build on the data indicating the students’, and by proxy the school’s, specific needs in relation to the reduction of cyberbullying’s harm to school learning environments (Strom & Strom, 2005; U.S. Department of Education, 1998). However, if all of the respondent groups—students, parents, teachers, staff, principals, school volunteers, or community members—data were to be lumped and reported together, it could be difficult to pinpoint and address the greatest areas of need when crafting the plan.

For example, if students respond that cyberbullying occurs frequently but that it does not affect the learning environment, while the majority of teachers respond that the cyberbullying incidents negatively impact their ability to teach, such discrepancies could be masked if the data were reported without being broken down into respondent categories. Therefore, when reviewing the data to identify the areas requiring immediate attention, the teacher response could be overshadowed by the students because the operational structure of a school means that the number of student responses is much greater than that of teachers.

If a school’s plan only focused on the issues that were identified based upon the cumulative number of responses to the questionnaire, then the fact that teachers perceive cyberbullying as damaging to student learning could be overlooked and thereby go unaddressed in the school’s plan. The result could be that cyberbullying is never addressed in a manner that reduces its negative effect on student learning and so the
school’s ability to teach would not be enhanced despite the plan’s implementation. In order to avoid blind spots that could undermine the effectiveness of the plan, the questionnaire, although anonymous, should designate the subgroup to which the respondent belongs. Doing so, and analyzing the data accordingly, could ensure that each subgroups’ major perspectives garner a commensurate level of consideration in the school’s plan.

2.8.2 Clearly Define the Negative Behavior to be Deterred

As stated previously, defining cyberbullying can be difficult due to the many different forms that it can take. Moreover, cyberbullying is a term that most students are not educated about and thus, may not know the variety of expressions that fall under this umbrella. What is more, cyberbullying can continue to evolve with technology such that what is described as cyberbullying today might not encompass additional cyberbullying expressions of the future. These reasons summarize why it is critically important for schools to clearly describe the behaviors and expressions that constitute cyberbullying and the ensuing degrees of severity. Definitions pinpoint for students, staff, and the community, the delineation of acceptable from inacceptable expression/conduct. The definition section should also describe cyberbullying that includes racist, sexist, and homophobic expression (Smith et. al, 2008; Willard, 2002-2011).

2.8.3 Statement About the Potential Harms that Cyberbullying can Cause

Some state anti-cyberbullying statutes detail the harms that result from cyberbullying (Bullying Prevention, 105 ILCS 5/27-23.7, 2011; School Bullying Prevention Act, 2011). These legislative findings inform the general public about the
necessity for a policy aimed at reducing cyberbullying. Given the media coverage about cyberbullying, one could argue that the incorporation of these findings in district anti-cyberbullying policies is overkill. On the other hand, this information could raise awareness and spur action among other community members. Especially, among parents of students who have yet to personally experience cyberbullying. This information could also inform constituents about how cyberbullying has the potential to negatively effect the learning environments of schools as a whole.

Research findings about the prevalence and resulting harms obtained from the all-school cyberbullying questionnaire could rally stakeholder action around deterring this always negative form of student expression.

2.8.4 Jurisdictional limits of the school

This section of the plan should detail the circumstances under which a student will be found in violation of school policy for engaging in cyberbullying expression, and the graduated disciplinary measures to which they will be subject. Every anti-cyberbullying policy states that it applies to such expression when it originates on-campus. If a policymaking body wants to expand its jurisdiction to include cyberbullying acts that originate off-campus, it should be stated in this section as well.

Some state anti-cyberbullying policies that have off-campus applicability caution principals and schools about the limits that the U.S. Supreme Court’s Tinker v. Des Moines decision imposed on educator authority to discipline student for expression. (Tinker v. Des Moines Indep. Cmty. Sch. Dist., 1969). For example, Alabama’s anti-
cyberbullying policy states that students can be disciplined for off-campus cyberbullying expression whenever it has the effect “of substantially interfering with the educational performance, opportunities, or benefits of a student” or “substantially disrupting or interfering with the orderly operation of the school” (Student Harassment Prevention Act, 2011, Definition of Harassment). This reference does not detail how lower courts have interpreted the Tinker standard and its applicability to off-campus cyberbullying. Therefore, school districts and principals need to be aware that policies granting them the authority to suspend students for off-campus cyberbullying expression that has an on-campus effect may not be upheld in a court of law. The same would be true of Ohio’s recently enacted anti-cyberbullying legislation. More importantly, it appears from the literature that educators informally intervene when students engage in off-campus cyberbullying that does not have an on-campus effect per se. Hence, it seems that schools and school districts may want to identify and exercise other forms of intervention that would aid, rather than complicate, schools’ mission to prepare students for productive citizenship in a global society.

2.8.5 Clear Discipline Rules and Consequences for Perpetrators of Bullying

In order to preserve students’ 14th Amendment right to due process, they must be put on notice about: (a) the acts and expressions that constitute rule infractions; and (b) the ensuing disciplinary measures to which they will be subject. This is particularly germane for policies that grant educators the authority to suspend students for off-campus
cyberbullying that has an on-campus effect since it has not been definitively decided if such authority would be universally upheld in a court of law.

Research states that if students know and understand the intervention and graduated disciplinary measures to which they will be subject for engaging in cyberbullying activity, and they are certain that such measures be imposed, that this is often effective in modifying undesirable behavior (Presenter Davis, 2011; Willard, 2004). Using suspension alone as a mode of discipline, then, would be less effective at deterring cyberbullying. Especially when it is applied in a zero tolerance manner regardless of the severity or the degree of threatened or actual harm imposed by the cyberbullying expression in question and absent education on the subject. Certain and graduated disciplinary measures that lead up to suspension would also be more effective than suspension alone because research demonstrates that suspension actually decreases the likelihood that a student will graduate from high school; and thus, directly contradicts schools’ purpose.

2.8.6 Encourage Reporting of Cyberbullying

Schools and other adults can only address what they know is occurring. Research cited earlier in this study suggests that cyberbullying is underreported for a variety of reasons. Hence, adults are often unaware of cyberbullying activity until it manifests as observable symptoms. This scenario enables cyberbullying to proliferate and further deteriorate student learning environments.
2.8.7 Reporting Procedures

In order to ensure a safe and welcoming learning environment, each school building’s anti-cyberbullying plan should establish clear procedures for reporting incidents of cyberbullying and other negative occurrences. Anonymous reporting of cyberbullying activity should be permitted as well. Upon notice of cyberbullying occurrences, staff should be required to report these incidents immediately to the school’s anti-cyberbullying point-person and should be subject to discipline for failing to do so (Harassment, Intimidation, and Bullying, 2011; Kowalski et. al, 2008).

The plan should also impose discipline for anyone who retaliates against those who report cyberbullying activity (Harassment, Intimidation, and Bullying, 2012; Kowalski et. al, 2008). Additionally, this portion of the plan should include investigation and notification procedures, as well as the investigation and resolution timelines for involved students, parents, and staff (Harassment, Intimidation, and Bullying, 2012; Kowalski et. al, 2008).

For example, the New Hampshire anti-cyberbullying statute states that parents of students involved in cyberbullying shall be notified of its occurrence within 48 hours of the incident report (Pupil Safety, 2012). This statute also dictates that a written incident form must be completed that chronicles the facts and the outcome of the investigation. Within 10 days of a completed investigation, the form must be submitted to the school district and the parents of those involved (Pupil Safety, 2012).

Massachusetts’ anti-cyberbullying statute adds that any student who knowingly makes a false report could be subject to disciplinary action and requires a strategy for
providing counseling or referral of appropriate services for those affected (Harassment, Intimidation, Bullying, 2012).

Additionally, there are state anti-bullying policies that require school districts to submit annual reports about the number, the nature of, and the resolution of traditional bullying incidents. The State of Ohio has mandates this requirement in its anti-harassment, intimidation, and bullying legislation which now includes cyberbullying. (Education, Boards of Education, 2012).

Reporting requirements like those listed above could ensure that each reported cyberbullying incident is taken seriously, that those involved remain abreast of the status of the report, and that the situation is resolved and communicated in a constructive manner.

2.8.8 Stakeholders Must be Informed About the Plan and its Consequences

State anti-cyberbullying policies and the literature state that all who interact with the school must be informed about the plan if it is to succeed (Harassment, Intimidation, and Bullying, 2011; Kowalski et. al, 2008; U.S. Department of Education, 1998). The plan is to be included in student handbooks and codes of conduct that are sent home at the beginning of each year, posted on the internet, and be available upon request (Harassment, Intimidation, and Bullying, 2011; Kowalski et. al, 2008). In addition, if done well, informing stakeholders about the school’s anti-cyberbullying plan—in which they had input—and the progress of the benchmarks established by the all-school assessment, could garner ownership and desire to see the plan succeed (Kowalski, et. al, 2008; U.S. Department of Education, 1998).
2.8.9 Spend Class Time on Cyberbullying

The literature suggests that it is important to educate students about the affects of cyberbullying (Kowalski et. al, 2008; U.S. Department of Education, 1998; Willard, 2007). Not only does this sort of instruction serve to combat cyberbullying, it is also germane to the school’s mission of inculcating students with habits and manners of civility and preparing them to be functional adults in society. Therefore, educating students about tolerance, respect, and how to deal with their conflicts and emotions in constructive ways, and their application to cyber communication, could help revive this element of schools’ mission which has been deemphasized for quite some time.

What is more, such instruction is timely due to the recent neglect of civic lessons and interactions as class time has increasingly shifted to focus more on the subjects covered by standardized testing. Moreover, in this information age, that promotes and thrives on individualism, there is not much deliberate focus on the greater good. One could argue that such values have become implicit, instead of explicit. This assumption posits that students will be able to judge right from wrong even though we have not explicitly equipped them to do so.

With regard to cyberbullying, this assumption is even more attenuated because students have not been instructed about the real world implications of their virtual communications. Therefore, they have no way of knowing the impact of their communications until they themselves are on the receiving end. Further compounding the issue is the fact that although uneducated, we expect students to “know” that cyberbullying expression, while commonplace “online,” is not socially acceptable in the
real world. We also expect students to distinguish appropriate from inappropriate reactions when they witness or experience cyberbullying even though they never been introduced to such scenarios. Considering the grave consequences that a lack of regard for fellow citizens can render, and the increasing use of electronic communication, it seems that expecting students to pick up implicit lessons about how to function in a virtual world, that effects real life, is a tall order.

For the reasons stated above, it would be a mistake to try and control cyberbullying by primarily or solely focusing on punishing students for acts that they likely did not know were as harmful as they are. This lack of awareness could be due to the fact that the vast majority of their electronic communication use is unsupervised in addition to being unguided.

It would also be informative to educate students about the limits of their electronic expression and that some forms of cyberbullying constitute crimes, torts, or statutory violations such as defamation, public disclosure of private facts, invasion of personal privacy/false light, assault, intentional infliction of emotional distress, true threat, extortion, harassment, stalking, or hate crimes, and child pornography (Willard, 2007). This information, on its own, could be enough to deter at least some students from engaging in cyberbullying.

Another topic to cover with students about how to intervene when cyberbullying occurs is to teach them to save the evidence (Kowalski et. al, 2008). Instant messages are not automatically saved and blog and comments on social networking sites can be
deleted. Thus, students who receive or witness cyberbullying communications should be sure to save and/or print them as evidence of their occurrence.

Hagan’s (2010) study has shown that teaching empathy to bullies has been an important component in anti-bullying efforts. Other successful anti-bullying education topics include teaching students positive ways to deal with conflict, teaching students that they are not invisible online, and that their reputation is just as important in the digital realm as it is the real-world (Kowalski et al, 2008). Kowalski et. al (2008) add that it is necessary to teach students the importance of protecting their passwords and that sharing this information is unwise even amongst friends. Such practices allow angry friends or “frenemies” to use others’ identities to post or send cyberbullying expressions from their accounts.

Students should also be taught that being a bystander or a witness can be very powerful (Kowalski et. al, 2008). Bystanders can defend students who are cyberbullied and inform adults of these incidents. Such action could reinforce the culture that cyberbullying will not be tolerated. One way to make this happen is to encourage all students to inform a responsible adult of any and all cyberbullying occurrences regardless of whether they are the targeted individual or a bystander.

Additionally, students should try to ignore messages or block senders when they receive unfriendly comments in lieu of retaliation that only escalates the situation. If this fails to stop the unwanted expression, students should inform the sender that the proper authorities will be contacted if the messages persist. If the messages continue, students
should then contact the proper authorities and present the cyberbullying evidence that they have collected (Kowalski et al., 2008).

Finally, students should be educated about what cyberbullying is and the harm that it causes. Defining and providing examples of what cyberbullying is could enable students to unmistakably recognize and dispense of it, or at the very least not perpetuate its occurrence.

2.8.10 Professional Development Regarding Cyberbullying

Due to the insidious nature of cyberbullying, principals, educators, school staff, and volunteers must be knowledgeable about how to prevent and identify its occurrence as well as how to effectively intervene (Harassment, Intimidation, Bullying, 2011; Kowalski et al., 2008, Willard, 2007; U.S. Department of Education, 1998). Adults inside the school could often be among the first “uninvolved” individuals to learn of specific incidents of cyberbullying. Therefore, it is crucial that they are trained to spot warning signs of its occurrence. Likewise, everyone involved with the school needs to be informed about how to react once they discover that cyberbullying is occurring. Professional development in these areas could promote reporting because staff and students would know that they are expected to report such events, would feel that their report will be taken seriously, and that caring individuals are working to rectify the problem.

Teachers should also be trained not to blame the victim (Kowalski et al., 2008). Just because a targeted student may “attract” cyberbullying expression because they are
different in some way does not diminish or minimize the fact that the individual(s) engaging in cyberbullying made a choice to do so (Presenter Davis, 2011).

Finally, teachers should be instructed that it is appropriate and necessary to contact the parents of the students engaging in cyberbullying so that they are aware of the situation and the sanctions that the actor will face (Kowalski et. al, 2008; Willard 2007). Teachers can also inform the parents that if the cyberbullying expression is posted on a social networking site, they can request that it be removed.

2.8.11 Intervene When Cyberbullying Involves Students from Different Schools or School Districts

Because the relationships that lead to bullying and cyberbullying are often established because of school functions and activities, cyberbullying can also occur between students from different schools or school districts. The geographic boundaries that once limited communication between students from other schools or school districts are much less restricted than before due to the boundless and real-time communication that is a hallmark of digital communication. For this reason, the Massachusetts’ anti-cyberbullying statute states that the first school to receive notice that cyberbullying has occurred is charged with promptly informing the other school (Harassment, Intimidation, Bullying, 2011). This could be a useful addition to a school district’s anti-cyberbullying policy so that such incidents do not go unaddressed.

2.8.12 Acceptable Use Policies

Many schools currently have Acceptable Use Policies which inform students about what they can and cannot use school owned or sponsored technology to access, i.e. computer and internet service. These policies have been put into place mainly to curtail
access to inappropriate material. While these policies are appealing at first blush, the broadest of them “drastically reduce school relevance to students” by preventing students from exploring personal curiosity, hobbies, and interests (Bell, 2010). Such restrictions are particularly harmful to students of economically disadvantaged backgrounds who do not otherwise have online access at-home.

Although these students may be able to access the internet from other locations, such as a friend or relative’s house and public libraries, they would have greater and arguably more guided access at school. Specifically, students could access the internet at school during free time such as before school, study halls, lunchtime, after school, and at other times when computers otherwise sit idle (Bell, 2010). Besides keeping students engaged in school, the internet skills they could gain from this increased access are a necessity for the jobs they will seek. Why else would the federal government have enacted laws and promulgated money to promote internet access, technology use, and educator professional development toward this end in every U.S. classroom (Clinton, 1998)?

However, acceptable use policies could be modified to explicitly prohibit cyberbullying. If students were educated about appropriate internet use and electronic communication, through curricula and acceptable use policies, and firm expectations were established, they could be more responsible in their usage. While some students might always test or exceed the boundaries, it would be much more prudent to deal with their infractions on a case-by-case basis than it would be to punish an entire school. Especially when the punishment only serves to hurt the nation in the long run as it churns
out, for those fortunate enough to graduate, graduates who are likely to be technologically inept to compete in a 21st Century economy.

2.8.13 Use of Electronic Communication Devices by Students

Many school districts have also enacted policies regulating student use of personal electronic devices during school hours and school-sponsored activities. Like acceptable use policies, although restricting student use of these devices is intended to make students focus on the schoolwork at hand, students could sneak to use the devices just as students in the past found others ways to communicate. An example would be passing notes in class. However, banning the use of these devices does not educate students about the boundaries of appropriate electronic communication nor does it harness the potential that these devices have to enhance student learning. A more advantageous approach includes educating students about appropriate use of these devices and using them for instruction.

2.8.14 Regularly Evaluate and Modify the School’s Anti-cyberbullying Plan

Once a plan has been crafted and implemented, it is equally important to the plan’s success that data is continually collected and analyzed so that the plan can be tweaked to achieve the desired outcomes (U.S. Department of Education, 1998). This is again why the first step of engaging all concerned parties on an ongoing basis is crucial to the plan’s effectiveness (Nance, 2002).
Evaluation includes updating the plan annually and routinely reviewing the number of occurrences and levels of satisfaction with the resolution of cyberbullying incidents. If the current plan is not performing as expected, school staff should next identify what is not working and how it can be improved. The reasons for ineffectiveness of an aspect of the plan could stem from implementation issues, a blind-spot in the overall plan, or that enough time has not lapsed to be able to discern if the desired result would occur.

In any event, the next step is to modify the plan accordingly and then re-assess to determine if the changes garnered more desirable outcomes (U.S. Department of Education, 1998). The process of collecting and analyzing data, and modification of the plan, must be continual to maintain a safe and welcoming learning environment. The next section delves further into why principal inclusion in the development of such policy is crucial to its success.

2.9 The Role of the Principal in Policymaking and Implementation

Once the school has carefully developed a data-driven plan geared toward reducing cyberbullying, it must focus its attention on implementation. Absent earnest implementation, even the best made plans will be ineffective. This is where principals, as school leaders, really should take the reins in ensuring that everyone in the school community is informed about and on-board with the plan that was created with their input (Kowalski, et. al 2008; U.S. Department of Education, 1998).
At the school building level, principals drive the creation and implementation of policies that beget academic achievement through the establishment and maintenance of a school environment that is conducive to learning (Nance, 2002; U.S. Department of Education, 1998). With the charge of educating students, principals have broad discretion with regard to the subject matter and latitude of school building policy as long as it is in compliance with policy created by higher authorities (Nance, 2002).

Given this information, one could make the argument that principal involvement in educational policy-making is indispensable at the district, state, and national levels. However, a 2002 dissertation study conducted in Ohio found that principals’ actual and desired involvement in educational technology policy-making was: (a) moderately to substantially involved in the educational policy-making processes at the building level; (b) little to moderately involved at the district level; and (c) virtually uninvolved at the state/national levels (Nance, 2002). Moreover, the study found that, on average, principals desire to be moderately involved in district level policymaking but have almost no desire for involvement at the state and national levels.

Nance writes that the disengagement of principal input causes great concern because it creates an educational policy system that is imprecise at best. In other words, policy shaped by those who lack first-hand experience is often ill-informed and therefore inattentive to the nuances of the circumstances within which administrators and educators operate. He further adds that administrator involvement in policymaking could also facilitate policy implementation because their input would foster a sense of ownership resulting in greater buy-in.
With this context, it is evident that the most effective anti-cyberbullying policies could only be crafted and implemented with the involvement of principals. Pursuant to the current policy-making process, it is clear that we must somehow instill principals’ desire to impact policies created by higher authorities so that they are tailored to the issues with which they confront. Nance (2002) writes that principal involvement in the policymaking process has occurred through administrator special interest groups, providing input to state and local school boards, testifying at legislative committee hearings, and through service on advisory committees (Daniel & Nance, 2002). However, there is no evidence that such input is a consensus of practicing principal perspectives or that such involvement is consistent. This is precisely why the model policy resulting from this research involved soliciting the practical experiences of principals who routinely grapple with off-campus cyberbullying that has an on-campus effect.
Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

Cyberbullying diminishes and sometimes halts the learning of those directly involved. Moreover, this growing phenomenon threatens the educational attainment of entire school populations. Cyberbullying then has the potential to prevent many of the nation’s students from graduating high school and thereby attaining the postsecondary credentials that are necessary to secure jobs in a 21st century economy. The end result is that the collective U.S. standard of living could be negatively impacted because an ever growing proportion of the current and future would-be employees that our nation’s public school system is churning out (or leaving behind) will not be able to compete for jobs in the global market. Because cyberbullying can occur from as early as elementary, on through graduate school, and into the workplace, it is imperative that schools take a proactive role in reducing its harmful effects on student learning.

The review of literature demonstrated that some states have yet to enact anti-cyberbullying legislation. In absence of such state-level statutes, school districts, through their school boards, have the authority to implement or not implement anti-cyberbullying policy. In school districts where these policies have not been enacted, principals then, as the heads of policy in their schools, have exercised their discretion as to whether, how,
and the degree to which they intervene when cyberbullying incidents occur that negatively affect student learning. Although the State of Ohio recently enacted anti-cyberbullying policy in February 2012, it does not become effective in school districts until November, 2012.

Despite the discretion that principals in these circumstances have, a review of the literature revealed that there was scant research about cyberbullying from the principal perspective. More specifically to the shaping of this study, there was little to no research found regarding: (a) principal perspectives on cyberbullying and anti-cyberbullying policies and practices in urban settings in general and, in particular, from those serving high concentrations of students who are economically disadvantaged; (b) principal experiences with cyberbullying and its effect on the student learning environment; (c) effective and ineffective principal actions taken to prevent or respond to cyberbullying incidents; and (d) what should be included and excluded from anti-cyberbullying policies. These gaps in the literature suggest that, if cyberbullying—as one salient threat to student learning—needs to be curbed to increase the likelihood of educational attainment for both individual and collective well-being, the voices of principals should be included in anti-cyberbullying policies.

Principals are often the authority figures who are on the ground, where cyberbullying occurs and have discretion in regard to how it is addressed. It is for this reason that the researcher sought to increase the understanding of their untapped perspectives on this issue in hopes that such knowledge could inform policy and practices that could decrease the potential harmful effects of this behavior on the student learning
environment. Patton (2002, p. 49) writes that “matching research methodology to the purpose of a study, the questions being asked, and the resources available” is key to any study. Because the current study’s focus was on understanding cyberbullying and its effects on student learning environments from the principal perspective, qualitative methodology will be used.

Qualitative research tells a story by taking the reader to the time and place of a respondent’s perspective in a particular context (Patton, 2002). Such insight, gathered through naturalistic study, makes it possible to understand both the external behaviors that are observable and the internal states of the respondent including their worldview, opinions, attitudes, beliefs, and values (Patton, 2002). In other words, Patton (2002) writes that understanding a respondent’s perspective requires the researcher to put him or herself in the respondent’s shoes. While the qualitative researcher realizes that their approach is imperfect, they believe that it is the method that least distorts the respondent’s experiences (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

The goals of this study were to understand principal experiences and perspectives about cyberbullying to grasp a better understanding of the aforementioned understudied topics. Further, the researcher hopes that knowledge learned from this study can be used to inform practices and policies that more effectively combat the negative effects of cyberbullying on student learning environments.

3.2 Setting of the School District Under Study

This study was conducted in one of Ohio’s largest school districts. This large, urban, Midwestern district served a student body of more than 30,000 in the 2010-2011
academic year; at least 75 percent of whom were economically disadvantaged (Ohio Department of Education, 2011). The State of Ohio’s rating system for school districts includes the following designations from highest to lowest: Excellent with distinction, Excellent, Effective, Continuous Improvement, Academic Watch, and Academic Emergency (Ohio Department of Education, 2011). In 2010-2011, the district under study earned a rating of Continuous Improvement for the fifth consecutive year, meaning that the district met five of the state’s 26 indicators (Ohio Department of Education, 2011).

The student demographics of the district were 58.9 percent Black, 0.2 percent American Indian or Alaska Native, 2.1 percent Asian or Pacific Islander, 6.8 percent Hispanic, 5.1 percent multi-racial, 27 percent White, 9.7 percent Limited English Proficient, and 17.1 percent students with special needs (Ohio Department of Education, 2011). Unable to find any other research that explicitly explored cyberbullying in urban settings, with high concentrations of students who are economically disadvantaged, the researcher contends that this may be the only such study. Therefore, this research dually addressed the dearth of information on the subject of cyberbullying in general and particularly in an urban context (Hong, 2009, p. 85).

The mission of the district, where this study was conducted, is to ensure that “[e]ach student is highly educated, prepared for leadership, and service and empowered for success as a citizen in a global community” (School district under study, 2011). This statement demonstrates the district’s awareness that the world is becoming increasingly connected. As such, one might logically conclude that the district is also aware that
students need to know how to communicate effectively via electronic devices in order to be prepared for life as productive global citizens.

As an additional background, in 2006, the State of Ohio adopted legislation that required school districts to enact policies that prohibit harassment, intimidation, or bullying (HIB) by December 31, 2007 (Education, Boards of Education, 2011). Although many of the policies and practices included in Ohio’s anti-bullying legislation have been suggested by the literature as tactics that are also effective in reducing cyberbullying, cyberbullying is not included as one of the prohibited behaviors in Ohio’s anti-HIB statute. While this study was underway, state legislature enacted and anti-cyberbullying policy on Thursday, February 2, 2012, that does not become effective until November 4, 2012. Therefore, the participants in this study responded to the questions without the guidance of an official anti-cyberbullying policy.

In any event, even if an anti-cyberbullying policy was enacted that included all of the components that the literature suggests as effective in curbing the effects of cyberbullying on student learning, Hallfors and Godette (2002) indicate that the true test of efficacy for any school-wide policy is dependent upon the fidelity in which it is implemented (Limber, 2006). Hence, principals need to be effective leaders that have the ability to instill a shared vision and solicit buy-in from those affected by the plan (U.S. Department of Education, 1998). This is again why the first step of engaging all concerned parties on an ongoing basis is crucial to the plan’s effectiveness (Nance, 2002).
For the reason stated above, the purpose of this study was to increase the understanding of cyberbullying from principal perspectives; specifically, how it affects the learning environment in their buildings and the policies and practices that are both effective and ineffective in diminishing its effects on student learning. Such findings could have the potential of better enabling urban principals and educators to establish and/or maintain school environments that are more conducive to educational attainment (Kowalski, et. al., 2008).

3.3 Research Questions

This study is designed to answer the following questions:

1) How has cyberbullying affected the learning environment in their schools?

2) Absent explicit anti-cyberbullying policy, how have principals addressed off-campus cyberbullying incidents that had an on-campus effect?

3) From the principal perspective, what should be included/excluded in state- and district-level anti-cyberbullying policies to decrease the effects of cyberbullying on student learning?

3.4 Research Design

3.4.1 Theoretical Framework

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the cyberbullying phenomenon from the principal perspective. With this in mind, the interpretivist paradigm was used as the theoretical underpinning for this research. Interpretivism “refers to approaches emphasizing the meaningful nature of people’s participation in
social and cultural life. The methods of natural science are seen as inappropriate for such investigation. Researchers working within this tradition analyse the meanings people confer upon their own and other’s actions” (Researching society and Culture, n.d., p. http://people.brunel.ac.uk/~hsstefs/glossary.htm). Like many qualitative theoretical orientations, the interpretivist paradigm developed as a critique of the use of positivism in the social sciences. Although there are different types of interpretivism, most interpretivists ascribe to the following assumptions and about knowing and reality, relativist ontology and transactional or subjectivist epistemology (Qualitative Research Guidelines, 2006).

Relativist ontology is the assumption that reality is constructed by individuals based off of the meanings and understandings they constructed as a result of their interactions with others and society (Qualitative Research Guidelines, 2006; Researching Society and Culture, n.d.).

Transactional or subjectivist epistemology is the assumption that individuals cannot divorce themselves from what they know. This includes the researcher such that what they know, their experiences, knowledge, and viewpoints, are inevitably linked to their object of investigation because these experiences are how they understand themselves, others, and the world around them (Researching Society and Culture, n.d.; Qualitative Research Guidelines, 2006). Hence, a researcher should be cognizant of, report, and check their biases and assumptions throughout the study’s duration to ensure the credibility of the findings (Bodan & Biklen, 2007; Patton, 2002).
The above assumptions illustrate how interpretivism draws from phenomenological ontology, which posits that there is no distinction between the mind and matter because truth can only be understood through the human experience that is elucidated through dialogue. These assumptions and the phenomenological ontology of interpretivism fit this study because the researcher sought to understand cyberbullying from principals’ subjective viewpoints. The phenomenological approach was also relevant to this study because it reminded the researcher that she must assume that how participants act is sensible because of their perspectives and experiences (Packer, n.d.). Thus, in order to fully understand participant perspectives on a subject, the researcher cannot assume that she already understands the participants’ perspectives (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Rather, she must be open to uncovering participants’ subjective truths (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

Interpretivism also embodies hermeneutic characteristics in that it involves the reading and interpretation of texts (Packer, n.d.) which can include interview transcripts (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Three hermeneutic principals that speak to interpretivism and the current study include: (a) that the researcher must know the language in which the text is written; (b) that each individual can interpret the same text in different ways; and (c) that the texts are read and analyzed in context which is crucial to the quality of the investigation (Packer, n.d.). The current study involved the inductive interpretation of interview transcripts, field notes, a reflection journal, participant demographic questionnaires, and the collection of pre-existing documents. As such, the three Hermeneutic characteristics stated above were instructive to data analysis and
interpretation of the research findings because they served as interpretive guidelines that impact: (a) credible research design; (b) the trustworthiness and rigor of the research; (c) the quality of the findings; and (d) the quality of the study overall.

As hinted to above, the interpretivist paradigm used in this qualitative study was also inductive in nature. This means that, as themes reveal themselves during the data collection process, the researcher can modify further data collection. Put differently, while the researcher’s background shapes what is studied, the approach taken, and provides parameters, tools, and a general guide of how to proceed, the research design is also flexible (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). This is because the inductive nature of the interpretivist paradigm necessitates that researchers neutrally (Patton, 2002) analyze respondent interpretation throughout the data collection process in order to shape the evolving data focus and collection (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Hence, the findings are created as the investigator proceeds (Qualitative Research Design, 2006). Because truth is found in dialogue between the researcher and the respondents, this dialectical process informs a more sophisticated understanding of the social world in a specific context (Qualitative Research Design, 2006). Packer (n.d.) adds that such research is relevant to both practitioners and educators. Finally, because the interpretivist paradigm assumes that all interpretations are based in a specific time, place, and context, the truth in the findings are ever evolving, becoming more nuanced and/or until a new theory emerges (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Qualitative Research Design, 2006).

The researcher chose the interpretivist paradigm as the theoretical orientation for this study because it was best suited to answer the research questions from the principal
perspective. It also oriented the researcher in terms of data collection, analysis, and interpretation (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Qualitative Research Design, 2006). Glaser and Strauss (1967) elaborate on this point stating that the theoretical orientation that a researcher chooses should, among other things, (a) provide a strategy for handling research and provides conceptual modes for explaining and describing findings, (b) supply critical categories and hypotheses that can be verified both at the time the research was conducted and in future research, and (c) be understandable to other researchers, students and laymen. Similar to what Patton (2002) stated about determining whether to use qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methodology, Glaser and Strauss (1967) go on to write that a “[t]heory that can meet these requirements must fit the situation being researched, and work when put into use. By ‘fit’ we mean that the categories must be readily (not forcibly) applicable to and indicated by the data under study; by ‘work’ we mean that they must be meaningfully relevant to and be able to explain the behavior under study” (p. 3). The two scholars further explain that the best way to find theory that meets these stringent standards is to use an inductive process where the theory is substantive and the categories are discovered by examination of the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

The themes encompassed in the interpretivist paradigm were used in this study to (a) drive the phenomenological data collection of principal voices about cyberbullying through the use of semi-structured interviews comprised of mostly open-ended questions, and (b) inductively explore, analyze, understand, describe, and explain principals’ current
perspectives on this issue with a focus on how they have chosen to address its disruption to the student learning environments in their buildings.

3.4.2 Sampling

Criterion-based purposive sampling was used for this study because selecting information rich respondents provides in-depth understanding of issues that are central to the purpose of the research (Patton, 2002). In this study, principals in a large, urban, Midwestern school district serving a high concentration of students who were economically disadvantaged, and that did not have anti-cyberbullying policy at the state- or district-level was the population of interest. This population was chosen because little cyberbullying research has been conducted in districts with this demographic makeup. Using the criterion-based purposive sampling method (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), 52 middle and high schools from the district under study were identified from the Ohio Department of Education’s, Download Data Reports (Download Data, 2011). This information is publicly accessible on the Internet.

3.4.3 Recruitment

After the 52 schools in the district under study were identified from the Download Data Reports, the researcher obtained permission to conduct the study from The Ohio State University’s Institutional Review Board, the College of Education & Human Ecology’s Office of Outreach and Engagement at The Ohio State University, and the Office of Evaluation Services at the district under study. Next, the researcher requested
and obtained current principal contact information from the school district under study for the 52 schools identified as the target population.

On Tuesday, February 7, 2012, the researcher mailed hard copies of the invitation letter to participate in the study (see Appendix A) and the Introduction letter from the Office of Accountability from the district under study (see Appendix B) all 52 principals to request their participation in the study. On Tuesday, February 14, 2012 the researcher sent a follow-up email with the invitation letter to participate in the study and the Introduction Letter from the district under study. The follow-up email generated three participants for whom interview location times and locations were set.

However, after mailing and emailing the Invitation and Introduction Letters to potential participants, the researcher placed follow-up phone calls to the remaining 49 principals, the number of calls placed to each principal requesting their participation ranged from one to five. The follow-up phone calls enabled the researcher to secure 20 additional participants. In total, 23 interviews were conducted in 20 days from Friday, February 17, 2012 to Thursday, March 8, 2012. Because the researcher appreciated how precious time is for school building principals, the researcher agreed to conduct the interviews at a time and location most convenient for each of the participants. As a result, 10 interviews were conducted in person in 13 were conducted over the phone. Although the researcher requested 30 minutes to conduct the interview, the average length was 21 minutes and nine seconds with a range of eight minutes and seven seconds to 53 minutes and 29 seconds. The researcher determined that saturation was achieved after 23
interviews were conducted. (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; See Appendix H for participant demographics).

3.3.4 Sample size

Glaser (2000) wrote that “qualitative data are inexpensive to collect, very rich in meaning and observation, and very rewarding to collect and analyze” (p. 7). Yet, Bogdan and Biklen (2007) add that qualitative researchers should think small in terms of data collection because such work is labor intensive and time consuming. Creswell (1998) wrote that in qualitative research, between five and 25 participants are sufficient. In this study, the researcher attempted to strike a balance between gathering enough data to answer the research questions and identify emerging themes, while being cognizant of the length of time a quality study would take to conduct. Therefore, although the purposeful sampling method was used to identify 52 middle and high school principals in the district under study, a sample size of 25 interviews was determined as the target. However, as indicated in the previous section, the researcher capped the number participant interviews at 23 due to data saturation.
3.5 Data Collection

In qualitative research, more than one data collection method is typically used to gain a full understanding of participant perspectives about the topic under study (Creswell, 2009; Glesne, 1999; Patton, 2002). For this study, four types of data collection were used: (a) a review of the literature; (b) individual, semi-structured, open-ended interviews; (c) demographic questionnaires; and (d) document collection.

Review of the literature. A review of the literature not only amplified the researcher’s interest in this topic, it also provided background and illuminated gaps in the literature that: (a) informed the research questions for this study, (b) suggested a qualitative study with an interpretivist orientation, (c) informed the semi-structured interview questions as well as the participant demographic questionnaire, and (d) drove and informed data collection, analysis, and interpretation.

Individual, Semi-Structured, Open-Ended Interviews. Guided by the interpretivist paradigm, principal perspectives about cyberbullying were collected using individual, semi-structured interviews composed of mostly open-ended questions. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) stated that in-depth interviewing best embodies themes of qualitative research. Patton (2002) added that “[i]nterviews yield direct quotations from people about their experiences, opinions, feelings, and knowledge” (p. 4). Semi-structured interviews involve the creation of some general questions that enables more systematic and comprehensive data collection as each participant is prompted to address the same issues (Patton, 2002). However, Patton (2002) also adds that this form of interviewing also
grants the researcher flexibility to explore relevant topics that the researcher did not anticipate and/or was not expressed in other interviews.

Bogdan and Biklen (2007) stated that open-ended questions evoke dialogue and allow respondents to answer from their own perspectives, which also empowered the researcher to flexibly dive more deeply into previously unheard responses and flesh-out new insights. When combined with the other methods of data collection in a qualitative study, the rich data gathered from interviews also enabled the researcher to understand the context specificity of participants’ perspectives, and facilitated inductive and creative synthesis.

The creation of the semi-structured interview was based on the review of literature and conversations with a current middle school principal in the district under study. Two trial interviews were completed to determine if the elicited responses generated the data sought to answer the guiding research questions of this study. Afterward, the general questions were further tuned and the researcher began scheduling interview dates, times, and locations with the principal participants.

In keeping with the naturalistic theme of qualitative research and for participant convenience, the researcher met with each principal at their respective schools or by telephone to conduct the interviews. As a result, 10 interviews were conducted in person in 13 were conducted over the phone. Although the researcher requested 30 minutes to conduct the interview, the average length was 21 minutes and nine seconds with a range of eight minutes and seven seconds to 53 minutes and 29 seconds. It took the researcher
twenty days, from Friday, February 17, 2012 to Thursday, March 8, 2012, to conduct 23 participant interviews.

In addition to the audio recordings, the researcher also kept field notes and a reflection journal to aid accurate transcription and to reduce the likelihood of interjecting her opinion into the respondents’ answers. The field notes and reflection journal also ensured that the data analysis and interpretation that occurred in this qualitative study, both during and at the conclusion of data collection, was as authentic as possible (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The audio-recordings were documented with association codes and participant names. Once the recordings were transcribed, all identifiable information was redacted from the transcripts and completely replaced with the association codes. The identifiable documentation was kept confidential throughout the study and destroyed after transcription. To ensure consistency and continuity among the interviews and the data collected, the researcher was the only interviewer.

*Demographic questionnaires.* The 23 participating principals were asked to complete a brief demographic questionnaire (See Appendix G for the participant demographic questionnaire). Question topics included, age, number of years as a principal, number of years as a principal in the current school-building, number of years employed by the district under study, race, gender, highest level of education attained, and whether they held a current principal licensure. The responses obtained from this questionnaire enhanced the researcher’s comprehensive understanding of how the principal participants’ life and work experience shape their perspectives, attitudes, beliefs, and actions toward cyberbullying. This information also helped the researcher
identify patterns and outliers that were used to customize specific topics covered in the individual interviews. Such data was also important because it introduced experiences and perspectives that had not been previously addressed in the literature.

*Document Collection.* Documents were collected and analyzed to obtain a more sophisticated understanding of the data elicited from the individual interviews and the demographic questionnaires. Incorporating this characteristic of qualitative methodology helped build to the credibility or trustworthiness of the research study findings.

### 3.6 Data Analysis

Patton (2002) writes that the goal of data analysis is to identify patterns that can be developed into meaningful categories and themes that involves the identification, coding, categorizing, classifying, and labeling of the primary patterns in the data (Patton, 2002). In this study, after the data was collected, the researcher used two stages of coding, open and axial (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Open coding was used to break the data into manageable units that were then divided into categories representing major themes and subcategories representing more finite strands of the major themes (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The codes were then recorded in a codebook to track the themes identified from the initial inductive review of the data (see Appendix J for the codebook). The codebook was created from four sources: (a) a review of the literature; (b) the open-ended questions from the individual semi-structured interviews; (c) the initial inductive review of the interview transcripts and the first-cut at coding from that review; and (d) some additional categories that were added because, upon further
review, some of the data did not fit into the first-cut of coding categories (Patton, 2002). Next, axial coding or cross-classification was used to organize the categories and subcategories in new ways to look for patterns that may not have been discovered in the initial inductive analysis (Patton, 2002; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

To ensure consistency in the coding process, the researcher and a research partner independently reviewed the verbatim interview transcripts to understand the participants’ perspectives and to identify and code emerging themes. Once the coding was complete, the researcher discussed the themes with the research partner and a professor on her dissertation committee until confirmation of the themes that emerged from the transcripts was reached (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

In order to organize and understand the number of participants that ascribed to the major themes and subthemes, the researcher constructed two spreadsheets for each of the themes to systematically organize and analyze the data. The first spreadsheet, the Quoted Code Worksheet, mimicked the coding worksheet in having the following categories: (a) participant; (b) code; (c) transcript page number(s); and (d) transcript line number(s) (see Appendix K for an example of the Coding Worksheet). However, it also added another category, participant quotes, that corresponded to the listed code (see Appendix L for a example of the Quoted Code Worksheet). The second worksheet that the researcher created was the Code Count Worksheet which was used to count the number of participants whose quotes were assigned to each of the codes (see Appendix M for an example of the Code Count Worksheet). This process then enabled the researcher, using axial coding, to collapse the themes into five major themes.
3.7 Trustworthiness and Rigor of Researcher

Evaluating qualitative research differs from evaluating quantitative research. The quality of quantitative research is determined by how well the researcher utilized standardized procedures so that his or her statistical findings are broad, generalizable, and are “presented succinctly and parsimoniously” (Patton, 2002, p. 14). In contrast, the quality of qualitative research is determined by how well the researcher “provided evidence that their descriptions and analysis represent the reality of the situations and persons studied” (Lodico, Spaulding, and Voegtle, 2006, p. 273). Along these lines, Patton (2002) stated that “the quality of qualitative data depends to a great extent on the methodological skill, sensitivity, and integrity of the researcher” (p.5). Lodico et. al (2006) added that many different criteria have been proposed to evaluate the trustworthiness and rigor of qualitative research. However, this study focused on credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and authenticity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

3.7.1 Credibility

Because the goal of qualitative research is to increase understanding of behavior or a phenomenon from the respondents’ subjective experience, the researcher must be vigilant to authentically capture, record, analyze, and interpret the data collected. In this study (a) research partners, and (b) triangulation were utilized for this purpose. Although the researcher wanted to use member checking, the Institutional Review Board indicated that this could not occur via email because email was not secure. This, combined with the fact that the researcher thought that principals would be deterred from participating in the
study if she asked for more than a 30-minute block of their time, prevented member-checking from being used in this study.

*Research partners.* Incorporating research partners into the coding that occurs subsequent to data collection increases the likelihood that the categories and subcategories identified from inductively analyzing the verbatim transcripts were accurately portrayed. The research partners’ unique perspective and fresh eyes on this subject served as a check and balance to the themes initially identified by the researcher.

*Triangulation.* This study used multiple data sources—a review of the literature, verbatim interview transcripts, a participant demographic questionnaire, and the collection of existing data about the participating principals’ schools—to increase credibility by giving the researcher a more comprehensive understanding of principals’ perspectives about the cyberbullying phenomenon and add additional assurance that the research processes accurately capture this data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

### 3.7.2 Transferability

Lodico et. al (2006) wrote that unlike quantitative researchers, qualitative researchers “do not expect their findings to be generalizable to all other settings” (p. 275). But, they do subscribe to the belief that lessons learned in one setting may be applicable to or useful in others (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Lodico, et. al, 2006). However, Lodico et. al (2006) state that the degree of the transferability of a study’s findings is judged by the reader based upon the researcher’s rich or thick description of the context in which the study was conducted. The reader can use this information to determine if the themes that emerge from a particular study are applicable to another setting. In this study, both the
participants and the researcher engaged in thick or very detailed and contextual description to decipher principal perspectives that of cyberbullying within a particular school district and policy setting.

3.7.3 Dependability

Dependability of qualitative research is the degree to which the researcher documents and presents the research processes and procedures to collect and interpret data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Lodico et. al, 2006). Dependable studies are logical, traceable, and documented (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) in a manner that enables readers to understand how the research was conducted such that it could be replicated. In this study, such a research audit trail was established by the:

1) Research Proposal
2) Participant demographic questionnaire
3) Initial and modified guided interview topics
4) Audio-recorded interviews
5) Verbatim interview transcripts
6) Field notes and reflection journal
7) Code book
8) Quoted Code Worksheet
9) Code Count Worksheet
10) Research partner analysis

Additionally, the researcher carefully followed ethical protocol throughout this
study. Prior to embarking upon data collection, approval was obtained from the
Institutional Review Board (IRB) (see Appendix F for the IRB approval letter). In
accordance with the human subject guidelines promulgated by the IRB, the recruitment
letter to the participants included an interview protocol instructing them that: (a)
participation in this study is voluntary; (b) they can withdraw at anytime throughout the
study; (c) both their school name and identity will be kept confidential and separate from
their anonymous responses so that they do not have any bearing on their employment or
professional reputation; and (d) the researcher would request permission to record the
interview prior to beginning the tape (see Appendix A for the Letter to Participants). The
researcher verbally reviewed this document with each participant to obtain consent.
Participant inquiries were addressed prior to the start of the interview.

3.7.4 Confirmability

Confirmability refers to whether the researcher presented the data in a clear and
discernible manner that was authentic to the participants’ perspectives (Lincoln & Guba,
1985). The above measures of triangulation, use of research partners, and the
development of a research audit trail were used to ensure confirmability.

3.7.5 Authenticity

Spradley (1979) writes that authenticity attempts to match the researcher’s goals
with the participants’ needs. In this study, authenticity was achieved by informing the
participants: (a) of the study; (b) that the purpose of this research was for doctoral study;
(c) of the researcher’s desire to increase the understanding of principal perspectives about the growing and dangerous phenomenon of cyberbullying; and (d) demonstrated how important principal perspectives are in creating and implementing that policies and practices that could effectively curb cyberbullying’s negative effects on student learning. The researcher also informed the respondents about the significance of their participation in order to conduct this study. Finally, the researcher demonstrated authenticity by accurately portraying participants’ varied viewpoints in the themes and subthemes that emerge from inductive analysis.

3.8 Researcher Subjectivity

Qualitative study posits that individuals cannot divorce who they are from the knowledge that they have. More specifically, one’s background, knowledge, and experiences can “filter, skew, shape, block, transform, construe, and misconstrue what transpires from the outset of a research projected to its culmination in written statement” (Peshkin, 1988, p. 17). For example, the researcher of the current study has had a long-standing interest in education, and education policy in particular. As a first-generation college student from a socio-economically disadvantaged and minority background, the Young Scholars Program at The Ohio State University kept the researcher on the college path, some of her peers (event those enrolled in the same classes as the researcher) and relatives veered off. It is the researcher’s conviction that just as her life experiences and trajectory were forever altered by the educational support that this program provided, many of those who strayed could have also been poised to take advantage of many
opportunities that are currently unavailable to them had they too been fortunate to participate in such a program.

After participating in study abroad programs during undergraduate study, the researcher’s observational and formal and study conclusion—that adequate education foundations foster or hinder life trajectories—was reinforced on a global scale. As such, the researcher became deeply interested in educational policy; particularly how it is shaped and whose voices are included in the process, and the impact that it has for the most vulnerable students. To pursue further study of educational policy, the researcher earned a law degree and a Master’s degree in Educational Administration. This, coupled with nearly five years of work experience as an education policy analyst at KidsOhio.org, has led to the researcher’s stance that while public education is affected by policy, rarely is policy creation affected directly by input from the students served by, and the practitioners serving, the public education system. Moreover, such a one-way exchange can only lead to incomplete and/or inadequate policies that do not put student needs at the forefront.

For example, the State of Ohio only recently enacted anti-cyberbullying legislation, that is not required to be enacted by Ohio districts until November, 2012, despite: (a) the fact that cyberbullying could be a significant and growing problem in these schools just as it is nationally; (b) media accounts of such incidents; (c) the clear and detrimental connection between the long term effects that cyberbullying can on learning environments; and (d) the fact that a majority of states and at least school districts within the State of Ohio have enacted legislation on this subject.
Moreover, even though anti-cyberbullying legislation has been enacted at the state level, the findings of this study suggest that principal perspectives were not involved in its formation. As such, it is the researcher’s hope that the findings of this study inform policymaking on this subject from the perspective of practicing principals from urban districts that serve tens of thousands of students for whom no deep dive has previously been taken in the literature.

In summary, the researcher’s background has given rise to the following assumptions:

1) Principal voices are key to decreasing the harmful effects of cyberbullying on student learning;

2) Principals—especially from large, urban, Midwestern school districts serving high concentrations of students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds—have insights about cyberbullying that have yet to be explored;

3) Principals desire policy guidance to address cyberbullying that they can tailor to meet their schools’ needs; and

4) Principals are the right fit for the building that they are currently in and are strong enough leaders to create and implement policy and practices that would decrease cyberbullying’s negative effect on student learning (Policy Studies Associates, 1998).

Having identified these assumptions, the researcher recorded and remained cognizant of them so that they did not interfere with the collection, analysis, interpretation, and presentation of the research study findings.
3.9 Summary

In addition to summarizing the research problem, questions, and purpose of this study, this chapter also described the research design that includes the theoretical framework, school setting, sample and sample size, data collection, analysis, and interpretation, the trustworthiness and credibility of the data, and identified the researcher’s subjective biases. The next chapter presents the findings of this study.
Chapter 4: Findings

4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study was to identify, through practicing principal perspectives, policy components and practices that are effective and ineffective for decreasing cyberbullying occurrences and/or its negative influence on urban middle and high school (grades six-12) learning environments. More specifically, because the State of Ohio did not enact anti-cyberbullying legislation until February, 2012, and does not require school districts to adopt anti-cyberbullying policies until November, 2012, this study sought principal perspectives about how they have addressed cyberbullying incidents in their schools in the absence of specific policy on the subject. This chapter summarizes the empirical findings from semi-structured, open-ended participant interviews, demographic questionnaires, and publically accessible school district and school building data. In closing, this chapter begins with a demographic description of the participants and concludes with the emerging themes derived from this study.

4.2 Participant Demographics

Twenty-three principals participated in the study (see Appendix H for a complete chart of Participant Demographics).
Table 4.1: Participant Demographics and Level of Educational Attainment

Table 4.1 indicates that 47.8 percent (11) of the participants were female and 52.2 percent (12) of the participants were male. Additionally, 56.5 percent (13) of the participants identified as Black/African American, 39.1 percent (9) were White, and 4.3 percent (1) of the participants identified as Other. Fifty-six point six percent of participants (13) attained Masters Degrees, 34.8 percent (8) attained Masters Degree’s Plus, and 8.7 percent (2) earned Doctorate degrees. All of the participants held current principal licensures.

<table>
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<th>Category</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>White</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest Level of Education Attained</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Master’s +</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Doctorate</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2: Average Age, Average Number of Years Participants Served as Principal, and Average Number of Years Employed by the District Under Study

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Range of Years</th>
<th>Number of Years</th>
<th>Average Number of Years as Principal In current School</th>
<th>Average Number of Years as Principal in Other Schools</th>
<th>Average Number of Years in the District Under Study</th>
</tr>
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<td>0 to 3</td>
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<td>Average</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td></td>
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</table>
The average age of the participants was 43.7 with a range of 29 to 64 years-old. The average number of years that the participants served as principals in their current building was 4.1 with a range of one to 9 years. The average number of years during which the participants served as principals in other school(s) was 1.1 years with a range of zero to three years. The average total number of years that each participant was employed by the district under study was 16.3 with a range of two to 28 years.

4.3 Theme Emergence

The emergent themes in this study were derived from participants’ answers to the following research questions:

1) How has cyberbullying affected the learning environment in their schools?

2) Absent explicit anti-cyberbullying policy, how have principals addressed off-campus cyberbullying incidents that had an on-campus effect?

3) From the principal perspective, what should be included/excluded in state-and district-level anti-cyberbullying policies to decrease the effects of cyberbullying on student learning?

Data analysis of participant responses to the semi-structured, open-ended interview questions, demographic questionnaires, and other document data began with open codes that were identified in the review of literature. Once the primary codes emerged from the researcher’s initial pass at data analysis, a research partner (see Appendix I for a description of the research partners) was given a binder with a hard copy of the participant transcripts, the primary codebook (see Appendix J), and a coding worksheet (see appendix K). Once the research partner completed her independent coding
of the transcripts, a debriefing meeting was held where agreement was reached in regard to the emerging themes. Next, the researcher held debriefing meetings with a professor serving on her dissertation committee, who was a qualitative researcher, until confirmation of the themes was achieved.

Next, using axial coding, the researcher was able to collapse the number of codes identified in the open coding process into five major themes. The segments that follow are divided into the five major themes that emerged from the data: (a) Cyberbullying in the School Setting; (b) Cyberbullying Effects for the School Learning Environment; (c) Policy Components and Practices that are Effective and Ineffective for Reducing Cyberbullying; (d) Principal Authority to Address Cyberbullying; and (e) Principal Perspectives About State-, School District-, and Building-Level Anti-Cyberbullying Policies. Within these themes, subthemes also emerged. All themes and subthemes are presented in Table 4.3: Emerging Themes and Subthemes below.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Subthemes</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cyberbullying in the school setting</td>
<td>(a) Cyberbullying is an Issue in Urban School Districts Serving High Concentrations of Students who are Economically Disadvantaged, (b) Cyberbullying Originates Off-Campus, (c) Occurrence, Frequency, and Magnitude, (d) Importance of Reporting, (e) Cyberbullying and Negative Cyberinteraction, and (f) Why Cyberbullying Occurs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyberbullying Effects for the School Learning Environment</td>
<td>(a) Time of task, (b) Leads to Other School Disruptions, and (c) Long-Lasting Harms</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Effective Policy Components and Practices
(a) Educate Stakeholders, (b) Parental Involvement, (c) Educate Students About Social Development, (d) Counseling and Mediation, (e) Conference with Involved Parties, (f) Investigate Every Cyberbullying Report, (g) Implement Reporting Procedures, (h) Involve Police, (i) Teach Responsible Digital Communication, (j) Allow Students to Start Anew, and (k) All School Anti-Cyberbullying Plan

### Ineffective Policy Components and Practices
(a) Barring Student Technology Use, (b) Lack of Education (c) Ignoring/Failing to Investigate Reports, (d) Barring Staff Access, (e) Unclear Boundaries of Authority and Accountability, (f) Lack of Consequences, and (g) Underreporting

### Policy Components and Practices that are Effective and Ineffective for Reducing Cyberbullying

#### Policy Components and Practices to be Included in Anti-Cyberbullying Policies
(a) Stakeholder Education, (b) Jurisdictional Boundaries, (c) Public Service Announcements, (d) Adults Inhabit Cyberspace, (e) Protocol and Consequences, (f) Resources, (g) Curricula, (h) Define Cyberbullying and Negative Cyberinteraction, (i) Case-by-Case Analysis, and (j) Student Safety

#### Policy Components and Practices to be Excluded in Anti-Cyberbullying Policies
(a) Barring Student Technology Use, and (b) Barring Staff Access

### Anti-Cyberbullying Policies Unhelpful
(a) Authority to Intervene and Administer Discipline, (b) Authority to Intervene and Informally Intervene, (c) Administering Suspension, (d) Parental Reaction to Discipline, and (e) Uncertainty About Authority

### Principal Authority to Address Cyberbullying

### Perspectives About Why Ohio Only Recently Enacted Anti-Cyberbullying Legislation
(a) Principals Experience Cyberbullying, (b) Unclear Jurisdictional Boundaries, (c) Recently Gained Attention, (d) Hard to Monitor and Regulate, (e) Unclear Definition, (f) Already Addressing Effectively, and (g) Difficult to Establish Uniform Policy

### School-Building Level Policy

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Table 4.3: Emerging Themes and Subthemes
4.4 Presentation of Findings

As explained in Chapter 3, semi-structured, open-ended interviews were used to elicit participant perspectives about cyberbullying because the use of this instrument yields “direct quotations from people about their experiences, opinions, feelings, and knowledge” (Patton, 2002, p. 4). Similarly, Bogdan and Biklen (2007) posit that open-ended questions enable participants to answer from their own perspectives. Lodico, Spaulding, and Voegtle (2006) add that the trustworthiness and rigor of the research is judged in part by how well the researcher provides context around the research findings. In other words, the researcher must include sufficient context to enable the reader to; (a) authentically understand the participant responses; and (b) determine the applicability of the findings of this study to other settings (p. 273). In this study, the researcher enabled the participants, in a particular school district and policy setting, to articulate their perspectives in their own words via semi-structured, open-ended interviews. Additionally, to ensure authenticity of the emergent themes from this study, the summaries that follow include direct quotes, some of which have been edited to protect participant anonymity. However, great care was taken to ensure that participant responses were not distorted during the editing process by providing as much of the participants’ statements as necessary to articulate their perspectives in their own words.

4.5 Cyberbullying in the School Setting

When principals were asked to share their perspectives about cyberbullying in the school setting, several subthemes emerged: (a) Cyberbullying is an Issue in Urban School
Cyberbullying is an Issue in Urban School Districts Serving High Concentrations of Students who are Economically Disadvantaged

Before discussing principal perspectives about cyberbullying in the school setting, it is important to note two germane points revealed by a review of the literature. The first is that cyberbullying is a subject ripe for more research in general and particularly in urban districts with high concentrations of students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds (Hong, 2009; Mason, 2008). The second point revealed by the review of literature is that there is very limited research about cyberbullying from the principal perspective. Despite the dearth of research in these areas, the researcher assumed that: (a) cyberbullying was indeed occurring in large, urban school districts with high rates of students from economically backgrounds; and (b) principals in the district under study had perspectives about cyberbullying that had not yet been explored. The findings of the current study indicated that all 23 of the participants experienced manifestations of cyberbullying in their school buildings, and all 23 addressed these issues. Both of these findings confirmed the researcher’s assumptions.

Cyberbullying Originates Off-Campus

In accordance with the literature, all of the participants stated that cyberbullying incidents originate off-campus yet have on-campus effects (Kowalski et. al, 2008;
Willard, 2004). One participant stated, “I don’t even recall of an incident that originated here. But because they have to come here and walk by one another, it is going to be my issue…” [Participant 3, 166-168].

Occurrence, Frequency, and Magnitude

The literature suggests that the potential for cyberbullying is great due to student access to electronic devices capable of communication and unsupervised, uneducated use (Kowalski, 2008; Lenhart et. al., 2010; Ridehout et. al., 2010; Strom & Strom, 2005; Willard, 2007). In this study, participant experiences regarding the frequency of cyberbullying occurrences, and the magnitude of this issue in their particular buildings, widely varied. For example, Participant 2 stated that cyberbullying issues occurred two times per year and, as a result, concluded that cyberbullying was not a serious issue at his school. In contrast, Participant 12 reported 25 or more cyberbullying issues per month, making it a cyberbullying a huge issue at his school. However, the majority the participants stated that the resolution of cyberbullying in their school buildings was a moderate concern for which they had to divert at least some of their attention. Moreover, ten participants shared that the ramifications of cyberbullying were escalating in terms of frequency of occurrence, severity in the language used, and/or fallout from cyberbullying expressions.

Importance of Reporting

All 23 participants stated that they became aware of cyberbullying incidents once they were reported by students, parents, or staff. Five participants stated that they became
aware of cyberbullying issues through monitoring social media. Two participants learned of cyberbullying incidents because they knew their students well enough to read their facial expressions and body language which prompted them to investigate why a student was upset. Knowing the student body well enough to read the context clues that inform staff that something is awry, and getting students to report negative incidents, is premised upon having personal relationships with students. For example, Participant 15, 219-222, said that in terms of reporting, “It’s all about your relationship with students and that trust level that you develop, because then that opens opportunities to have those discussions.” This is stressed in the literature. Additionally, four participants articulated that cyberbullying or cyberissues occur more often than we know because adults do not become aware of these incidents unless they are reported or until a school disruption occurs. This finding is also supported by the literature (Daniel & Greytak, 2011; Education, Boards of Education, 2012; Harassment, Intimidation, and Bullying, 2012; Kowalski et. al, 2008; Pupil Safety, 2012; U.S. Department of Education, 2010).

**Cyberbullying and Negative Cyberinteraction**

Not presented in the literature is the distinction between cyberbullying and negative cyberinteraction. However, eight of the 23 participants articulated a clear distinction between cyberbullying and negative “cyberinteraction” or “cybertalking.” Participant 5, 156-161, shared, “[t]oday everybody says everything is bullying. That’s like when you talked about the cyberbullying, it’s more cyber trash talk, because they end up both doing it. You’re a b, she’s a b, he’s a b and then they go back and forth and very
rarely is it a one-sided. Now someone may start it, but they’re usually both going back and forth.”

Similarly, Participant 1, 133-140, distinguished between cyberbullying and negative cyberinteraction when he said,

Sometimes parents may want to say it’s bullying but sometimes it’s easily two kids going back and forth…it’s not just one-sided, both are doing it so you can’t call that bullying. I call that bickering. It’s different as opposed to your kid trying to mind their own business and they’re getting bothered every day. There’s a difference that I have to be able to explain thoroughly to my parents so they understand this is not bullying, it’s back and forth.

Moreover, the participants that drew the distinction between cyberbullying and negative cyberinteraction stated that they experience the repercussions of negative cyberinteraction more often than cyberbullying. Participant 5, lines 37-46, stated

…I don’t know if it’s necessarily cyberbullying, it’s cyber-talking about each other. Some people would say it’s cyberbullying, some people wouldn’t…I don’t know that we’ve had any more than one or two incidents of actually it’s just a one-way thing; it’s usually both of them going back and forth…[t]he actual bullying where it’s just one person, harassing, pictures, I don’t think I’ve had but one issue of that…

The dialogue that the researcher had with Participant 14, 2-61, below clearly illustrates the distinction between the two and that negative cyberinteraction is a much larger issue than cyberbullying.

Q: Have you experienced cyberbullying incidents or ramifications at your school?

A: Will you provide me a definition of cyberbullying that you’re using?

Q: Sure, or you can add to it certainly. You can give me your definition, however you want to do it, but I’m happy to give you one.
A: I can give you the definition that I use.

Q: Sure. I would like to have record of that.

A: I typically describe cyberbullying as students who engage in intentional or willful acts of harassment or intimidation through the use of cyberspace which, to me, also includes text messaging, Facebook and Twitter. That’s typically how we see it play out. Typically when I’m looking at whether something is a cyberbullying case is what type of interaction led up to the actual alleged bullying or harassment taking place online. So if that is fairly consistent with your definition, then my number of incidents which I would call it pretty frequent. I think it’s probably the one area right now where schools have a very limited capacity, even though we have a requirement to act, we have a limited capacity to monitor and obtain information. However, to be more specific in terms of an answer, I would say when I limit it to the harassment and bullying, I would say maybe 10 times in a year. Let’s say that. However I will say that almost every incident that we have here that relates to violence or physical altercation of any type, verbal altercation stems from Facebook, and it’s not necessarily a cyber-bullying thing. That’s why I have to kind of draw the line. It’s not a cyberbullying thing. If we’re getting into the war of words online, it’s not always bullying, but it oftentimes results in a verbal or physical altercation at the school.

Q: Okay, so you’re making a distinction between cyberbullying and then what is some sort of interaction other than what you would consider harassment online. So what you would characterize as cyberbullying, which by the way the definition that I would use is really consistent – it would be very broad as you just stated. So the incidents of cyberbullying are about 10 times a year. What about the incidents that aren’t cyberbullying but lead to those altercations, either physical or verbal?

A: Oh, my God. Every one of them. Let’s see.

Q: Like if you could say number of incidents per week or month, or something like that.

A: I would put it at—Wow. I’ll draw a distinction for you. The number of actual physical altercations that have resulted from cyberinteraction of some sort I would put at about 25-30 a year and that’s probably low. That’s a physical altercation. And then the number of verbal altercations that result from cyber interaction, I would put closer to 40-45 a year. We spend a lot of time dealing with cyber related incidents because
kids are far more connected today than they ever have been, I think, in the history of education. And those incidents bleed over into the school, because this is the only place they see one another. So they talk trash all night long and then they get to school and this is the only place they see one another, so then it’s on. It’s either a verbal altercation or a physical altercation. So we spend a great amount of time refereeing those kinds of things.

Expanding on this perspective, Participant 14, 381-386 and 359-371, added that any policy crafted to address cyberbullying should also encompass negative cyberinteraction,

…it’s more than just the idea of bullying and there’s a bigger face than the face that they’ve put on it in terms of this young lady who committed suicide, or any child who may commit suicide. I think those acts are far less frequent than the number of occasions in which this mutually engaged in level of interaction could ultimately lead to somebody being bullied online…

Then when you talk to the state legislature, I think they’re not drawing a line necessarily the way I drew the line…harassment and bullying is different than mutually engaged in interaction, but mutually engaged in interaction is not bullying. So the law, I don’t think frankly, is going to go far enough, because I think that it was inspired by a young girl who was so harassed and so bullied that she wound up committing suicide. So really the goal or attention is to get at people who are victimizing others. It’s not really geared toward getting at students who are mutually involved in or engaging in this pattern of harassment and intimidation that’s taking place on the internet. So I think that any policy, to be effective, would need to be expanded to incorporate both types of definitions.

*Why Cyberbullying Occurs*

When participants were asked why they think cyberbullying occurs among their student body, they listed several reasons that are interrelated. Although the majority of these reasons are not mutually exclusive, the researcher lumped them into the following three categories to increase readability: (a) Digital Communication is Impersonal; (b) Digital Communication is Prolific; and (c) Misinterpretation of Digital Expressions.
Digital Communication is Impersonal

The literature suggests, and fifteen participants confirmed, that electronic communications render interactions impersonal because there is no immediate threat of face-to-face confrontation (Kowalski et. al., 2008; Presenter Davis, 2011; Willard, 2004). This perspective was shared by the 14 participants who stated that the impersonal nature of electronic communication fosters a sense of disconnect among students because they cannot see, and thus do not realize the harm they are causing. In fact, the literature cites disconnect as a key characteristic that distinguishes cyberbullying from bullying (Strom & Strom, 2005; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004). Participant 13, 112-16, stated that “[s]ocial media makes everything so impersonal. Kids have a hard time understanding what they’re doing is wrong, because it’s not a face I'm looking at. I can’t call you a name and see how you hurt...”

Twelve participants said that cyberbullying occurs because digital communication offers students a sense of anonymity, as if there are no consequences for their expressions. Participant 1, 20-21, stated, “I think it’s an anonymous way for people to say what they want to say. They think there are no repercussions for doing it.” This is also supported by the literature (Kowalski et. al., 2008; Presenter Davis, 2011; Willard, 2004).

Another cyberbullying characteristic that ten participants stated as a reason why cyberbullying occurs is disinhibition. The literature describes disinhibition as a student’s feeling of disconnect combined with the sense of anonymity that impersonal electronic communication provides (Kowalski et. al., 2008; Presenter Davis, 2011; Willard, 2004).
Disinhibition enables students who would not engage in bullying to participate in cyberbullying. It also empowers students to engage in more egregious expressions than they would face-to-face. Participant 3, 422-431, stated,

The most quiet child will get on there and run off at the mouth and it gets bigger than them. It spirals…I liken it to having a gun in your hand or losing your inhibitions and wanting to get up and dance on the table because you’ve had three drinks. You would never do it normally, but now it’s like hey, and you do it and that’s what happens with kids. They get on this and they just roll and they say gosh awful things.

Participant 7, 28-34, adds, “it’s easier to make comments from a keyboard than it is to address folks directly. Sometimes it’s easier to hide behind your computer. I would say it gives kids maybe a false sense of bravado or maybe makes them feel—it’s easier. It’s quicker. A lot of times kids will say things over the computer that they wouldn’t necessarily say to someone’s face.”

Implied in the above quote is the idea that cyberbullying expression occurs quickly and without much thought. This is echoed by the eight participant responses which stated that cyberbullying is much easier, quicker, and convenient to engage in than bullying. “It’s easy to sit at a computer without anybody there and say whatever you want to say and hit send. You’re not face-to-face, there’s no one around. It’s convenient. It’s easy” [Participant 18, 45-47]. This description of cyberbullying is also expressed in the literature (Kowalski et. al., 2008; Presenter Davis, 2011; Willard, 2004).

*Digital Communication is Prolific*

Eleven participant responses suggested that cyberbullying occurs because electronic communication is the primary means of socialization for today’s students.
Stated differently, electronic communication is an integral part of students’ social lives and culture. This perspective is also one that it is noted in the literature. Also in alignment with the literature are the responses of ten participants who stated that cyberbullying is just a new method of communication that enables students to communicate the same issues that they would in the absence of electronic devices (Lenhart et. al, 2010; Price, 2010; Rideout, et. al, 2010; Strom & Strom, 2005). For example, Participant 17, 17-18, stated “I think it’s just what’s happening in our society. More students have access to technology which frees them to communicate throughout the day on Twitter, and they’re updating Facebook and Twitter. So I think in our school, like many other schools, students have just begun to communicate and express themselves per technology more so than face-to-face.” Participant 15, 26-34, elaborated on this notion when she stated,

I think teenagers are very social. They’re very much into social networking. I would say with or without…access to social media, internet, there would still be those issues because adolescents are just trying to figure out how to have positive relationships with each other. They’re very sensitive to any type of criticism, what their peers think is most important, so it’s the peer interaction that – with or without computers – they struggle with. I think having access to Facebook, Twitter, cell phones, texting just gets the message delivered more quickly and to a lot of people.

Building on the participant perspective, that electronic communication enables students to engage in expression that would take place via other means absent technology, 13 participants stated that cyberbullying occurs because there is a generational technology gap between adults and today’s students. This gap is also noted in the literature and stems from the fact that students today are very tech savvy, have access to devices capable of electronic communication, and use these tools as their primary means of social interaction. Parents and school staff, on the other hand, may or
may not be tech savvy (Lenhart et. al, 2010; Price, 2010; Rideout, et. al, 2010; Strom & Strom, 2005). Participant 14, 319-331, depicted this phenomenon when he stated,

…I think what happened is you had a generation gap. You had my generation that came through that had absolutely no access to technology growing up...We are light years beyond that today. So you had an entire generation that came through that was essentially ignorant to all of these things. The challenge for the next generation will be that the parents who…are really coming through at a time where that technology proliferated, you’re comfortable with using it, you know about it, you’re connected with it yourself, and for you it’s going to be more challenging for your kid to get away with something that you don’t know about.

Moreover, participants shared that even adults who are tech savvy do not realize the extent to which electronic communication is interwoven into student’s lives. The literature supports this finding. Participant 17, 185-192, summarizes how this gap fosters an environment for cyberbullying when he stated,

I don’t think they [most adults] realize the extent to which students are communicating in the cyber fashion now. I think it may be because many of those who write the policies may not be so inclined to do so [communicate in the cyber fashion] themselves, I don’t know. But I definitely know that students communicate online and through Twitter and Facebook as much or more than they communicate verbally now. I don’t think some of the people who are writing the policies realize the extent to which students are communicating that way.

Participant 13, 201-208, illustrated the generational gap as it relates to the school building and district setting when he stated,

It’s kind of like what I said earlier about it being a world that a lot of the educators don’t really live in. I think the younger teachers know about Facebook and things like that, but most of the people – most of the administrators aren’t going to be young – you know the bulk of them are going to be seasoned and they’re not into it. That’s one of the reasons why I think they have such strict policies about not allowing us to access it at school, or even teaching kids how to use it appropriately.
As evidenced in the literature, nine participants responded that cyberbullying occurs because although students have access to technology capable of electronic communication, they have not been instructed about how to use it responsibly (Lenhart et. al, 2010; Price, 2010; Rideout, et. al, 2010; Strom & Strom, 2005; Willard, 2007). In addition to not being educated about responsible digital communication, eight added that cyberbullying exists because no expectations exist with regard to the appropriate manner to communicate electronically (Willard, 2007). Participant 3, 63-65, stated that “kids are part of this technology age, but they don’t have the upbringing of the technology age. They don’t have the etiquette. They don’t understand how powerful it is.” Participant 13, 208-210, reinforced this statement when he said “[t]hat’s what’s lacking. The kids don’t even know how to use those programs and no one’s teaching them. They’re learning from their friends.”

Additionally, seven participants stated that unsupervised use of electronic devices led to cyberbullying occurrences. Participant 11, 21-25, demonstrated this point when he stated that,

I think it’s a lot of unsupervised time that our students have…a lot of the transcripts that I get from cyberbullying occur very late at night. A lot of times very late on the weekend nights into the very wee hours of the morning over the weekend. So that’s – it’s just my opinion that there’s a lot of poor supervision going on.

Participant 18, 29-33, supported this perspective when he responded “I think a part of it is just a lack of training for the students as well as a lack of supervision sometimes, because it’s so easily accessible…it’s very hard to monitor.” The lack of supervision of student
technology use, as a contributing factor to cyberbullying incidents, is also referenced in the literature.

In this same vein, four participants stated that cyberbullying occurs because the cyberworld is almost entirely uninhabited by adults, a norm-setting presence, or at least that’s how students perceive it to be. The following perspective was not addressed in this manner in the literature,

Sometimes I think with social media students don’t have a good norm of what most people are doing. Their norms are off. So helping them understand most people aren’t doing this. You get on Facebook and you see this small sampling of people who are doing or posting these things. Most people aren’t doing that. So setting some norms for behavior and interacting and just relationships [Participant 15, 232-240].

To further explicate this point, Participant 13, 24-34, stated,

I really believe the kids don’t realize that adults live in their cyberworld…matter of fact, when they found out that I had a twitter account they were shocked. You could see them looking around like, ‘He has twitter?’ You could see all their eyes getting big like, ‘Wow, I wonder what he has seen on our twitter pages,’ you know?...I think that’s the biggest thing. They think it’s a safe place they can go, a safe place from adults because most of their parents aren’t on twitter. Some of them have Facebook, but a lot of them don’t...And they have those mobile phones now that are very – all of them have access to those programs, to the apps, and so they have easy access.

The fact that students have access to, and engage in, unsupervised and uninformed digital communication could be precursors to the seven participant perspectives which stated that cyberbullying occurs because students are unaware that their expressions actually constitute cyberbullying. As illustrated by Participant 22, 28-34, below, citing this combination as a contributing factor to the occurrence of cyberbullying incidents is
also mentioned in the literature (Lenhart et. al, 2010; Price, 2010; Rideout, et. al, 2010; Strom & Strom, 2005; Willard, 2007),

I don’t know that students really perceive some of the things that occur as bullying. You know, they’ll talk about each other and put each other down and, in their mind, bullying is something that’s more physical. I don’t know that they fully understand the ramifications of what they’re doing when they put things out there. I think in their view they’re just stating their opinion or stating what they like or don’t like about somebody and do not necessarily fully understand that it could be considered harassment or bullying.

Participant 14, 177-185 added,

Last year for example, we had the State Attorney General’s Office come in and do a presentation on cyberbullying and what cyberbullying actually was. Students were shocked to hear what they described and fairly well rejected what the lady told them. It was really interesting to see their reaction. They reacted in a very negative way. I believe they reacted that way because they did not see the behavior as bullying and harassment. So as far as they were concerned, it was just another adult trying to get in their business and tell them what they could or could not do.

Six participants responded the cyberbullying originates off-campus because students have idle and unsupervised time at home.

I would like to believe that it’s because during the course of the school day we have kids so locked down on a schedule and they were so engaged in their studies that they don’t have time for a lot of extra drama and extra socialization, so all that occurs outside the school day… There’s not a lot of time for them to kind of get involved in a lot of shenanigans here in the building, so maybe that’s why—they go home and they have idle time… they’re not necessarily focused on too much or they’re not doing too much. You know, they sit down at the computer and start typing and letting words fly [Participant 7, 39-47].

Three participants stated that cyberbullying occurs because uninvolved students and adults, also known as bystanders or witnesses, do not intervene or report such incidents. This too can be found in the literature (Daniel & Greytak, 2011; U.S.
Department of Education, 2010; Willard, 2002-2011). Participants stated that reporting cyberbullying occurrences is a crucial component of intervention because cyberbullying goes undetected until either reporting or manifestation in the form of a school disruption occurs. “Nine times out of ten the victim is not going to tell…” [Participant 2, 36]. “I don’t think the kids let us know about a lot of issues” [Participant 3, 90-91].

Misinterpretation of Digital Expressions

A review of the literature revealed that students can misinterpret digital expressions because they are devoid of context clues such as tone and facial expression (Kowalski, et al., 2008; Willard, 2004). Two participants shared this perspective and is evidenced in Participant 10’s, 25-33, response when he said,

I think at this developmental stage children don’t understand all of the different dimensions of communication. The bulk of our communication is done non-verbally and they don’t understand that. So I think for kids maybe who are more literal, you know, we text the word fine and it could mean Fine! or it could mean fine and we don’t understand the differences in tone and body language, and when it’s appropriate or not appropriate to use...

4.5.1 Cyberbullying Effects for the School Learning Environment

When principals were asked how cyberbullying effects the school learning environment, three subthemes emerged: (a) Time of Task; (b) Leads to Other School Disruptions; and (c) Long-Lasting Harms. Each of these subthemes is discussed in detail below.
Time off Task

The literature states that cyberbullying has the potential to disrupt the learning of not only the individuals directly involved, but also the learning environment of a school as a whole (U.S. Department of Education, 2010; Willard, 2007). This description of cyberbullying was confirmed by all 23 participants when they stated that the manifestations of cyberbullying and/or negative cyberinteraction in the school setting reduced the amount of time spent on teaching and learning, “…we have to take time out to investigate situations that might occur, so when we do that students are pulled from class and they’re missing out on class time” [Participant 8, lines 32-34].

Similarly, eight participants stated that cyberbullying involves other students which only adds to school disruptions. “The other kids start talking about it and then they go back and forth with so and so said they want to fight you, and so and so said they want to fight you, so it creates an undercurrent of kids wanting to fight or just the general feeling of kids feeling like they’ve been picked on” [Participant 5, 31-32]. Four participants explicitly stated that cyberbullying disrupts school culture (U.S. Department of Education, 2010; Willard, 2007).

Leads to Other School Disruptions

All 23 participants reported that cyberbullying and negative cyberinteraction leads to other school issues or disruptions. For example, Participant 14, 14-33 stated,

… I will say that almost every incident that we have here that relates to violence or physical altercations of any type and verbal altercations stem from Facebook, and it’s not necessarily a cyberbullying thing. That’s why I have to kind of draw the line…If we’re getting into the war of words
online, it’s not always bullying, but it oftentimes results in a verbal or physical altercation at the school.

The literature supports this perspective by stating that cyberbullying can escalate to school violence and other disruptions when left unchecked (Safe School Initiative Study, 2002; U.S. Department of Education, 2010).

**Long-Lasting Harms**

A review of the literature stated that cyberbullying can cause several lasting harms for students including anti-social behaviors, poor school performance, and depression (Agatston, 2001; Agatston, 2010; Mason, 2008; Tokunaga, 2010). The findings of this study indicate that seven participants share the perspective that cyberbullying has lasting harms for students that include being uncomfortable, fearful, distracted, depressed, not wanting to attend school or participate in school activities, and emotional harm. Participant 13, 80-90 stated that cyberbullying,

…takes away the whole safety element…here’s a good example. I had a student take a picture of a girl and say, ‘This ho is pregnant.’ Or the boys at school ran a train on her and posted on twitter. Well, she happens to have 300 or 400 followers on twitter, so you have 300 or 400 people who might have read that tweet and now you have everybody looking at you and possibly talking about you or you think they’re talking about what they saw or whether they’re showing the picture that the girl put up of you. So that’s how it becomes disruptive. I think it really messes with people emotionally more than anything.”

This quote also illustrates a point in the literature about how cyberbullying can be more damaging that traditional bullying because the number of witnesses to the negative expression can be infinite and perpetrators have unlimited access to the targeted individual (Kowalski, 2008; Strom & Strom, 2005, When Teens Turn). Participant 10,
325-245, elaborates on how much more harmful cyberbullying can be than bullying when she reported that,

… I think cyberbullying is more damaging than some of the face-to-face, because there’s no accountability. So when I’m at home in my bedroom at night, I feel unsafe there. I have that unsettling feeling when I’m in the safest place in my world. When you get a dirty look down the hallway or someone calls you a name in the hallway, you’re not in the core of your onion, so to speak. You’re out. But when it happens at home in your safe place, I think that unsettling feeling is even more damaging. I wish they knew that. And we couldn’t possibly, because policymakers are – you know, we didn’t grow up in the information age, most of us, so I think that we just don’t have any point of commonality in that way. I think that’s the biggest thing.

Four participants also stated that they articulate to students, and the parents of the students involved in cyberbullying and/or negative cyberinteraction, that everything they post on the internet is permanent and can have long-lasting and negative effects on their reputations. “…‘Even though you can go and delete this, it’s there forever. So when you go to college or apply for a job, people will pull things. They will look at things and is this really what you want to be associated with you and your name?’ I said ‘we don’t know what the future holds, but we do know that this happens, that they do pull stuff on people depending on your job’” [Participant 9, 283-289]. This reflected in the literature.

4.5.2 Principal Perspectives About Policy Components and Practices Effective and Ineffective for Reducing Cyberbullying

When the 23 participants were asked what they have found to be effective in addressing cyberbullying and/or reducing its negative impact on student learning in their school building their collective responses generated several policy components and practices. To increase readability, the researcher categorized participant responses into
five main categories. In addition, each category has been further divided into subthemes, where applicable, as follows:

(1) **Theme 1-Effective Policy Components and Practices**, subthemes include: (a) Educate Stakeholders; (b) Parental Involvement; (c) Educate Students About Social Development; (d) Counseling and Mediation; (e) Conference with Involved Parties; (f) Investigate Every Cyberbullying Report; (g) Implement Reporting Procedures; (h) Involve Police; (i) Teach Responsible Digital Communication; (j) Allow Students to Start Anew; and (k) All School Anti-Cyberbullying Plan;

(2) **Theme 2-Ineffective Policy Components and Practices**, subthemes include: (a) Barring Student Technology Use; (b) Lack of Education; (c) Ignoring/Failing to Investigate Reports; (d) Barring Staff Access; (e) Unclear Boundaries of Authority and Accountability; (f) Lack of Consequences; and (g) Underreporting;

(3) **Theme 3- Policy Components and Practices to be Included in Anti-Cyberbullying Policies**, subthemes include: (a) Stakeholder Education; (b) Jurisdictional Boundaries; (c) Public Service Announcements; (d) Adults Inhabit Cyberspace; (e) Protocol and Consequences; (f) Resources; (g) Curricula; (h) Define Cyberbullying and Negative Cyberinteraction; (i) Case-by-Case Analysis; and (j) Student Safety;

(4) **Theme 4- Policy Components and Practices to be Excluded in Anti-Cyberbullying Policies**, subthemes include: (a) Barring Student Technology Use; and (b) Barring Staff Access; and

(5) **Theme 5- Anti-Cyberbullying Policies Unhelpful**

This section articulates principal perspectives about what they have found to be effective and ineffective policy components and practices for reducing cyberbullying in absence of official and specific policy on the subject.

**Theme 1-Effective Policy Components and Practices**

*Educate Stakeholders*

The review of literature stressed the importance of educating all stakeholders, parents/guardians, students, staff, and the community about: (a) responsible digital
communication/use; (b) what cyberbullying is, what it looks like, and the harms that it causes; (c) how to mitigate or not engage in cyberbullying incidents; (d) consequences for engaging in cyberbullying; and (e) sets the expectation that cyberbullying is unacceptable, in order to reduce the negative impact of cyberbullying on student learning in the school setting (Harassment, Intimidation, and Bullying, 2012; Kowalski et. al, 2008; U.S. Department of Education, 1998; Willard, 2007). Nineteen of 23 participants said that educating and keeping stakeholders informed is effective for reducing cyberbullying occurrences and/or its negative effects on student learning. “So, just once again, just that having education about it and talking with your kids, and knowing your student body, and educating your staff and your parents, and just keeping everyone in the loop about what you are doing” [Participant 1, 417-421].

It is also important to note that, collectively, the 19 participants who stated that educating stakeholders is effective for reducing the negative impact of cyberbullying on student learning, cite several aspects of education as necessary. The literature suggests that establishing, educating about, and enforcing consequences for those engaging in cyberbullying is a key component of combating it in the school setting (Harassment, Intimidation, and Bullying, 2012; Kowalski et. al, 2008; U.S. Department of Education, 1998; Willard, 2007). The responses of sixteen participants supported this point.

The literature also speaks to the importance of clearly defining cyberbullying and providing students with examples to impart understanding of when they are engaging in such expression (Harassment, Intimidation, and Bullying, 2012; Kowalski et. al, 2008; U.S. Department of Education, 1998). Fifteen participant responses iterated the
importance making sure that all stakeholders are aware of what cyberbullying is and what is not. Participant 14, 277-292, stated that in terms of crafting a state- or district-level anti-cyberbullying policy,

I think that the overall process itself is going to give us a terminology to use with kids and really draw a line between essentially name calling in person versus name calling over the internet. I don’t want to seem like I’m reducing it to trivial types of definitions, but I think that students don’t even think that when they’re sitting on their Facebook account talking about this kid or that kid, I don’t think that they associate that with bullying or harassment. I really don’t. So I think that a policy will provide greater ability to educate and ultimately a greater ability to intervene on behalf of students. I think it’s going to reduce some incidents. It may not reduce them all. It’s not going to eliminate it, but I think it’s going to reduce some. I think it’s going to bring about a better awareness and maybe curtail some behavior.

Likewise, Participant 15, 246-250 stated,

I definitely think just having concrete examples of this is and this isn’t, you know people that are mad at each other, name calling, is this is cyber-bullying? I think you need to have concrete examples of what it looks like on different social media and what it isn’t. I think you need to clearly define the school’s role in that.

A review of the literature also reveals that it is important for staff to have professional development about what cyberbullying is, how it occurs, how to spot it, and how to intervene (Harassment, Intimidation, Bullying, 2012; Kowalski et. al, 2008; U.S. Department of Education, 1998; Willard, 2007). Fourteen participants mentioned the importance of professional development in decreasing cyberbullying occurrences and their negative impact on student learning. Two participants added that staff should stay abreast of technology and how students are using it in an effort to curtail negative communications.
Still on the subject of educating all stakeholders as an effective practice to reduce cyberbullying occurrences and/or its negative effects on student learning, 12 participants stated that it is important to share information about the permanency of digital communications and how they can negatively effect college recruitment college and career attainment. The importance of this tactic is evident in the literature. However, the literature takes it a step further by stating that students and other stakeholders should be informed about the harms of cyberbullying and the possible legal ramifications that could result from engaging in this sort of expression (Willard, 2007).

*Parental Involvement*

In addition to educating parents about cyberbullying, its consequences, and the ensuing policies and procedures to address it, 19 participants, as well as the literature, stated that an effective practice in combating cyberbullying is parental involvement (Smith et. al., 2008; U.S. Department of Education, 1998). In describing parental involvement, participants stated that parents need to be educated about: (a) the modes and devices with which cyberbullying takes place; (b) how to monitor their student’s digital communications; (c) how to intervene effectively; (d) how to enforce consequences; and (e) involving them in the resolution of cyberbullying incidents that arise. Participant 15, 255-278, stated,

I wish that parents could really be trained, have a parent training component so they really understood, and that we…updated it frequently. There are different things that pop up…[s]o you have to stay current and parents have to understand. I approach it as a parent…and a principal because with my own kids I monitor not just their Facebook, their friends, [and] Twitter, I [also] look at what their friends are putting out on Twitter and I found out some really not good things. But if parents don’t
understand how to do that, they’re missing a whole piece of parenting. So there has to be the parent component.

Participant 3, 106-123, added to the importance of the parental involvement/education piece when she stated,

There are means to educate and it starts at home…when I have parent workshops, I try to make sure that parents know the latest jargon, they know the texting language; because I say you’re standing there thinking you’re monitoring your child and I’m saying, ‘Have you ever seen this? When you come in you’ve seen these words, these little symbols and three or four letters together?’ ‘Yeah.’ ‘Well, let me tell you what they’re saying about you to their friends.’ I try to periodically put together a piece where we help parents understand. Their kids are very savvy, but it’s still our job to make sure we monitor them. You can still say, ‘I know that’s your friend, but I don’t feel good when that person is around and I’m really asking you to limit—they don’t say that anymore. They say, ‘Well, those are his friends and I can’t choose.’ ‘Yeah, you can. That’s your job.’

If that frontal lobe is not going to mature until between the ages of 28 and 30 and it’s the decision making part of the brain and it doesn’t mature until then, oh, yeah, you can still make a lot of decisions for your kids and, yeah, when they go to college, you want to know why they made that dumb decision, the frontal lobe is still immature. So it’s just knowing all those things and taking an active role.

_Educate Students About Social Development_

As suggested by the literature review of this study, 15 participants stated that cyberbullying occurs because students lack education about the habits and morals of civility and what it means to have respectful discourse (Lleras, 2009; Sunderman et. al., 2004). Many participants stated the their schools have implemented various forms of programming such as mentoring, small cohort models, bringing in outside speakers, and focused on building positive peer-to-peer and student-to-staff relationships. This is done in an effort to encourage amenable conflict resolution and respectful discourse.

Participant 14, 394-409, richly described the need for this to happen when he shared,
It’s that whole realm of social development that is missing in our students largely today, respect, common decency, respectful discourse. I think it stems a lot from the things that they’re seeing and hearing both in the media, on the internet, on music videos, and in their own community. And I think what happens is it fosters a level of disrespect or a level of – lack of care; not even disrespect as much as it is disregard. You know, I don’t even respect you enough to regard you as a meaningful person and I think the challenge is how do we address that as a society, because our kids are becoming less and less, in general—and these are generalities because there are exceptions to everything—they’re becoming less and less capable of conducting themselves in social situations. What happens is you have no social skills, I have no social skills and we wind up two people without social skills fighting because we don’t know how – we desire and require more respect than we’re ever willing to give to anybody else.

Additionally, the literature states that students must also explicitly receive these lessons in the context of digital communication.

_Counseling and Mediation_

Seventeen participant responses indicated that counseling and mediation, either individually or in small group settings, has been effective for reducing cyberbullying in their schools. “[F]or bullying type situations we have a program—mediate the students and a lot of times they’re with a counselor when there’s this typical bully type situation we have at school” [Participant 19, 89-90]. These methods are also described in the literature.

_Conference with Involved Parties_

Thirteen participants stated that they have found conferencing with all parties involved, and their parents, effective in reducing cyberbullying and/or its negative effect on student learning. Participant 6, 43-49, stated,

Most of the time we’re able to resolve things between the parties involved, so we sit folks down and we essentially – I think the hip-hop term for that
is probably most useful in the sense that we squash essentially all of the issues. Sometimes with cyberbullying especially, parents become involved. So in those cases we bring in parents and have them sit down with each other and the kids and they also squash. In general that’s the route that we’ve chosen.

The literature agrees with this approach to addressing cyberbullying incidents whenever all parties are comfortable facing one another. Participant responses also indicate that they do not force targeted students to have a face-to-face meetings if they are uncomfortable with such a scenario.

**Investigate Every Cyberbullying Report**

A review of the literature suggests that when combating cyberbullying, it is vital to promptly investigate all reports of such incidents (Harassment, Intimidation, and Bullying, 2012; Kowalski et. al., 2008). Eleven participants stated that they have found investigating all reports of cyberbullying to be effective in reducing cyberbullying occurrences and or their negative effect on student learning. Participants responded that the reporting of incidents is how they became aware of cyberbullying other than actual school disruptions. Participant 1, 409-431, sums up the importance of encouraging reporting, having reporting procedures in place, and investigating all reports of cyberbullying when he stated,

At this school kids are helping me. It’s not just adults, it’s not just parents, it’s kids. There’s been situations where even parents have called, ‘Hey, you didn’t know about this. Well, my kid came home telling me this today.’ I like that. I always tell them, ‘If you don’t feel comfortable telling me, then your parents should know about it. There shouldn’t be a situation where there’s fight and then you tell me, ‘Oh, he’s been bullying me for three weeks.’ And no one knows about it? So I even tell our kids, ‘Don’t use that as a scapegoat to fight, because it’s not going to hold up…’ say if a kid wants to make a complaint, that kid writes me a statement. So that
kid doesn’t even have to be in here if they don’t want to when I address their accuser. So you write me a written statement. I’ll give you a copy of it to make sure you told me. I don’t want them to be, ‘Oh, no, they didn’t tell me that.’ No, I want kids to know, ‘I feel comfortable going to him or her because I know they’re going to handle it.’ And that’s that trust thing, too, where kids here -- they trust us to, ‘No, they’re going to take care of it for me.’ I tell them, ‘Your focus should be education every day, not worried about somebody bothering you or throwing paper at you. It needs to be I’m strictly focusing on this class, that class, this class.’

The above quote also speaks to a point discussed in the literature that bystanders, or those who witness or suspect that cyberbullying is occurring, can play a large role in combating cyberbullying by reporting these incidents once they become aware of their occurrence (Kowalski et. al, 2008). Participant 1’s quote above also demonstrates that another important piece in encouraging reporting is having all adults in the building be visible and accessible. Five participants mentioned this practice in their responses.

Implement Reporting Procedures

The literature states that in combating cyberbullying, it is important to have reporting procedures for all stakeholders (Harassment, Intimidation, and Bullying, 2012; Kowalski et. al., 2008). The findings of this study indicate that although participants believe that reporting instances of cyberbullying and negative cyberinteractions are a key component of combating their occurrence, there was not a specific focus on all components of the reporting procedures as outlined in Chapter 2 which included: (a) protecting individuals who report such incidents from harassment and intimidation; (b) notifying all stakeholders of the procedures and timelines for investigation and resolution; (c) requiring documentation of the incident; (d) disciplining those who make false reports; (e) establishing anonymous reporting; and (f) assigning a point person to
manage the all-school anti-cyberbullying plan (Harassment, Intimidation, and Bullying, 2012; Kowalski et. al., 2008).

The researcher did not ask about, nor did any of the participants mention, any of the above mentioned reporting procedures except documentation of cyberbullying incidents and anonymous reporting. Two participants stated that in true instances of cyberbullying, they document from the complaint to the resolution. On this subject, however, Participant 9, 343-349, stated that,

…our bullying form that we fill out is really cumbersome. It’s really long and not user friendly. I’d like to see it be something that’s online and can be submitted that way, but also can be specific about who we’re talking about. Like they’re telling us you can’t write the kid’s name down. Well, if I ever have to pull it out to use in a court case and it says Student 1, who’s going to believe that I truly knew who Student 1 was.

**Involve Police**

As mentioned in the literature, three participants stated that cyberbullying can be too big for them to handle and that in such cases, they involve the police (Kowalski et. al, 2008). Participant 10, 63-66, explained this stance in the following quote,

[w]e have gone so far as to involve the Columbus Police Department and encouraged parents to press charges when the cyberbullying is continual and the attempts at the school to stop it, the attempts of the parents to stop it, have not worked.

**Teach Responsible Digital Communication**

The literature states that one way to proactively combat cyberbullying is taking class time to teach students responsible digital communication (Kowalski et. al, 2008; U.S. Department of Education, 1998; Willard, 2007). Teaching students this skill reduces
the likelihood that cyberbullying will occur and removes students’ excuse that they do not realize that their digital communications constitute cyberbullying. Moreover, it is the researcher’s stance that students need to know how to effectively communicate through digital devices in order to be marketable in the 21st Century economy (Carnevale et. al., 2010). Participant 15, 183-197, actually described how she was independently taking on this responsibility.

We are in the process of teaching students to use electronic and social media responsibly. We got permission – I had to work through legal – to have a designated area during free time where students can use their electronics and phones. Whether you have it or not, students are going to use their electronics at school. You can either teach that responsibly or you can just keep putting people out of school for it. So we have a designated area during free time where if I want to listen to my MP3 player, or play my DS, or use my phone, or whatever I want to do, I have to do it within the boundaries of that designated space. So then that leads you to other issues. You have to talk about the responsibility that goes with that. Yesterday would be a circumstance where that You-tube video of the weekend fight, people were looking at it. Now they’re going to be looking at it whether I have our zone set up or not, but the thing about having the zone is it’s more easily identified that they’re doing things.

Allow Students to Start Anew

Presenter Davis’ (2011) work states that graduated and certain disciplinary measures should be imposed for students who engage in undesirable behavior, including cyberbullying. Presenter Davis (2011) stated that students need a chance to learn and rectify their wrongdoing in order to effectively modify unwanted behavior. The findings of this study confirmed this idea when Participant 3, 263-269, described the conversation that she has with students when they are being suspended for cyberbullying, when she said,
I’m going to send your work home with you and we’re going to start over when you come back. That’s another thing, too, to keep a sense that it’s okay to make a mistake and start over. You have to give kids that okay too. You’re not going to be labeled for the rest of your life because you make a mistake. You’ve got to make the atmosphere very conducive to that and that makes it conducive to learn, because it’s all about that can you walk in here and learn.

*All School Anti-Cyberbullying Plan*

The review of literature states that an important starting point for combating cyberbullying in the school setting is the establishment of an all-school anti-cyberbullying plan that is constructed around data gathered from an all-school assessment (Kowalski et. al, 2008; Willard, 2002-2011; U.S. Department of Education, 1998). As explained in Chapter 2, the all-school assessment is an anonymous questionnaire that is administered to all stakeholders to assess how often and what types of cyberbullying incidents—described as the undesired communications/behaviors that the school is attempting to decrease—occur, the level of satisfaction with the resolution, the climate and culture of the school overall, and solicits suggestions about how to improve each of these aspects. This data is then analyzed and taken to a committee comprised of stakeholders to craft and all-school plan. Once the plan is established, the assessment is regularly administered and analyzed to check on the effectiveness of the prevention and intervention strategies outlined by the plan. Corresponding modifications are then made as necessary.

The findings of this study indicate that none of the 23 participants are approaching reducing the number of cyberbullying and negative cyberinteractions, or their negative impact on the learning environment, in this manner.
Theme 2-Ineffective Policy Components and Practices

Barring Student Technology Use

The literature indicated, and nine of the 23 participants stated, that banning student use of technology either as a practice or as a discipline without education is ineffective at reducing the negative effects of cyberbullying on the learning environment (Bell, 2010). Participants stated that one reason for this is that students know proxies, and have access to other electronic devices, that enable them to circumvent blocked access. “Students, however, they use proxies and all that kind of stuff to work around firewalls, so it’s very challenging to keep them off of it. And then they’ve got their phones and their phones post to Facebook very quickly and easily” [Participant 14, 220-227]. “I think parents or educators who try to restrict access to things is a lot of effort – I mean it’s just ridiculous and it doesn’t actually work. You know, you can make things harder, but aside from making them financially impossible, I don’t think there’s any kind of access restriction that makes any sense” [Participant 6, 259-263]. “I don’t thinking taking cell phones does anything. I don’t think any of those things—Part of it is going to happen, but I think the real piece is in educating kids about what’s appropriate. I think taking the phones is not really – cause they’re just going to get another phone, or they’re going to use their friend’s phone, or they’re just going to write a note old-fashioned style” [Participant 9, 296-301].

Moreover, and the literature supports this stance, the findings of this study indicate that participants believe that students need to be instructed about how to
communicate effectively with digital devices in order to be successful in a 21st Century economy.

One caveat to the general theme that parental restriction of access to the use of electronic devices is ineffective at reducing cyberbullying, and/or its negative effect on the learning environment, is that it could work for younger students. Participant 7, 223-243, reported,

I think what I’ve found that works best is when parents take the pages all the way down, or say, ‘You absolutely cannot be on the internet unless it’s for school work and I’ll be sitting right beside you and we’ll be doing the social studies together.’ That can happen at this age level with 6th, 7th and 8th grade. I don’t know if that’s entirely possible once you start getting into high school. But when you’ve got an 11-year-old 6th grader, I’ve seen parents shut it all the way down and then the problem immediately goes away, because maybe in 6th grade they don’t have cell phones. You know, when you’re 11, you’re not necessarily that completely free to do whatever you want whenever you want.

*Lack of Stakeholder Education*

Seven of the 23 participants stated that a lack of stakeholder education is ineffective at reducing the negative effects of cyberbullying on student learning. “I think what’s ineffective is the lack of education, that we’re not doing anything with kids” [Participant 3, 552-553]. “So what’s ineffective is just a lack of education for the students about the harmful—you know, everything has positives and negatives, internet included. So I think that there’s a lack of specific teaching about the negative impact of the internet, so the kids explore and do things without really thinking a lot about it” [Participant 18, 216-220].

One participant stated that, for some school staff, the cyber world is one where,
A lot of the educators don’t really live in. I think the younger teachers know about Facebook and things like that, but most of the people – most of the administrators aren’t going to be young – you know the bulk of them are going to be seasoned and they’re not into it. That’s one of the reasons why I think they have such strict policies about not allowing us to access it at school, or even teaching kids how to use it appropriately. That’s what’s lacking [Participant 13, 201-210].

Another participant stated that it is ineffective to not stay abreast of technological advances and how student access can result in negative interactions when this does not occur, “[n]ot wanting to learn about what these tools are and getting out there as adults” [Participant 13, 260-263].

Similarly, participants stated that parents/guardians need to be educated about technological devices and how they are used to communicate, what appropriate and inappropriate use/communication looks like, how to monitor their child’s use, how to respond, and know what their level of accountability is should their child engage in cyberbullying.

Well, I wish that parents could really be trained, have a parent training component so they really understood, and that we did that, updated it frequently. There are different things that pop up...[s]o you have to stay current and parents have to understand. I approach it as parent connecting with principal because with my own kids I monitor not just their Facebook, their friends, Twitter, I look at what their friends are putting out on Twitter and I found out some really not good things. But if parents don’t understand how to do that, they’re missing a whole piece of parenting. So there has to be the parent component [Participant 15, 255-278].

Each of the perspectives shared in this subsection are supported by the literature.

*Ignoring/Failing to Investigate Reports*

Seven of the 23 participants stated that ignoring or failing to investigate reports of cyberbullying or negative cyberinteraction was the practice that was the most ineffective
at reducing the negative impact of these occurrences on student learning. “If you’re not going to respond, then you’ve got a lot of students who are going, ‘Hey, we can say and do anything.’ So one of the worst things you can do is not respond when you’ve been made aware that something has occurred, that things are happening” [Participant 17, 245-248].

_Barring Staff Access_

Six of the 23 participants stated that blocking staff access to social media impedes them from intervening in cyberbullying/negative cyberinteraction incidents because they cannot access these sites from school. Although some of the participants stated they were granted limited access to social media during the school day, such access was only given to one or two staff members at most.

Along these lines, another participant stated that,

[t]here has to be access at the building level to be able to get on and look. I have to be able to bring somebody in here and say, ‘Get on your Facebook account,’ with other witnesses so it’s just not me looking at stuff on their Facebook, whether its safety and security, whatever that level of security is, so that kids’ safety isn’t compromised, because I think that’s important, that kids’ safety and privacy are not compromised in being able to investigate things. But it doesn’t help me to not have any access at all. At least if they can’t – and I know they can’t just open up access district-wide, but give some administrative access to Twitter or Facebook, those things where we might need to get some evidence [Participant 15, 278-289].

To further illustrate the point, another participant stated,

I have Facebook access at my computer station because of an elaborate set of permission that I had to go through to get it accessible. However in the building as a whole, there is not. There are probably only two of us, myself and the school resource officer, who have that permission [Participant 14, 220-224].
Other participants rely on their own devices, such as smart phones or iPads, depend on parents or students to bring in hard copies of the cyber expressions, or are unable to conduct thorough investigations as a result of this restriction. This theme is was not addressed in the literature.

**Unclear Boundaries of Authority and Accountability**

Present in the literature, and reported by four of 23 participants, an ineffective policy or practice for reducing cyberbullying and/or its negative effects on student learning is the lack of boundaries between school and home accountability (Daniel & Greytak, 2011; Kowalski et. al., 2008; Willard 2002-2011). This theme is present in the literature. To illustrate this point, one participant stated that what’s ineffective is “some parents’ lack of feeling responsible/not holding parents accountable” [Participant 2, 243].

…I don’t think it’s defined really whose responsibility it is and that they’re not – I think there’s a whole lot of finger pointing whose responsibility it needs to be and whether we agree – I think we need to come together…for the safety of children. I think that there’s just a whole lot of unchartered waters that people are afraid to cross, that they’re afraid to enter into and hold everyone accountable instead of saying, you know, ‘This is the school’s responsibility.’ Unfortunately it does…kind of manifests itself at school. It’s easy to sit at home in front of a computer typing threats or stuff and getting people involved but, when the reality comes, that people need to start taking action. So it does happen here, or it happens at the bowling alley, or it happens at the mall. It happens at places when you are actually faced with the situation of words, you know, you've got to save face, you’ve got to stand up and defend yourself, defend your honor or whatever it might be. So oftentimes it is the school, it’s the school bus. So I think it’s unchartered, but I think we need to charter it. [Participant 2, 155-171]

**Lack of Consequences**

The lack of establishing, educating about, and consistent enforcement of consequences is regarded in the literature as an ineffective tactic to reduce cyberbullying
occurrences and/or its negative effect on the learning environment (Presenter Davis, 2011). Three of the 23 participants confirmed the ineffectiveness of this practice. This sentiment also captures four participant statements about lecturing. “Anything that’s just remotely kind aligned to encouraging kids to not engage in the behavior. So for a kid to come in here and for me to say, ‘You know, if you could just stay off the internet, just ignore it, don’t get online, don’t—that is not effective at all.” [Participant 7, 224-227].

Underreporting

The literature reported, as did two of the 23 participants, that underreporting is a practice that is ineffective at reducing cyberbullying or its negative effects on student learning (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). For example, Participant 22, 194-195, stated that because of blocked staff access in the school setting, “…[u]nless the students print it off and bring it to us, I have no way of checking and seeing what the conversations are.” However, as stated above, many participants responded that they only became aware of cyberbullying incidents via reports from parents, students, and staff. Thus, it could be inferred that more participants would agree that reporting all incidents of cyberbullying is key to reducing its negative impact on the learning environment.

Theme 3- Policy Components and Practices to be Included in Anti-Cyberbullying Policies

Twenty-one of the 23 participants stated that a district or state level policy would be helpful only if it included one or more of the following policy components or practices.
Stakeholder Education

Participants believe that stakeholder education about cyberbullying and negative cyberinteractions should be included. By stakeholders, the participants stated that it is important to educate students, staff, parents, and the community at large. In terms of education, participants stated that stakeholders should be informed about what responsible digital communication is, about what cyberbullying and negative cyberinteractions are and what they look like, the harms they cause, how to spot and monitor them, how to effectively intervene, and encourage reporting by bystanders as well as those involved. Participants stated that sort of awareness would make students more cognizant of their actions, would deter such occurrences, and empower individuals to intervene effectively and/or report when these issues arise.

Jurisdictional Boundaries

Fourteen participants stated that a state- or district-level anti-cyberbullying policy would be helpful if it: (a) established clear jurisdictional boundaries between home and school; and (b) delineated staff and parents accountability with regard to cyberbullying occurrences. Participant 2, 177-184, said that an anti-cyberbullying policy would be helpful if it defined “things within the school—when it becomes our responsibility. The policy would need to do the same for parents and guardians.” Similarly, Participant 4, 485-490, added, a policy or stance is always great, because that means that in every high school and in every other building in the district we’re doing the same thing...because right now we're hitting and missing. We’re just trying to make moral decisions and trying to do the right thing.
Public Service Announcements

When asked, six participants stated that campaigns, particularly in the form of public service announcements, would be effective at reducing cyberbullying and/or its negative effects on student learning. For example, Participant 3, 613-621, stated,

I think that one of the things they could do is just make sure that they heavily populate advertisements on television in the whole United States about cyber-bullying. Have a good student centered, not advertisements that some adult thinking person put together, but have students help put together advertisements that would make sure that they understood the affect that it has and why it’s important that they not partake in it and that there are other alternatives to having fun, or there’s other alternatives of conflict resolution than to get on there and downgrade someone like that.

Likewise, Participant 14, 371-377, said,

Then, finally, I think that we have programs that are drug awareness and alcohol awareness programs and maybe the next generation of similar kinds of programs need to be these programs that are developed around the idea of cyberbullying, cyber harassment, cyber interaction and the consequences of those types of interactions and that we can assign students to attend. In fact that’s really good. I might have to do that myself. I’m glad we had this talk.

Adults Inhabit the Cyberspace

Five participants stated that it is or would be effective for adults to have a positive presence in the cyberworld because students do not think that adults inhabit that space.

Participant 6, 274-253, stated,

…really the teachers inhabiting that space in a professional and academic way, so if all of a sudden Facebook becomes for you a place where you’re actually checking for your homework and stuff as well as checking your friends pages to see the gossip, then I think that becomes a little bit more difficult for you to dominate that space in a negative way.
Participant 13, 288-290, supported this perspective when he said, “I think when kids know that you can see what they’re doing, even though you’re not out there looking, they are less inclined to do stuff that they shouldn’t be.”

Along these lines, six participants stated that they have found monitoring social media sites, and informing the students that they are doing so, as a practice that is effective in reducing cyberbullying. Participant 6, 46-53, said,

…my security officer actually has access to Facebook here at school and has created a fake account. So he’s been able to friend many students. They accept whoever they want as friends, so he can let me know what’s going on and we call in the kids when we see something, so that’s helped a lot. Because if you get on someone that everybody wants to friend, then you can see just about everything that they’re talking about.

In contrast, some participants cautioned that monitoring social media is a slippery slope that could lead to invasion of student privacy which is something that they do not want to be involved with.

Protocol and Consequences

Four participant responses indicated that an anti-cyberbullying policy would be helpful if it established clear protocol and consequences. For example, Participant 8, 142-146 and 149-150, reported,

…I guess if someone engages in cyberbullying that they can receive disciplinary action and there are steps to it, it probably would be effective, cause it might scare some students to make sure they’re not saying things that are inappropriate, but for others it might not really have an affect... Just like bullying in general. I mean you can give consequences and so forth and some students still might do it.
Resources

Four participants said that an anti-cyberbullying policy would be helpful if it provided “some staff to deal with this. If my estimation is correct and it’s veracious as I think it is, I’d be investigating bullying all day long and [it] wouldn’t allow me to fulfill my role as the instructional leader of the building” [Participant 12, 188-190].

Curricula

Three participants stated that an anti-cyberbullying policy would be helpful if it provided curricula to proactively teach students about responsible digital communication. Participant 20, 31-138, reported that such a policy could be helpful depending,

…on the language of that legislation, you know, identifying that there is a problem is maybe the initial step, but the problem comes in accessing appropriate resources and the time, the background that you really have to have to do an effective job of educating adolescents – or kids at any developmental age. I mean I think there’s one kind of education plan that should be in effect for even very young children, something different for your mid-elementary and then teenagers and high school kids need to have a really much more involved education about the dangers.

Participant 13, 216-229, echoed this perspective when she stated that if the policy were written as others have been in the past, “if there’s no curriculum for us to use to teach kids the appropriate uses of those programs, then you’re just going to have another set of rules.”

Define Cyberbullying and Negative Cyberinteraction

Two participants stated that defining and providing examples of the negative behavior that the policy seeks to deter is key to reducing the occurrence and/or the effects of cyberbullying and negative cyberinteraction on student learning. Additionally,
participants stated that anti-cyberbullying policy should include negative cyberinteraction because it is just as, if not more, disruptive as cyberbullying because it actually occurs more often and therefore leads to a greater frequency of school disruptions.

Case-by-Case Analysis

Two participants said that a specific anti-cyberbullying policy would be helpful depending on,

how the policy was written. I would say if it didn’t handcuff us in regards to what – everything’s situational when it comes down to it. So the authority to address, supported by the state, I guess would probably would help us as long as it wasn’t such a restrictive law that prevented us from doing anything else.

Given the limited cyberbullying research from the principal perspective, this was not mentioned in the literature.

Student Safety

Two participants stated that an anti-cyberbullying policy would be helpful if it kept students safe and was broad enough to encompass any kind of threat regardless of the location of its origin. Because there are few studies about cyberbullying from the principal perspective, the literature did not address this aspect.

Theme 4- Policy Components and Practices to be Excluded in Anti-Cyberbullying Policies

Shifting gears to what should be excluded from anti-cyberbullying policy at the state- or district- level, participants identified two district-level policies that were ineffective at reducing cyberbullying and/or its negative impact on student learning. The first was barring student technology use as a practice or sole disciplinary measure. Nine
participants stated that simply barring the use of or access to technology is not effective at reducing cyberbullying or its negative impact on student learning. Participants stated that students know proxies to get around the fire walls that block access to social media sites on school computers. Students are also very tech savvy and found or borrowed other devices to interact with peers via digital communication. Secondly, barring technology use did not help educate students about how to engage in effective and responsible digital communication—a perquisite to being marketable in a 21st Century global economy.

However, one participant did state that banning access to social media was effective for younger students, such as those in elementary through middle school because parents typically control more aspects of students’ lives at that point.

The second district level policy that the participants found to be ineffective at reducing cyberbullying, negative cyberinteraction, and/or their disruption to student learning was barring staff access to social media in the school setting. Six participants stated that they could not effectively monitor or investigate instances of cyberbullying and negative cyberinteraction because their access to social media sites in the school setting was also restricted. Even the few participants who reported that they received special permission from central administration to have access at their school, stated that their ability to monitor and investigate was impeded by the fact that only one administrator had access to the sites. This was not addressed in the literature.

**Theme 5- Anti-Cyberbullying Policies Unhelpful**

Two participants stated that state- and district-level anti-cyberbullying policies were unnecessary because they were already addressing cyberbullying and negative
cyberinteractions incidents effectively pursuant the district under study’s student code of conduct and anti-harassment policies. Participant 1 stated that a state- or district-level anti-cyberbullying policy would alter the way he handles these incidents and have the potential to render his method of intervention less effective. This was not addressed in the literature.

4.5.3 Principal Authority to Address Cyberbullying

When participants were asked about their authority to address cyberbullying, the subsequent five subthemes emerged: (a) Authority to Address and Administer Discipline; (b) Authority to Address and Informally Intervene; (c) Employing Suspension; (d) Parental Reaction to Discipline; and (e) Uncertainty About Authority. These subthemes are discussed in the order presented below.

Authority to Intervene and Administer Discipline

Daniel and Greytak (2011) state that it is unsettled whether, and if so, what the threshold is for principals to have authority to discipline students for engaging in off-campus cyberbullying that has an on-campus effect. As previously defined in Chapter 1, the word discipline is used in this study to mean that a student is removed student from the school setting. Whenever a principal suspends or expels a student, he or she is denying the student a property right to a free and appropriate education as promulgated by all 50 State’s individual constitutions. Thus, in order for a principal’s decision to suspend or expel a students to be upheld in a court of law, the principal must demonstrate that, as an agent of the state, the school’s compelling interest in maintaining a school
environment conducive to learning outweighs the student’s property right to a free and appropriate education so as to meet the due process requirements of the 14th Amendment.

To ensure that the researcher truly understood participant perspectives about whether they have the authority to exact discipline upon students who engaged in off-campus cyberbullying that had an on-campus effect, they were asked: (a) whether they had the authority to exact discipline in such cases; and (b) what the threshold event was that triggered that authority. All 23 responded that they had authority to exact discipline whenever manifestations from the cyberbullying expression occurred in their buildings. However, it is important to note that the participants were very clear that they did not have authority to exact discipline for the cyberbullying expression itself. Rather, they only have the authority to exact discipline for school disruptions that occurred as a result of the off-campus cyberbullying expression. Expounding upon this point, Participant 12, 131-135, stated that he had,

…the authority to deal with the fallout of the behavior if it came to school, if there was a fight or an argument or something, but the actual act of the cyberbullying if it was done at home, then I really didn’t have the authority to address it from the school point of view.

Authority to Intervene and Informally Intervene

Although the participants stated that they only had authority to exact discipline for the on-campus fallout of off-campus cyberbullying incidents, 22 of the 23 participants stated that they informally intervene whenever they become aware of cyberbullying expressions even in absence of a manifestation in the school building. For example, Participant 17, 136-145, said,
I don’t know if I legally [have the authority to intervene in off-campus cyberbullying incidents that do not have an on-campus effect], but I have. I have addressed it. I mean I just assume that anything that can affect the climate of the building, whether it’s off-campus or not is something that I need to address. For instance, if we had kids that had gotten into a fight in the neighborhood on the weekend and I find out about it, I’m going to bring them in and if I feel it’s necessary I’m going to call the parents in and we’re going make sure it doesn’t pour over and disrupt the climate of the building. So the same thing goes for cyberbullying. If it’s posted online, I think it can also disrupt the learning process and we’re going to address it in as complete a fashion as we can to make sure it doesn’t disrupt the school.

Participant 6, 99-133, added,

I think that’s always going to be at the discretion of the administrator… I don’t have any qualms with that informal way of kind of getting kids to squash situations, even if it didn’t occur at all on – you know have anything to do with school, because it may – if they don’t squash it, then it may. So there’s a lot of situations where I wouldn’t go and do like a formal punishment and certainly that’s because I don’t like to do that anyway, but also because if a parent was upset about that, they could legitimately be upset about that.

Informally intervening in every report of cyberbullying instance is recognized in the literature as a tactic effective at reducing its occurrence and/or negative effect on the school setting (Willard, 2007).

Administering Suspension

Daniel and Greytak (2011) inform readers that some principal decisions to suspend students for off-campus cyberbullying incidents, that had an on-campus effect, have been overturned in courts of law when challenged by the disciplined student. Moreover, the courts have not clearly delineated bright line rules or a test to inform educators about whether and, if so, the circumstances under which their decision to discipline will be upheld. In this study, fifteen principals reported that they have
suspended students for the on-campus ramifications of cyberbullying expressions that originated off-campus. Additionally, six participants stated that although they have yet to discipline students for on-campus manifestations of off-campus cyberbullying, they can envision circumstances where they would. Another two participants stated that they had not suspended students for this reason nor could they foresee an instance when they would.

Of the 15 participants who reported that they would suspend, nine stated that the threshold event to suspend included making threats. Seven participants said that they usually suspended students as a result of their refusal to stop engaging in either the cyberbullying activity or the resulting ramifications or insubordination. Lastly, five participants stated that suspension could be immediate depending on the severity of the threat or disruption. This was not addressed in the literature.

Additionally, the findings of this study indicate that at least two participants stated that suspending students without remediation, or as a sole tactic for reducing cyberbullying or its effects on the learning environment, is by-and-large ineffective. The literature review in Chapter 2 of this study supports this perspective as well.

*Parental Reaction to Discipline*

As stated in the previous section, principal decisions to discipline students for off-campus cyberbullying incidents that have on-campus effects, have been challenged by parents and in many cases overturned in courts of law (Daniel & Greytak, 2011). In this study, 14 participants mentioned parental reactions to their decision to discipline their children for off-campus cyberbullying that had an on-campus effect. Six of the
participants stated that parents challenged their decision to discipline. For example, Participant 8, 67-74, stated that when she called a parent to inform her about what had transpired on Facebook, the parent told her that it, …was not a school issue and that that was something that happened at home, so she didn’t want to be bothered with it. But I let her know, ‘well, it became a school issue when it was brought up at school.’ So those types of attitudes from parents.

Participant 10, 72-77, added that, …typically what the parents will come back with is, ‘well, my child did this because. There’s always a reason. ‘You know, this child did this to my child’ and that old school if they hit you, you can hit them back sort of a mentality sometimes comes into play. That’s typically the only challenge.

However, Participant 10, 77-83, goes on to add that, I have had situations where parents are involved in the cyber-bullying and parents are on Facebook and I think their intentions are to stop it, but then, you know, I call it the Jerry Springer generation. We don’t know how to de-escalate a situation or how to solve the situation formally in a proper manner that’s acceptable in society, so then we become a participant in the cyberbullying.

Five of the participants stated that parents have not challenged their decision to discipline. Participant 1, 116-122 and 270-273, shared that he had not, …met much parent resistance…because I inform parents that this can snowball into something big. Words and arguments start fights. I get a lot of support from my parents… no negative reaction from parents because parents know the policy. Parents understand the warning and that if it happens again, its insubordination.

On a related note, the review of the literature adds that part of a principal’s requisite skill set includes political knowhow to navigate stakeholder, including parents, perspectives in order to execute policy decisions that best establish and maintain the
learning environment (Davis et. al., 2005). The need for this delicate balance is evident in the participant quotes above.

Additionally, it is vital to note that none of the participants have been challenged in a court of law for their decision to suspend students for engaging in off-campus cyberbullying that had an on-campus effect. This was not addressed in the literature.

*Uncertainty About Authority*

Despite the fact that all 23 principals stated that they have authority to: (a) informally intervene in any report of off-campus cyberbullying; and (b) exact discipline for off-campus cyberbullying incidents that had an on-campus effect, eight reported that the jurisdictional thresholds or boundaries are unclear. To illustrate this point, Participant 3, 92-95, said,

I feel like it’s really so out of my control, cause usually it was not initiated here. It’s about things that didn't happen here, but because now I know about it, I’m compelled to do something about it because it can change the climate in your building. So we work very hard a nipping it in the bud.

4.5.4 Principal Perspectives About State-, School District-, and Building-Level Anti-Cyberbullying Policies

When principals were asked about their perspective on state-, school district-, and building level anti-cyberbullying policies, their responses fit into two broad categories.

As such, the researcher divided this segment of the study into two sections:

(1) Theme 1- Why Ohio Only Recently Enacted Anti-Cyberbullying Legislation, which included the following seven subthemes: (a) Principals Experience Cyberbullying; (b) Unclear Jurisdictional Boundaries; (c) Recently Gained Attention; (d) Hard to Monitor and Regulate; (e) Unclear Definition; (f) Already Addressing Effectively; and (g) Difficult to Establish Uniform Policy; and

(2) Theme 2- School-Building Level Anti-Cyberbullying Policy
Theme 1- Why Ohio Only Recently Enacted Anti-Cyberbullying Legislation

As indicated above, all 23 participants have experienced and addressed cyberbullying and/or negative cyberinteraction issues in their school buildings. In response to the open-ended interview question that asked for participant perspectives about: (a) why the state just recently passed legislation; and (b) why the school district under study waited until state law was passed to adopt a specific anti-cyberbullying policy, the following seven themes emerged.

Unclear Jurisdictional Boundaries

Ten participants stated that jurisdictional boundaries between home and school are unclear and that this is why the state and the district under study are just now enacting a specific anti-cyberbullying policies. Participant 23, 140-158, best articulated this point when he stated,

Well, I think you said it in your question about most of the cyberbullying taking place outside of the school. It’s like going into the neighborhood at nighttime and getting into a fight with somebody. It’s outside of the school. It usually ends up with some things in the building, but it makes it very difficult because that line is really drawn there. You know, how much do I police? You know, I’m an educator. How much am I supposed to police? The word police becomes a verb. I’m policing things that are happening outside of the school. How much more do I need to be responsible for? So I think that’s where some of that is that now you’re crossing over into liability issues of whether you do or you don’t in the district and [how] those policies are kind of defined...I actually talked to legal not too long ago, it wasn’t about cyberbullying, but was something that did happen outside of the school and said, you know, how much of that do I take a look at here within the school day? When it happens outside of the school…it’s a line there that’s really hard to see, you know, where does it start next? Because once you start doing certain things, now you’re over into that area and how much further do you go and where do you stop?
Recently Gained Attention

Five participants stated that the state and the district are just now enacting specific anti-cyberbullying policies because cyberbullying did not become a major issue in the general public’s eye until the recent suicides hit the media. Participant 9, 208-219, explained,

I don’t know. I think in general bullying has not been necessarily recognized until recently as something that’s an issue… I think people would question how detrimental it might be to someone and I think until you start having kids who are hurting themselves in severe ways that people aren’t really thinking about those things. I think the people who are making the laws and stuff are not necessarily – they don’t have children in their face everyday – I’m not talking about their kids, but I’m talking about mass children who are under their care and need to make sure that they’re safe.

In a similar vein, five participants stated that having come of age in a different era, adults do not fully realize the frequency of occurrence or the harms that cyberbullying and negative cyberinteraction can have on individuals and their ability learn. To demonstrate this point, Participant 10, stated that,

One of the things that I hear often and especially from people of an older generation is, and I think it’s making an excuse, that bullying is just kids being kids and we have to kind of buck up and deal with it because it helps make us strong. I think that’s one reason. I think the other reason is that oftentimes people of our generation – I’m very computer literate, but I think oftentimes it takes some time for us of the knowledge age to get into the information age. Kids are very… techno-savvy, so I think we have been slow to learn all of the different ways that cyberbullying can take place. So the responses to it maybe have been more slow.

Four participants stated that technological advances and student access to, and use of, these devices are too quick to keep up with with from a policy standpoint. As an example, Participant 4, 138-149, reported,
I think because it’s so relatively new. Granted, technology has been around a very long time, but the speed of access, students have greater access to technology than they maybe had five years ago. I would say most of my students have cell phones and they may have an android, they’re going to have a Windows. They have very sophisticated equipment. So when I – the policy is you are allowed to have your phone... but it needs to be off and in your pocket...I think the access to technology has just amplified.

**Hard to Monitor and Regulate**

Three participants responded that state- and district-level anti-cyberbullying policies are just recently being developed because electronic communication is difficult to regulate and monitor. Participant 8, 128-132, expressed this perspective when he said,

I think it’s hard to regulate. At any given moment, someone could send a text and you can erase texts, I mean all sorts of things. Same thing with Facebook. You can post it and then get rid of it, but those who are savvy know how to pull it back up or whatever the case might be, but I think it’s hard to regulate.

**Unclear Definition**

Two participants shared the perspective that the state and school district were delayed in adopting anti-cyberbullying policies because there was no clear definition of cyberbullying,

I think, number one, it’s so difficult to prove who’s actually being bullied. To give you an example, the boy I’ve dealt with, his parents have called and said, ‘My child’s getting these kind of messages on their Facebook.’ After a little bit of investigation, I found out that their child has been sending equally damaging material back the other way. So it becomes who started it and those kind of things. So it’s a little bit difficult to actually say that it’s actually bullying or is it just an argument between two individuals back and forth [Participant 12, 164-171].
Already Addressing Effectively

Two participants stated that they have been effectively addressing cyberbullying through other district policies such as the code of student conduct and the anti-harassment, intimidation, and bullying policy. Therefore, these participants’ responses indicated that they did not see the benefit of enacting specific anti-cyberbullying policy.

Participant 1, 286-295, stated,

There’s a heavy anti-bullying push in the school district and I put cyberbullying under that policy. It’s not like I feel our district hasn't addressed it. They just aren’t calling it cyberbullying, it’s just straight bullying of any sort. So I feel that it’s under that umbrella for me to be able to go and fight that when it happens.

Participant 14, 191-198, added to this perspective when he said,

Right now we operate that under our anti-bullying and harassment policy for the district. It's my understanding that we are now under a state mandate to develop specific cyberbullying policy statements that will be enforced starting next fall. I don’t know what that’s going to really mean. I don’t know if that’s going to provide us with any additional access to information. I don’t know how different that’s going to be from our current anti-harassment and bullying procedure.

Difficult to Establish a Uniform Policy

The literature suggests that in order for school policies to be effective, everyone at the building level must share one vision and collectively work on a common plan (Davis et. al., 2005). One participant stated that because policy implementation reflects the nature of the staff in a school building, and that staff knowledge about technology traverses a broad spectrum, it is difficult to have a uniform policy district-wide. To further illustrate this point, Participant 6, 206-210 reported that,
The policies almost always are just going to reflect the way that the principal or your team approaches that kind of thing. I guess it’s hard to have that be uniform when you have people like me who are [younger] and still behind, and people who are [older] and don’t even check email.

**Theme 2- School-Building Level Anti-Cyberbullying Policy**

Although not addressed in the literature, thirteen of the 23 participant responses indicated that they do implement policy at the school building level in an effort to combat recurring issues that negatively affect the learning environment. For example, one participant responded,

A building level policy? That would come from, I guess being reactive, you know reacting to a situation, because oftentimes novel things happen and after it occurs you go, ‘Okay, we need a policy. We need a procedure in place so that we avoid having this happen again,’ and that’s developed with the staff [Participant 4, 165-169].

Conversely, five participants stated that they do not implement policy at the building level because it is the school board and district administration’s task to do so. Participant 3, 542-547, stated she would only implement policy,

…[t]hat the Board of Education adopted…[t]hat’s the only way that I would even enforce, because I truly believe that my job of administrating the building is to support the will of the superintendent. The superintendent gets the charge from the people through the Board, so I support–I enforce Board policy, so I would never institute anything on my own here, but I would enforce whatever the district adopts.

Finally, two principals distinguish between policy set by the school board and procedures that are developed and implemented at the school building level. “We develop procedures at a building. Policies are developed from the Board of Education” [Participant 21, 106-107]. Participant 23, 196-214, elaborated on this point,
Instead of developing a policy, we look at what are the behaviors? What kinds of behaviors are we seeing that we need to do some intervention with? So we’ve used the policies that are already in place, because I think there are policies that are stated already that don’t detail every little thing, but yet are a guideline for us. So instead of us just looking at creating a new policy, let’s redefine the current policies, maybe be a little more specific with it…[a] policy is a policy…[u]nless you have a strategy in place or a plan in place to address the issue, what’s the policy going to do?...So I think the policies are there. I think we just have to maybe redefine them a little bit more.

4.6 Summary

This chapter provided and in-depth description of the major themes and subthemes that emerged from the thorough analysis of data that was gathered from the semi-structured open-ended interviews, filed notes, demographic questionnaires, and document collection. The five overarching subthemes that emerged from this study are: (a) Cyberbullying in the School Setting; (b) Cyberbullying Effects for the School Learning Environment; (c) Policy Components and Practices that are Effective and Ineffective for Reducing Cyberbullying; (d) Principal Authority to Address Cyberbullying; and (e) Principal Perspectives About State-, School District-, and Building-Level Anti-Cyberbullying Policies. In answering the three research questions that were the foundation of this study, the next chapter details the researcher’s summary, conclusions, and recommendations of the themes and subthemes that emerged from the data.
Chapter 5: Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

5.1 Overview of the Study

This qualitative study explored the perspectives of principals—in a large, mid-western, urban, school district with a high concentration of students who are economically disadvantaged—about how cyberbullying affects the learning environment in their school buildings and how they have addressed these incidents absent specific policy on the subject. In this study, the purposive, criterion-based sampling method was used to identify a target population of 52 principals of schools with some configuration of the six-12 grade span in the district under study. Saturation was reached after the conduction of 23 semi-structured, open-ended interviews. Fifty-two point two percent (12) of the participants were male and 47.8 percent (11) were female. Fifty-six point five percent (13) of the participants identified as Black/African American, 39.1 percent (9) identified as White, and 4.3 percent (1) identified as other.

Through in-depth analysis of the semi-structured, open-ended interviews, field notes, and demographic questionnaires, five major themes emerged from the data: (a) Cyberbullying in the School Setting; (b) Cyberbullying Effects for the School Learning Environment; (c) Policy Components and Practices that are Effective and Ineffective for Reducing Cyberbullying; (d) Principal Authority to Address Cyberbullying; and (e)
Principal Perspectives About State-, School District-, and Building-Level Anti-Cyberbullying Policies. Within these themes, subthemes also emerged. All themes and subthemes are presented in Table 4.3: Emerging Themes and Subthemes. The following section details how these themes and subthemes answer the three overarching research questions that guided this study.

5.1.1 Research Question 1

*How has cyberbullying affected the learning environment in their schools?*

Prior to explaining how the findings of this study answer Research Question 1, it is important to note two the gaps in the literature (that the researcher was cognizant of at the start of the study) that are pertinent to this question. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the first gap in the research centered upon how cyberbullying affects the learning environment from the principal perspective. A second, and more acute, gap existed about cyberbullying from the principal perspective in urban school districts in general and particularly those with high concentrations of students who are economically disadvantaged. The findings of this study directly address these gaps in that all 23 participants stated that they had experienced cyberbullying ramifications in their school buildings.

The findings of this study also exposed and addressed another gap in the literature (that the researcher was not aware of at the onset of the study), the distinction between cyberbullying and negative cyberinteraction. As introduced in the previous chapter, participants distinguish between cyberbullying and negative cyberinteraction with the
primary difference being that cyberbullying is one-way harassment whereas negative cyberbullying interaction involves two-way interactions. Put simply, negative cyberinteractions are a war of expressions that are mutually and digitally expressed by the involved parties.

Participants stated that negative cyberinteraction has as big of an impact as, if not more than, cyberbullying on the learning environment because it occurs more often. As a result, the findings of this study indicate that both cyberbullying and negative cyberinteraction diminish the learning environment in various ways. The most glaring effect of these phenomena on the learning environment is diminishing time on task. In other words, participants stated that addressing reports of cyberbullying and negative cyberinteraction eat away at time that could be spent teaching, for staff, and learning, for students. Additionally, participants stated that these negative communications create an undercurrent of fear and an unwelcoming climate in the school building, which dilutes schools’ ability to maintain an environment conducive to learning.

Additionally, the findings of this study indicate that cyberbullying and negative cyberinteraction can have long lasting harms on students such as depression, anti-social behavior, and failing, avoiding, or dropping out of school. Another lasting harm that participants mentioned is that everything on the internet is permanent and has the potential to threaten future admission to college and attainment of career opportunities.
5.1.2 Research Question 2

*Absent explicit anti-cyberbullying policy, how have principals addressed off-campus cyberbullying incidents that had an on-campus effect?*

Before explaining how participants addressed cyberbullying incidents in their school buildings absent explicit policy on the subject, it is important to note that this study found that the target population felt as though it had the authority to intervene and exact discipline, in the form of suspension or expulsion, for the on-campus ramifications or disruptions that ensued from off-campus cyberbullying or negative cyberinteraction expressions. The findings of this study also demonstrate that even though the participants stated that they only had authority to exact discipline for the on-campus fallout of the off-campus expressions, it was clear that they also felt as though they had the authority to investigate all reported incidents of off-campus expressions. Moreover, the participants responded that they had the authority to informally intervene in such incidents—even those that did not have an on-campus manifestation—in order to curtail possible school or learning environment disruptions. For the participants, intervention meant that they could use any tactic to intervene as long as it did not involve suspension or expulsion.

Having outlined the participant perspectives about their authority to intervene, either formally or informally, in off-campus cyberbullying and negative cyberinteraction incidents, the rest of this section summarizes how the findings of this study answer Research Question 2 regarding how principals addressed these incidents absent explicit policy on the subject.
Participants shared that because cyberbullying and negative cyberinteraction, if left unchecked, can lead to greater school disruptions such as verbal and physical altercations, time off task, poor student performance, and unwelcoming or unsafe school climates—where the learning capacity of the students is diminished—they investigated all reports of such incidents and intervened as necessary.

The findings of this study also show that as part of investigating off-campus cyberbullying and negative cyberinteraction incidents, they conferenced with all students in an attempt to resolve the issue.

Additionally, and in accordance with the literature, participants stated that it is important that they educate and keep stakeholders informed. In terms of students, the literature states that all students should be educated about cyberbullying in terms of: (a) what it is and what it looks like; (b) the harms it causes; (c) that it will be addressed; and (d) the consequences of engagement. However, many of the participants in this study stated that only the students who are engaged in cyberbullying are instructed about these issues.

A few participants employed all-school programming geared specifically toward addressing cyberbullying. However, the majority of participants used counseling, mediation, assemblies and Town Hall meetings, as well as bringing in outside programs and speakers to teach students about social skills. Although the more general programming may not specifically address cyberbullying, the lessons of civility are
important since participants stated that students are lacking social development skills both in the real and virtual realms.

As regards staff, the findings did show that one tactic used to combat cyberbullying and negative cyberinteraction was making sure that all adults in the building were visible and accessible to form positive relationships with students. These relationships: (a) made it more likely that students would report such incidents; and (b) enabled staff to know the students well enough to read their facial expressions and body language to identify when something was wrong. These observations prompted staff to investigate the cause that was upsetting the student which could include cyberbullying or negative cyberinteraction.

Moreover, participants stated that: (a) professional development as far as what cyberbullying is, how to spot it, and how to effectively intervene; and (b) staff staying abreast of technology so that they are aware of how students may be misusing these devices, would be effective at reducing the effects of cyberbullying and negative cyberinteraction occurrences and/or their effect on the learning environment. Despite this acknowledgement, however, cyberbullying professional development had not taken place on a formal or consistent basis, if at all.

Participants also stated that they found it helpful to monitor social media sites for cyberbullying and negative cyberinteraction. One participant stated that his school safety personnel created a fake Facebook profile and friended students in order to keep tabs on what is happening in this venue.
In terms of parental education, the findings show that a comprehensive plan to educate parents about cyberbullying and negative cyberinteraction is a huge piece of what was lacking when it comes to combating cyberbullying in the school setting. However, participants did state that they attempted to educate parents of students who engage in cyberbullying and negative cyberinteraction about what cyberbullying is, the manners/modes in which it is carried out, how to spot and monitor it, and how to effectively intervene. The findings of this study also show that some participants tried to proactively educate their parents in general by hosting cyber education nights.

Participants also tried to educate parents how to monitor their students’ digital communications as well as those of their friends. Participants added that they requested parents to impose consequences for misuse of digital communication. Additionally, the findings of this study indicate that parental involvement was key in resolving cyberbullying and negative cyberinteraction incidents. As such, participants stated that they called parents in whenever they conference with the involved parties.

The findings of this study demonstrated that although most participants did not have the level of detailed reporting procedures that the literature suggests, they did have students complete the district’s harassment forms in instances of cyberbullying. However, and as already mentioned, all participants stated that they promptly investigated reports of cyberbullying and negative cyberbullying interactions to prevent them from escalating into school disruptions. Participant responses suggested that having reporting procedures, such as having all adults in the building being visible and accessible, encouraging parents
and students to print hard copies of the digital expression, allowing students to report anonymously, encouraging all stakeholders to report such incidents, and prompt investigation of all reports, helped diminish the occurrence of cyberbullying and negative cyberinteraction. Participants stated that the reason that this was an effective tactic is because employing these practices informed the student body about what engaging in this sort of expression looks like, that the administration will address it, and that consequences are certain. In essence, this practice harkens back to notion that education of all stakeholders is key in combating cyberbullying and negative cyberinteraction.

The findings of this study demonstrated that participants found it effective to involve police in cyberbullying or negative cyberinteractions incidents that were either too big for the school to handle on its own, that reached a certain level of severity, were outside the purview of the school, and, in some instances, when the undesired expressions or behavior continued despite intervention.

The findings indicated that it was important to give students a chance to start over with a clean slate so that they know that they can come back to school and excel after a misstep. A participant added that this was important when trying to modify behavior so that students were encouraged to learn and improve.

Another finding of the study was that one participant was proactively teaching students responsible digital communication during the school day. She stated that such instruction was necessary because students needed this skill set to thrive in adulthood and
because the alternative was to put them out of school for inappropriate use that was sure to continue.

The findings indicated that the last tactic used by participants to combat cyberbullying and negative cyberinteraction incidents was to investigate and intervene in these occurrences even when it occurred between students who attended different schools.

5.1.3 Research Question 3

*From the principal perspective, what should be included/excluded in state- and district-level anti-cyberbullying policies to effectively decrease the effects of cyberbullying on student learning?*

*What Should Be Included*

The findings of this study indicated that participants believe that stakeholder education about cyberbullying and negative cyberinteractions should be included. By stakeholders, the participants stated that it is important to educate students, staff, parents, and the community at large. In terms of education, participants stated that stakeholders should be informed about what responsible digital communication is, about what cyberbullying and negative cyberinteractions are and what they look like, the harms they cause, how to spot and monitor them, how to effectively intervene, and encourage reporting by bystanders as well as those involved. For students, this would include age appropriate curricula at all grade levels.

Participants stated that this sort of awareness would make students more cognizant of their actions and that such awareness could deter the occurrence of these
negative expressions. Moreover, this awareness could also empower individuals to report and intervene effectively when these issues arise.

Participants also stated that what should be included in anti-cyberbullying policies was the establishment of clear jurisdictional boundaries between when the cyberbullying expression is under the authority of a caretaker and when that responsibility transfers to the school. Participants stated that even though they were aware that they only had authority to exact discipline for the on-campus ramifications of off-campus cyberbullying expressions—such that they were restricted from imposing discipline for the off-campus expression itself—the jurisdictional limits were still a gray area for them and was difficult to explain to parents, guardians, and students.

The findings of this study also showed that participants believed that threshold(s) for school and home accountability should also be clearly defined in an anti-cyberbullying policy. In other words, the policy should delineate what triggers a school’s responsibility to act and what the school will be held accountable for versus that of the home and the parent or the guardian when cyberbullying or negative cyberinteractions occur.

Another finding was that participants would like anti-cyberbullying policies to establish clear protocol for administrators to follow and establish clear consequences for students engaging in cyberbullying or negative cyberinteraction. Participants stated that this would assist them with intervention efforts because they would have a written and consistent policy that they would use to inform students, staff, and parents.
This study’s findings also revealed that participants think that anti-cyberbullying policy should clearly define the negative behavior that it seeks to deter. Participants stated that currently, there was no clear definition of cyberbullying which made it difficult to address. Similarly, and as previously mentioned, participants stated that negative cyberinteraction also disrupted the learning environment, perhaps even more so than cyberbullying. However, negative cyberinteraction did not fit the definition that the participants ascribe to cyberbullying.

Two participants stated that the policy should be flexible enough to enable administrators to use their discretion as they prefer to analyze and act upon these incidents on a case-by-case basis. In other words, these participants would like to weigh the context around each individual case in lieu of exacting proscribed disciplinary measures.

Four participants stated that an anti-cyberbullying policy should include resources to investigate and monitor social media use. Participants stated that not having access to social media diminished their ability to resolve cyberbullying issues because they could not adequately monitor or thoroughly investigate cyberbullying and negative cyberinteractions incidents. Participants also stated that schools should be provided additional staff who could take the time required to properly investigate and resolve these incidents.

The findings indicated that three participants shared the perspective that age appropriate curricula should be included in anti-cyberbullying policies to proactively educate student about effective and responsible digital communication. These participants
stated that you can either educate students about the proper use of digital communication because they are going to use it and because it is a skill set that they need to have. Or, you can put them out of school for their continued misuse.

Participants also stated that anti-cyberbullying policies was to include any provisions necessary to keep kids safe and include all threats to student safety and well-being regardless of whether they originate on- or off-campus.

Another practice that participants reported should be included in anti-cyberbullying policy is that adults, including the school district, should inhabit the cyberworld in the positive way. As indicated in Chapter 4, participants stated that students think that the cyberworld is place where they can interact and express themselves without adult supervision. As such, most of the social media sites that students visit are purely for social interaction. Participant 6 stated that having a cyber presence on Facebook or Twitter, for educational purposes, would help students see these sites and their purpose in a different light. In other words, students would start to see them as a positive tool and also be aware that adults are monitoring what occurs on those sites. Participant 13, echoed this perspective when he stated that students were shocked to hear that he had a Twitter account.

Participants also stated that including public service announcements should be included in anti-cyberbullying policies. Participant 3 stated that she could recall anti-litter public service announcements from her childhood that were so powerful that she cannot recall a time when she saw someone litter. She then went on to state that in the absence of these campaigns, she now witnesses individuals throwing whole bags of trash outside
their car windows as they drive down the street. She stated that public service announcements impart a sense of civic mindedness for all stakeholders and could be highly effective at reducing incidents cyberbullying, negative cyberinteraction, and their ramifications on the learning environment.

Along these same lines, Participant 14 stated that having awareness programs for cyberbullying and negative cyberinteraction, similar to the D.A.R.E. program for drug and alcohol awareness, could also be effective at reducing the occurrences of cyberbullying, negative cyberinteraction, and/or their disruption to the learning environment.

What Should Be Excluded

Shifting gears to what participants stated should be excluded from anti-cyberbullying policy at the state- or district- level, two district-level policies were identified as ineffective for reducing the effects of cyberbullying and negative cyberinteraction on the student learning were identified. The first was barring student access to, or use of, technology as a practice or sole disciplinary measure. Nine participants stated that simply barring the use of or access to technology was not effective at reducing cyberbullying’s negative impact on the student learning environment. Participants stated that students knew proxies to get around the fire walls that blocked access to social media sites on school computers. Students were also very tech savvy and found or borrowed other devices to digitally interact with their peers. Second, barring technology use did not help educate students about how to engage in effective and
responsible digital communication—a perquisite to being marketable in a 21st Century global economy (The Big Goal, 2011).

However, one participant did state that banning access to social media was effective for younger students, such as those in elementary through middle school, because parents typically control more aspects of students’ lives at that point.

The second district level policy that the participants found to be ineffective at reducing cyberbullying, negative cyberinteraction, and/or their disruption to the student learning environment was barring staff access to social media in the school setting. Six participants stated that they could not effectively monitor or investigate instances of cyberbullying and negative cyberinteraction because their access to social media sites in the school setting was restricted. Even the few participants who stated that they attained special permission from central administration to have access to social media sites at their school building said that their ability to monitor and investigate was impeded by the fact that only one administrator had access to the sites.

No Need for State- or District-Level Anti-cyberbullying Policy

Two participants stated that state- or district-level anti-cyberbullying policies were unnecessary because they were already effectively addressing cyberbullying and negative cyberinteractions incidents pursuant the district under study’s existing student code of conduct and anti-harassment policies. Participant 1 stated that a state- or district-level anti-cyberbullying policy would likely alter the way he handled these incidents and could render his method of intervention less effective.
5.2 Conclusions

Derived from participant responses to the semi-structured, open-ended interview questions and the five major themes that emerged, the following conclusions emerged.

Conclusions Addressing Gaps in the Literature

1. The findings of this study addressed a gap in the literature about cyberbullying from the principal perspective. Only a handful of previous studies explored cyberbullying from the principal perspective (Cardini, 2011; Kowitz Orobko, 2009; Wiseman, 2011). Additionally, the findings of this study speak to a gap in the literature regarding cyberbullying from large, urban, principals’ perspective, especially those who serve in districts with a high concentration of students who are economically disadvantaged (Hong, 2009). The focus on this particular principal demographic differs from the previous studies regarding principal perspectives on cyberbullying. Additionally, the previous studies mentioned above were guided by different research questions or methodologies meaning that those researcher’s had findings that may not be applicable to the policy and demographic setting of the current school district under study.

For example, Cardini’s (2011) study used a quantitative methodology that identified principal perspectives about whether Minnesota’s anti-cyberbullying legislation was effective. However, the closed-ended questionnaire used in Cardini’s (2011) study did not solicit principal perspectives about what the effective/ineffective policy components or practices were nor did it identify what
principals thought should be included/excluded from an effective anti-
cyberbullying policy. Lastly, although Cardini’s study was designed to be a
statewide study, only seven of the 105 participants were urban school principals
and there was no mention of rate of economic disadvantaged for these urban
districts.

Kowitz Oroboko’s (2009) study included interviews with three urban principals—
for which the student body size nor the rate of students economic
disadvantaged were mentioned—and Wiseman’s (2011) study did not indicate
whether the three principals he interviewed were from urban, rural, or suburban
school districts. Finally, the fact that this study interviewed 23 principals serving a
large, urban district with a high concentration of students from economically
disadvantaged backgrounds, addresses the dearth of research about cyberbullying
from the principal perspective in general, from this specific principal population
of principals, and id evidence that cyberbullying does occur in school districts
with this specific demographic composition.

2. The findings of this study also introduced and, to a limited extent, explored a gap
in the literature about negative cyberinteraction. At the onset of this study and
until data analysis began, the researcher was only aware of, and sought to study
cyberbullying from the principal perspective as one salient threat to educating
students for productive adult lives in the 21st Century economy. However,
participants drew a distinction between cyberbullying—one-way digital
harassment—and negative cyberinteraction—a two-way war of words. In
describing this distinction, participants stated that negative cyberinteraction disrupts the learning environment in the same manner as cyberbullying incidents. Participants also reported that negative cyberinteraction is just as harmful, if not more harmful, to learning environments because it occurs more often and usually involves more students.

3. In the literature, principals’ perspectives about their authority to address cyberbullying was not addressed. Participants in this study reported that they had, and exercised, the authority to investigate and intervene in all reports of cyberbullying and negative cyberinteraction. They also added that failing to investigate these reports could lead to other school disruptions that negatively affect the learning environment. Participants stated that although they felt they had the authority to investigate and intervene in all reports of such incidents that originate off-campus, they only had the authority to exact discipline for students who engage in the on-campus ramifications or school disruptions.

4. Participant responses indicated that blocking staff access to social media in the school setting was ineffective because it inhibits principals’ ability to investigate reports of cyberbullying and negative cyberinteraction.

Conclusions Upholding the Literature

5. Participants agreed that educating stakeholders is key in reducing cyberbullying, negative cyberinteraction, and their negative impact on the learning environment.
Moreover, participants stated that this should be included in anti-cyberbullying policies.

a. In terms of students, participants stated that they should be proactively instructed about responsible digital communication use in order to be marketable employees in the future. However, only one principal was actually doing this in practice. Along these same lines, participants stated that students should be educated about: (a) what cyberbullying and negative cyberinteraction are what they look like; (b) the harms they cause; (c) the consequences, legal and otherwise, resulting from engaging in these incidents; (d) how to intervene effectively; and (e) the expectation that these expressions should not occur.

b. For staff, participants stated that professional development as regards: (a) what cyberbullying and negative interaction are what they look like; (b) how to spot and, for some participants, monitor these incidents; (b) the harms they cause; (c) the consequences, legal and otherwise, resulting from engaging in these incidents; and (d) how to intervene effectively, is also critical for reducing their negative impact on the learning environment. However, participants stated that this has not occurred formally, if at all.

Participants also stated that it was important for staff to stay abreast of technology and how students are using or abusing it. Staff should also be
visible and accessible to students to build relationships that tip staff off to
issues bubbling up.

c. As regards parents, participants stated that they too should be educated
about: (a) what cyberbullying and negative interaction are and what they
look like; (b) the harms they cause; (c) how to spot and monitor these
happenings; (d) the consequences, legal and otherwise, resulting from
engaging in these incidents; (e) how to establish and enforce consequence
in the home; (f) how to intervene effectively; and (g) expectations that
these expressions do not occur.

6. Participants reported that they had and exercised the authority to investigate and
intervene in all reports of cyberbullying and negative cyberinteraction. They
stated that if they do not, these incidents lead to other school disruptions that
negatively effect the learning environment. Moreover, principals stated that they
must establish and incorporate consequences for engaging in such expression
because lecturing had no effect. Participants also stated that consequences should
be included in anti-cyberbullying policies.

7. The findings of this study indicated that the reporting of these incidents is vitally
important in combating cyberbullying and negative cyberinteractions because
they often go undetected until either reporting or school disruption occur. As
such, participants have enacted practices that encourage reporting in their school
buildings. Participants also shared that the foundation of encouraging reporting
from the student side is having positive relationships with students.
8. A participant stated that it is important to allow students to start anew with a clean slate after they engage in unwanted expression or behavior, including negative cyberinteraction, such that they are encouraged to return to school ready to learn and to improve.

9. The findings of this study also suggest that banning student access and use of digital devices and social media sites was ineffective at reducing cyberbullying, negative cyberinteraction, and their effects on the learning environment because: (a) students know proxies to circumvent such firewalls; and (b) this practice does not equip them with the skill set they need to be productive adult citizens.

10. This study’s findings demonstrate that participants think the following policy components and practices should be included in an effective anti-cyberbullying policy:

   a. Stakeholder education as explained in conclusion number five above. In particular, participants wanted clear definitions of cyberbullying and negative cyberinteractions as well as examples of these prohibited expressions to be included in anti-cyberbullying policies. Participants also stated that age appropriate curricula should be included in anti-cyberbullying policies. Finally, participants stated that anti-cyberbullying policies should include public service announcements and awareness programs such as D.A.R.E. about cyberbullying, negative cyberinteraction and civility in general.
b. Clear jurisdictional boundaries that explicitly state when the school and the home are accountable for cyberbullying and negative cyberinteraction incidents.

c. Establish a clear protocol for principals to follow while still allowing them to exercise discretion on a case-by-case basis. Participants also would like anti-cyberbullying policies to establish clear consequences for engaging in cyberbullying and negative cyberinteraction.

d. The provision of resources, in terms of staff and access to social media sites in the school setting, should be included.

e. Participants stated that adults, and the school district itself, should inhabit the cyberworld where students interact. Principals stated that one reason cyberbullying and negative cyberinteraction occur was because students believed that adults did not inhabit this space, leaving them free to say what they want without consequence. Participants also stated that this lack of adult presence trivializes what could otherwise be a powerful learning tool.

Conclusions Counterintuitive to the Literature

11. The literature posits that an effective method of combating cyberbullying and negative cyberinteraction is the establishment of an all-school anti-cyberbullying plan that results from an assessment administered to all stakeholders which identifies: (a) if cyberbullying is an issue at the school; (b) the frequency and the
nature of the cyberbullying incidents occurring at the school; (c) the level of satisfaction that students, parents, teachers, staff, principals, school volunteers, and the community experience with regard to how the cyberbullying incidents are resolved; (d) the extent to which students are being educated about acceptable social interaction and its direct applicability to virtual communication; and (e) suggestions from stakeholders as to how to better address the problem.

The data from this assessment is then used, in consultation with stakeholders, to form an all-school plan to combat cyberbullying that is specifically tailored to the school’s needs. Once established, the assessment is regularly administered to gauge progress and should be modified accordingly. The literature also points out that it is important to assign a point person to manage the plan.

The findings of this study indicate that principals do not employ this method when combating cyberbullying and negative cyberinteraction. Instead, it appears that they attempted to educate students about cyberbullying and negative cyberinteractions in ad hoc manner through program, initiatives, and addressing these incidents as they arise rather than as part of a comprehensive plan or integrated curricula as suggested by the literature.

12. A review of the literature stated that an effective practice for combating cyberbullying, negative cyberinteraction, and their negative effect on the learning environment is to proactively teach students how to responsibly engage in digital communication. However, the findings of this study indicate that while participants agreed with this practice, they also sought curricula to help them do
so. Moreover, only one participant was using school time to teach students this skill set.

13. The literature also states, and the participants agreed, that professional development is key in combating cyberbullying and cyberinteraction. However, participants stated that their staff had not received formal professional development about cyberbullying and negative cyberinteraction. Moreover, many participants stated that school staff’s knowledge of digital communication and social media varied widely and was extremely limited in some cases; which does not lend itself to a great understanding of the magnitude of the negative effects of these expressions and/or how to spot and effectively intervene when they occur.

14. Although the literature demonstrates that anti-cyberbullying policies, if properly crafted and implemented, can be effective at reducing its negative impact on student learning environments, two participants stated that an anti-cyberbullying policy would not be helpful to them in executing their charge of educating students because they: (a) were already effectively combating these issues pursuant to the district under study’s student code of conduct and anti-harassment, intimidation, and bullying policy; and (b) did not see the benefit that such policies would add.
5.3 Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, several suggestions about how to effectively combat cyberbullying, cyberinteraction, and their negative effects on students learning are provided for principals, parents, and policymakers at the school state and district levels.

5.3.1 Principals

1. Principals should conduct all-school assessments that are administered to all stakeholders to identify: (a) the frequency and the nature of the unwanted behaviors/expressions that occur at the school (through examples and descriptions of the undesirable behaviors/expressions); (b) the level of satisfaction that students, parents, teachers, staff, principals, school volunteers, and the community experience with regard to how the unwanted behaviors are resolved; (c) the extent to which students are being educated about the undesirable behaviors/expressions; and (d) suggestions from stakeholders as to how to better address these issues.

In the event that the assessment indicates that the issues that do arise are effectively resolved such that the climate and culture of the building is conducive to learning, then the school should periodically reassess to maintain such an environment.

On the other hand, if the data resulting from the assessment reveals that the schools’ culture is one that is not conducive to learning, then the school should
assign a point person to construct an all-school plan that addresses all undesirable behaviors/expressions in consultation with the stakeholders. Once established, the assessment should be regularly administered to gauge progress and implement the according modifications.

The all-school plan should include: (a) a comprehensive education component for all stakeholders; (b) clearly define the undesirable behaviors/expressions; (c) set the expectation that such undesirable behaviors/expressions should not occur; and (d) impose graduated consequences for engaging in such behaviors/expression.

Principals should proactively teach student how to use digital communications appropriately during the school day.

Principals should also implement reporting procedures such that stakeholders are knowledgeable about what to expect during an investigation, including a timeline of when a resolution could be reached.

Lastly, principals should encourage the formation of positive student-staff relationship so as to encourage reporting of cyberbullying and negative cyberinteraction incidents.

5.3.2 Parents

2. As part of the comprehensive stakeholder education plan, parents should be instructed about how take an active role in monitoring their student’s, and their friends, use of digital communication and social media interactions in order to stay abreast of what is occurring. Parents should also be instructed about how
to effectively intervene, reporting such incidents to the appropriate authorities and imposing consequences for misuse of digital communication.

5.3.3 Students

3. As part of the comprehensive stakeholder education plan, students should be proactively taught how to use digital communication effectively and responsibly. Moreover, such education should take place with the use of age appropriate curricula that is integrated with the instruction of all subjects. Similarly, students should be taught habits and morals of civility which instructs them about respectful discourse and conflict resolution, and its relevance in both the real and cyber realms. Both of these lessons are requisite to function as a productive citizen in the 21st Century.

5.4.4 Policymakers

4. Policymakers should craft anti-cyberbullying policies in consultation with practitioners to ensure that the policy components are actually geared toward facilitating the establishment and maintenance of a learning environment. As those on the ground, practitioners have first-hand knowledge about the school issues like cyberbullying and negative cyberinteraction and thus, have input that could strengthen policies that combat them. Requiring school districts to conduct all-school assessments could ensure that the school buildings’ anti-cyberbullying efforts are specifically tailored to each school’s needs. Policymakers should be sure to include: (a) clear jurisdictional boundaries, including the establishment of accountability thresholds between home and
school; (b) clear protocol and consequences; (c) clearly define the negative behavior to be addressed and include negative cyberinteraction; (d) flexibility to allow principals to use their discretion on a case-by-case basis when addressing cyberbullying and negative cyberinteraction incidents; (e) resources in terms of staff and staff access to social media sites at school to aid with monitoring and investigation; (f) age appropriate curricula to teach students how to use digital communication responsibly; and (g) include public service announcements and awareness programs.

Policies should not block access to social media for students or staff during the school day because this practice is ineffective at reducing cyberbullying and negative cyberinteraction.

5.4 Limitations

This study provides rich information regarding principal perspectives about cyberbullying in a large, Midwestern, urban school district with a high concentration of students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. However, the sample only included middle and high school principals from a single school district. As such, these findings may not lend themselves to being generalized to other school district settings such as urban, rural, or small urban school districts. However, in this study “thick descriptions” of the participants’ perspectives were used which enable readers to form their own interpretations about whether and when these findings can be generalized to another setting (Lodico et al, 2006).
What is more, this study is limited in that the researcher could not anticipate all of the findings that would emerge from the data or else she would have asked more probing questions of perspectives that did arise. For example, the researcher would have been sure to ask each participant about negative cyberinteraction in general, as well as how they distinguish it from cyberbullying.

5.5 Suggestions for Future Research

This study provides information regarding principal perspectives about cyberbullying in a large, Midwestern, urban school district with a high concentration of students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds but also serves as a foundation for further research about cyberbullying in general. For example, this study could be repeated with principals in charter schools, private schools, and elementary schools, as well as those from urban and rural districts of varying student populations. This study could also be conducted with parents, other school staff, students, and community members at large to better understand their perspectives about this salient threat to student learning.

This study explored and exposed several different aspects of cyberbullying including how it negatively effects learning environments, how it was addressed by principals, how policies could help combat the issue, and issues with stakeholder accountability to name a few. However, each of these, and the rest of the topics that emerged from the participants responses, could be studied in further detail.
Future research could also delve further into the similarities and differences between cyberbullying and negative cyberinteraction to explore whether negative cyberinteractions require different tactics to reduce its effect on student learning environments.

Future research could also explore the effects of the forthcoming district-level anti-cyberbullying policy on cyberbullying occurrences in the school setting.

5.6 Final Thoughts

The primary purpose of this study was to identify, through the lens and voices of principals, state-, district-, and building-level practices and policy components that are effective and ineffective in decreasing cyberbullying occurrences that negatively impact urban middle and high school (serving grades six-12) learning environments. The researcher chose the interpretivist paradigm as the theoretical orientation for this study because it was best suited to answer the research questions from the principal perspective.
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Appendix A: Letter to Participants
February 7, 2012

Dear Principal,

My name is Keisha Hunley-Jenkins and as a doctoral student at The Ohio State University, I am writing to invite you to participate in my graduate research study entitled, *In Their Voices: Large, Midwestern, Urban School District Principal Perspectives About Policies and Practices that are Effective and Ineffective in Reducing Cyberbullying and its Disruption Student Learning in the School Setting.*

The purpose of this study is to increase the understanding of cyberbullying from the principal perspective. Specifically, how it affects student learning in their buildings’ and the policies and practices that are both effective and ineffective in diminishing its potentially negative effects on student learning. Your perspective will add practical depth and knowledge to the anti-cyberbullying practices and policy components that the literature suggests are effective and have the potential inform Ohio’s pending anti-cyberbullying legislation. Your participation in this study will also add to the scant research about principal perspectives on cyberbullying policies in urban settings in general and particularly in those serving high concentrations of students who are economically disadvantaged.

I would be extremely grateful for your decision to participate in this study because your input is absolutely critical and essential to this research. If you decide to participate in this study, you will complete one two-minute participant demographic questionnaire, a 30-minute interview, and a 10-minute email review of a summary of the themes that emerge from your interview. Additionally, I would like to audiotape your interview for the purposes of note taking accuracy and authenticity. You and your school’s identities will kept confidential and your responses will remain anonymous throughout duration and conclusion of this study.

Attached is the approval letter for this study from x for your review.

Please note that your participation in this research project is completely voluntary. If you would like to participate or have any questions about the study, please email or contact me at 614.554.1133 or Hunley-Jenkins.1@osu.edu. I look forward to working with you.

Most sincerely,

Keisha J. Hunley-Jenkins
Appendix B: Introduction Letter
Thursday, January 05, 2012

Dear Administrator:

This letter serves as an introduction to Keisha Hunley-Jenkins of The Ohio State University. The proposed research activity: In Their Voices: Large, Midwestern, Urban School District Principal Perspectives About Policies and Practices that are Effective and Ineffective in Reducing Cyberbullying and its Disruption of Student Learning in the School Setting has been reviewed and approved by the Research Proposal Review Committee.

While this letter does not obligate you to participate in the study, Dr. Harris has expressed an interest in the results of this study and would appreciate your cooperation with Ms. Hunley-Jenkins. It also serves as an introduction and official notification that the researcher has followed established procedures and has been granted permission to solicit subjects to participate in the study. If you agree to allow the researcher to conduct research in your building, please sign below. The researcher must then fax this letter to the Department of Evaluation Services at 365-5160. This must be completed before the researcher contacts any potential subjects in your building. A signed form is NOT required if the building principal is the only individual in the building that will be involved in study activities. If you have any questions or concerns, please call my office.

Sincerely,

Office of Accountability
Appendix C: Semi-Structured, Open-Ended Interview Questions
**Introduction:** These questions are for principals who have had an issue with cyberbullying.

1. Have you experienced cyberbullying incidents or ramifications at your school?
   a. If yes, then…

2. How long have you been experiencing cyberbullying issues?

**Cyberbullying:**
1. How big of an issue is cyberbullying at your school?
2. Why do you think that cyberbullying occurs in general?
3. Why do you think that cyberbullying is an issue at your school specifically?
4. How often does it occur?
   a. Frequent/Sporadic?
5. How does cyberbullying disrupt student learning at your school?
6. How do you address cyberbullying incidents in your school?

   **Possible probing questions:**

   a. Does your school building have any policies or programs intended to decrease cyberbullying or its potential negative effects on student learning?
      i. If so, please describe and how long has it been in place?
      ii. If not, are you developing one?

   b. Does your school have, or are you developing, any policies that would address negative behavior such as cyberbullying? Examples include character education programs, empathy training, etc.?

7. Do you feel you have authority to address cyberbullying incidents that originate off-campus but negatively affect student learning at your school?
   a. If yes, what are the limits of that authority?
   b. If yes, what grants you that authority?
   c. If yes, what is the threshold event that must occur in order for you to intervene in off-campus cyberbullying incidents?
   d. If no, what limits your authority?
8. Have you suspended students for engaging in off-campus cyberbullying?
   a. If no, would you?
      i. If so, what is the threshold that must be crossed in order for a student to be suspended from school for engaging in off-campus cyberbullying?
   b. If yes, what is the threshold that must be crossed in order for a student to be suspended from school for engaging in off-campus cyberbullying?
      i. If yes, have you been challenged in any way as a result?

9. Has your staff received professional development or any other training about cyberbullying?

10. Why do you think the school district or the state have yet to adopt anti-cyberbullying policies?

11. Would a district and/or state-level anti-cyberbullying be helpful in your mission of educating each student in your school building?
   a. If yes, explain
   b. If no, explain

12. How is policy developed and interpreted in your school? In other words, what would spur you to develop and implement policy in your school?

13. What have you found that is effective in reducing the occurrence of cyberbullying and/or its negative effects on student learning?

14. What have you found to be ineffective in reducing the occurrence of cyberbullying and/or its negative effects on student learning?

15. If the school district or the state were drafting a policy designed to reduce cyberbullying or its negative impact on student learning, what do you think should be included?

16. What are three things you wish policymakers and/or the community knew about cyberbullying?
Appendix D: Verbal Informed Consent Script
Verbal Informed Consent Script

You have indicated an interest in participating in the study titled, *In Their Voices: Large, Midwestern, Urban School District Principal Perspectives About Policies and Practices that are Effective and Ineffective in Reducing Cyberbullying and its Disruption Student Learning in the School Setting*. I will read this verbal informed consent script to you to ensure you fully understand the purposes, procedures, and details of this study.

As your information sheet discloses, the goal of this study is gain understanding of principal perspectives on cyberbullying with a focus on both the effective and ineffective policies and practices used to address this behavior. It the researchers hope that the findings of this study will inform policy and practice implementation aimed at reducing the potential negative effects that cyberbullying can have on student learning in yours and other school buildings.

Your participation will require about 45-60 minutes of your time in total; this time includes the verbal informed consent, the participant demographic questionnaire, the interview, and email member checking once the aggregate themes have been identified from your interview.

- Do you have any questions about the time requirements of this study?

The interview questions are semi-structured and open-ended so feel free to respond as you see fit. I will audiotape our conversation, later transcribe it for analysis, and destroy the audiotapes upon completion of the transcription. To protect you identity and to ensure that that your responses are anonymous, coding will be used in the identification of themes across interviews. Once coding is complete and all identifiable information has been redacted, a research partner will also analyze the transcripts. Once the aggregate themes of your interview are identified, a summary will be sent back to you for member checking purposes; this simply means that you will read over the themes identified by the co-investigator and determine if you believe they are accurate or not.

You have been assigned a code that will be used in place of your name on all transcripts and documentation from this point forward. Only the Principal Investigator and the Co-Investigator will have access to the linked names and codes. Any identifiable information in the transcripts will be removed or replaced. All data will be stored in a secure location and destroyed after the minimum IRB record keeping requirement of 3 years. Any foreseeable risks or discomfort as a result of participation of this study could include a strained relationship between you, the participant, and district administration only if you and your school’s identity are not kept confidential such that individual responses to the interview questions are no longer anonymous. However, as detailed above, the principle investigator and the co-investigator will take all precautions to ensure that confidentiality, and therefore anonymity, are not compromised during the conduction of or at the conclusion of this study.

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Your participation in this study is greatly appreciated as its findings could have the potential to inform anti-cyberbullying policy at the state, district, and school-building levels. Such policy guidance could help principals understand the limits of their authority in grappling with off-campus cyberbullying incidents that negatively impact student learning in the school setting and identify policy components and practices that you and your peers have found effective and ineffective at combatting this always negative phenomenon.

- Do you have any questions about the procedures of this study?

Below are the details of who and how to contact the appropriate people should you have questions or concerns about this study, to address any questions, concerns, complaints, or if you feel you have been harmed as a result of study participation, and/or if you wish to withdraw at any time.

You may contact me, Keisha J. Hunley-Jenkins, co-investigator, by:

- Phone at 614.554.1133,
- Email at hunley-jenkins.1@osu.edu, or
- Mail at Keisha J. Hunley-Jenkins
  2656 Berwick Blvd.
  Columbus, Ohio 43209

You may also contact the principal investigator, Dr. Philip T.K. Daniel by:

- Phone 614.292.7991,
- Email Daniel.7@osu.edu, or
- Mail at Dr. Philip T.K. Daniel
  The Ohio State University
  301 Ramseyer Hall
  29 W. Woodruff Avenue
  Columbus, Ohio 43210

Finally, you can contact the Office of Responsible Research Practices at The Ohio State University by:

- Phone at 614.688.8457 or 1.800.678.6251, or
- Mail at Office of Responsible Research Practices
  The Ohio State University
  300 Research Administration Building
  1960 Kenny Road
  Columbus, Ohio 43120-1063
I am currently a doctoral candidate in Educational Administration at The Ohio State University and this study involves research. The results of this research will be used for journal articles and presentations, and direct quotes may be used to support the findings; confidentiality will always be upheld.

Participation is voluntary. Your selection is based on your position as principal of a school that serves some configuration of the 6-12 grad span in the school district under study.

I want to highlight your right to refuse to participate or decide to stop participating at any time without penalty. Do you have any questions or concerns about the study at this time? Do you freely give informed consent to participate in this study?
Appendix E: Follow-Up Phone Call Scripts
Follow-up Phone Call Scripts

Script for speaking to the individual who answers the phone at the school:
Co-Investigator (CI): Good X (morning/afternoon). My name is Keisha Hunley-Jenkins and I am a doctoral student at The Ohio State University. I am calling in reference to a letter that I sent to principal X inviting them to participate in my study about cyberbullying and the policy components and practices that they find effective and ineffective in reducing its negative effects on student learning in the school setting.

The purpose of my call is to confirm if principal X would be willing to participate in my study and, if so, to schedule a time, date, and location—in person or via phone—to conduct a 30-minute interview on this subject.

As such, may I please speak to principal X?

Script for speaking to the principal if they are available to talk at the time the call is placed:
Hello principal X. My name is Keisha Hunley-Jenkins and I am a doctoral student at The Ohio State University. I am calling in reference to a letter that I sent you seeking your participation in a study about cyberbullying and the policy components and practices that you have found, or might find, effective and ineffective in reducing its negative effects on student learning.

Please know that your participation in this study is completely voluntary. Should you choose to participate I would ask to you to complete a demographic questionnaire that takes less than two minutes to complete, a 30-minute audio-recorded interview either in person or over the phone, and 5-10 minutes to read over a summary of your interview responses once your responses have been transcribed to ensure that the researcher accurately recorded your responses.

Please note also that your name, the identity of your school and your school district will remain completely confidential. Once the audio recordings of your interview have been transcribed, all identifying information will be replaced with codes. As such, any responses that you give will be recorded anonymously in the study.

Do you have any questions? Would you like participate in my study? If so, could we please schedule a time, date, and location—in person or via phone—to conduct a 30-minute interview at your convenience.

Script for if the principal agrees to participate in the study:
Thank you very much for your participation in this study. Your input is vitally important to the findings of this study. I look forward to our interview on X, 2012. Should you have
any questions between now and then please contact me at 614.554.1133 or via email at hunley-jenkins.1@osu.edu.

*Script for if the principal agrees to participate in the study:*
Thank you very much for considering participating in this study. Should you change your mind and would like to participate, please contact me at 614.554.1133 or via email at hunley-jenkins.1@osu.edu. Do you know of any other principals in the district serving a configuration of the 6-12 grade span that would like to participate in this study?

Thank you very much.

*Script for leaving the principal a voicemail message if they are unavailable to speak on the phone:*
Hello principal X. My name is Keisha Hunley-Jenkins and I am a doctoral student at The Ohio State University. I am calling in reference to a letter that I sent you seeking your participation in a study about cyberbullying and the policy components and practices that you have found, or might find, effective and ineffective in reducing its negative effects on student learning.

Please know that your participation in this study is completely voluntary. Should you choose to participate I would ask to you to complete a demographic questionnaire that takes less than two minutes to complete, a 30-minute audio-recorded interview either in person or over the phone, and 5-10 minutes to read over a summary of your interview responses once your responses have been transcribed to ensure that the researcher accurately recorded your responses.

Please contact me at 614.554.1133 or via email at hunley-jenkins.1@osu.edu to let me know if you are willing to participate in my study. I will place a follow-up call to you in 1 week to determine whether you would like to participate.

*Script for leaving the principal a written message with the individual who answered the phone:*
My name is Keisha Hunley-Jenkins and I am a doctoral student at The Ohio State University. I am calling in reference to a letter that I sent you seeking your participation in a study about cyberbullying and the policy components and practices that you have found, or might find, effective and ineffective in reducing its negative effects on student learning.

Please know that your participation in this study is completely voluntary. Should you choose to participate I would ask to you to complete a demographic questionnaire that takes less than two minutes to complete, a 30-minute audio-recorded interview either in person or over the phone, and 5-10 minutes to read over a summary of your interview responses once your responses have been transcribed to ensure that the researcher accurately recorded your responses.
responses once your responses have been transcribed to ensure that the researcher accurately recorded your responses.

Please contact me at 614.554.1133 or via email at hunley-jenkins.1@osu.edu to let me know if you are willing to participate in my study. In the even that I do not hear from you within one week, I will place a follow-up call to determine whether you would like to participate.

*The script for additional follow-up phone calls would be the same as the messages above but would reference the all prior phone calls made to each principal.*
Appendix F: Institutional Review Board Approval Letter
Proto

col Number: 2011B0557

Protocol Title: IN THEIR VOICES: LARGE, MIDWESTERN, URBAN SCHOOL DISTRICT PRINCIPAL PERSPECTIVES ABOUT POLICIES AND PRACTICES THAT ARE EFFECTIVE AND INEFFECTIVE IN REDUCING CYBERBULLYING AND ITS DISRUPTION STUDENT LEARNING IN THE SCHOOL SETTING, Philip Daniel, Keisha Hunley-Jenkins, Educational Policy and Leadership

Type of Review: Initial Review—Expedited

IRB Staff Contact: Michael Donovan
Phone: 614-292-6950
Email: donovan.6@osu.edu

Dear Dr. Daniel,

The Behavioral and Social Sciences IRB APPROVED BY EXPEDITED REVIEW the above referenced research. The Board was able to provide expedited approval under 45 CFR 46.110(b)(1) because the research meets the applicability criteria and one or more categories of research eligible for expedited review, as indicated below.

Date of IRB Approval: February 4, 2012
Date of IRB Approval Expiration: January 26, 2013
Expedited Review Category: 7

In addition; the research was approved for a waiver of documentation of the consent process.

If applicable, informed consent (and HIPAA research authorization) must be obtained from subjects or their legally authorized representatives and documented prior to research involvement. The IRB-approved consent form and process must be used. Changes in the research (e.g., recruitment procedures, advertisements, enrollment numbers, etc.) or informed consent process must be approved by the IRB before they are implemented (except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to subjects).

This approval is valid for one year from the date of IRB review when approval is granted or modifications are required. The approval will no longer be in effect on the date listed above as the IRB expiration date. A Continuing Review application must be approved within this interval to avoid expiration of IRB approval and cessation of all research activities. A final report must be provided to the IRB and all records relating to the research (including signed consent forms) must be retained and available for audit for at least 3 years after the research has ended.

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It is the responsibility of all investigators and research staff to promptly report to the IRB any serious, unexpected and related adverse events and potential unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others.

This approval is issued under The Ohio State University’s OHRP Federalwide Assurance #00006378. All forms and procedures can be found on the ORRP website – www.orrp.osu.edu. Please feel free to contact the IRB staff contact listed above with any questions or concerns.

Michael Edwards, PhD, Chair

Behavioral and Social Sciences Institutional Review Board
Appendix G: Participant Demographic Questionnaire
Participant Demographic Questionnaire

1. Please circle you race or ethnicity:

   American Indian/Asian/Black/Hispanic/White
   Alaskan Native Pacific Islander African American Latino

2. Please circle your gender: Female Male

3. What is your age?

4. How many years have you been a principal in your current building?

5. How many other schools have you served as principal?

6. How many total years have you worked in the current school district?

7. What is the highest level of education that you have attained?

8. Do you currently hold principal licensure?
Appendix H: Participant Demographics
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<th>Total Number of Years in District Under Study</th>
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Appendix I: Description of the Research Partners

Research Partner 1 was a White female in her early thirties who earned dual Masters’ Degrees in English and Non-profit Management. She currently works as a Director of Major Gifts at a local non-profit.

Research Partner 2 was an African American, Full Professor in his early forties who was known for qualitative study. This professor also served on the researcher’s dissertation committee.
Appendix J: Codebook
Codebook

CB=Cyberbullying

1. Participant perspectives about Cyberbullying characteristics (1)
   - Descriptions of CB (1A)
   - Cyberinteraction (1B)
   - Frequency/Prevalence/History of occurrence/ Magnitude of CB in the school (1C)
   - Escalation (1D)
   - Other (10)

2. Principal perspectives about why CB occurs/exists (2)
   - Anonymity (believe they won’t get caught or that there are no consequences for cyberbullying) (2A)
   - Lack of supervision (2B)
   - Un/underreported (including fear of retaliation, culture of underreporting, unable to identify CB, fear that technology use will be banned (2C)
   - No expectations/No instruction/education on responsible digital communication (2D)
   - Do not recognize their communications as cyberbullying (2E)
   - Peer pressure (to fit in) (2F)
   - Impersonal/space and time between the communication (no immediate face-to-face confrontation) (2G)
   - Disconnect (students do not realize that their communications constitute cyberbullying, students do not realize the real life harm they are causing to others and to their reputation, impersonal, virtual world separate from real life, their culture says CB is ok/students do not know most communication is expressed in body language/tone and that these things are void in digital communication) (2H)
   - Student access to technology/savvy (2I)
   - Written in code/students know how to hide it (2J)
   - Disinhibition (students feel stronger online, can be more bold because of anonymity, its impersonal, say things they normally would not in person) (2K)
   - CB is a new way to communicate the same old things (ex. students used to do 3-way calling to get students to elicit things, boy/girl issues, girl/girl issues, drama. Now they just do it all on FB) (2L)
• Undetected until reported/manifestations (2M)
• Originates off-campus because of unstructured time at home (2N)
• Difficult for students/parents to understand that off-campus CB has an on-campus effect and that there can be consequences for this expression (2O)
• CB is a symptom of social underdevelopment (moral fiber of students has changed—now lack of regard for others) (2P)
• Generational gap of parents who did not grow up with technology/Students have different sensibilities about privacy, what to share, this is the way students socialize, etc. (2Q)
• Attracts attention (2R)
• Misunderstanding/miscommunication/interpretation of written posts (2S)
• Convenient/easy/fast (2T)
• Cyberworld is almost entirely uninhabited by adults (2U)
• Students too busy to do negative things during the day—it’s been pushed to another space (2V)
• Other (20)

3. **Principal perspectives about how CB affects learning/harms students (3)**
   • Leads to other issues/school disruptions (3A)
   • Time off task/stops student learning (3B)
   • Long-lasting harms/reputation (3C)
   • Cyberinteraction is a bigger issue than cyberbullying (more students engage in cyberinteraction, it leads to violence and other school disruptions, this is the way students interact today, this needs to be addressed in policy) (3D)
   • Student harm (perpetrators/victims) (3E)
   • Diminish school climate (3F)
   • Gets other students involved (3G)
   • Other (30)

4. **Participant perspectives on their authority to address off-campus cyberbullying that has an on-campus effect (4)**
   • Legal duty (4A)
   • Moral duty (4B)
   • Must stop to curtail other issues (4C)
   • No authority to act (4D)
   • Authority to address school manifestations only (4E)
• Threshold to intervene (4F)
• Threshold to discipline (4G)
• Threshold to suspend (including whether they suspend 1st or as a last resort) (4H)
• Parental reaction to principal intervention/discipline (4I)
• Limits on authority (4J)
• Source of authority (4K)
• Other (40)

5. Principal perspectives on policies/programs/procedures/practices effective in address/reducing cyberbullying in their school buildings (5)
   • What should be included in ACB policies (5A)
   • Other (50)

6. Principal perspectives about polices/programs/practices/procedures that are ineffective at reducing cyberbullying (6)
   • Other (60)

7. Participant perspectives about whether the state and district understudy has been slow to adopt anti-cyberbullying policy (7)
   • Other (70)

8. Principal perspectives about whether a state/school district anti-cyberbullying policy could be helpful in educating students (8)
   • Other (80)

9. Participant perspectives about developing/implementing policy at the school building level (9)
   • Discrepancy about developing building-level policy (9A)
   • Impetus for developing building-level policy (9B)
   • Other (90)

10. Principal perspectives on what the public needs to know about cyberbullying (10)
    • Other (100)
Appendix K: Coding Worksheet
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<th>Key Quote Line Numbers</th>
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Appendix L: Quoted Code Worksheet
### Descriptions of CB (1A)

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Participant perspectives about Cyberbullying characteristics</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>Yes, I've experienced CB</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>you start of hear because now bullying and cyberbullying, they're phrases that people are using a lot. But usually it's a one time incident. It's not even something that's continuously going on because we address it.</td>
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<td>sometimes parents are just as much in it as kids are.</td>
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<td>cyberissues but not as far as bullying</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>Limited CB issues, modifications</td>
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<td>it's mostly peer pressure, you know, truthfully it between girls having personality issues, wanting to fit in.</td>
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<td>start putting together the parents immediately. I truly believe if you get the ones who own the thecnolgy, who pay for the technology and get them to have some ownership in what's happening, so getting them involved, getting everyone who's involved...getting those groups together. This could consume entire day, week even.</td>
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<td>187-188</td>
<td>students can do a whole lot of damage in just one sentence</td>
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<td>yeah, I've experienced cyberissues but not as far as bullying</td>
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<td>it always starts in the neighborhood and then it comes here</td>
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<td>our kids live on FB and that's where it happens</td>
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<td>166-178</td>
<td>I don't even recall of an incident that originated here. But because they have to come here and walk by one another, it is going to be my issue, but it's really too big. It's too big for an administrator to tackle. There is absolutely no way, as big as that world wide web, as large as the expectations and mandates that we have not only at our district level but from the state to try to maintain a level of integrity and increase through academic achievement and close achievement gaps and all the reports and make sure we can interpret data and, &quot;Oh, yeah, don't forget you've got to go to the baseball game.&quot; So with all of those things that we have to do, there's absolutely no way as an administrator or myself and my administrative team, can monitor something so big. It's too big to monitor, and most often we won't get wind of it.</td>
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<td>if something occurs as a result of it, then it becomes an issue for us. But most of the time they do whatever they're going to do in the neighborhood, they don't to it here. But, they threaten and one or more parties may become concerned about having to leave and that's when we'll hear about it.</td>
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<td>Usually a parent comes in and they open it up and bring a transcript. I don't have access and I don't have an account, so usually parents have already run the stuff off. Or a child feels threatened and they'll come in and say, &quot;Can I open this up? I need you to see this,&quot; and they open it up. I don't go in and open anybody's account or get anything like that. Usually the kid who's afraid will open their account up and let you read what has been said to him or her. My conversation is always, &quot;Okay, now what's your end of this?&quot; And a lot of times parents will bring in the transcript to us. I say, &quot;Well, this is a big thing. Why didn't you just call the police?&quot; &quot;Well, I can't do that,&quot; but they do that. Everyone wants us to do it and that's why I said it's too big. We just can't do it. We can't do it for everybody.</td>
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### Parents and students report

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<td>We've had an instance where there was testing, making threats via text messages and this was one particular incident between two students. Then there was anonymous phone calls, then there were the Facebook postings to the point where the parents had to take the Facebook accounts down because they were just using their technology in ways that you would never have expected, to the point where the one parent did press charges on the other child, so it became a court case.</td>
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<td>adolescents are quite tech savvy.</td>
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<td>It's big within a small group of girls, or a couple small group of girls. It's primarily the girls.</td>
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<td>I don't know it's an issue just here. Just about every administrator or everybody I talk to says they have issues of it.</td>
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Appendix M: Code Count Worksheet
9. Participant perspectives about developing/implementing policy at the school building level (9)

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<th>Participant</th>
<th>Addressing an issue</th>
<th>Helps with parents</th>
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<th>Build.-prodecures</th>
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