ABSTRACT

Title of Document: A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF
                             MIDDLE SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS'
                             PERCEPTIONS OF CYBERBULLYING

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                             Education

With the increase in students' use of technology—and subsequently social media, email,

and texting—schools have seen a marked increase in instances of cyberbullying. The aim

of this study was to explore six middle schools' implementation of a district

cyberbullying policy in one school system. Each of the six schools had documented

incidents of cyberbullying in the most recent schools years. The researcher collected data,

through one-on-one interviews with principals and administrative designees who

managed student cyberbullying incidents, in order to address the following research

questions: (1) How do administrators approach and process cyberbullying incidents? (2)

What are administrators' perceptions of how cyberbullying impacts the learning

environment? (3) What strategies have middle school administrators employed to reduce

cyberbullying incidents?

The participants noted that cyberbullying negatively affected the learning environment for schools, created unsafe spaces that impeded student learning, and monopolized the time of administrators. Most notably, the results indicate that although schools address incidents of cyberbullying with the district policy in mind, they do not always document or report the incidents to district leaders, as the policy requires. As a result, the district may be unknowingly underreporting cyberbullying incidents to the state. Based on these findings, the researcher recommended that the school district consider streamlining the process by which school administrators document cyberbullying investigations and results, strengthen efforts to educate parents about how to monitor their students' social media use, and provide middle schools with research-based prevention programs to support their efforts to address cyberbullying.

A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF MIDDLE SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS'
PERCEPTIONS OF CYBERBULLYING

by

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Key Definitions

AP (Administrative Procedure) – A set of systems or rules written by District A officials to govern the actions of school system personnel

Bullying – A pattern or behavior when a person repeatedly uses power in an intentional manner, including verbal, physical, or written conduct or intentional electronic communication that creates a hostile learning environment by substantially interfering with a student's educational benefits, opportunities or performance, or with a student's physical or psychological well-being

Bystander – Someone who sees or knows about bullying that is happening to someone, but chooses to do or say nothing

Cyberbullying – The use of electronic communication to harm or harass others in a deliberate, repeated, and hostile manner

PBIS (Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports) – A proactive approach to establishing the behavioral supports and social culture needed for all students in a school to achieve, social, emotional, and academic success

SchoolMax – A school information system used by District A to manage student data, schedules, attendance, and discipline; platform where all incidents of bullying, harassment, and intimidation are entered

Upstander – Someone who sees or knows about bullying that is happening to someone and chooses to intervene on behalf of the bully victim

Section I. Introduction

The 21st century has brought with it a number of educational reforms—from the

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) to the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015

(ESSA). In 2013, The United States Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and

Pensions (November 22, 2013) acknowledged that if all students are going to be prepared

for the careers of the 21st century, all schools must be equipped with (a) computers that

have high-speed Internet connections and (b) educators who have received the necessary

training on how to integrate technology into the classroom.

As school leaders scramble to keep up with changing policies and federal

mandates, many school systems like District A have taken up the charge of preparing

students to enter the globally competitive workforce prepared to keep pace with the

technological advancements of the 21st century. District A's vision states, "District A

will be a GREAT school system recognized for providing education services which

ensure that every student in our diverse school district graduates ready for college and

careers in a global society" (PGCPS Strategic Plan, 2015, p. 3). To accomplish this aim,

District A teachers are trained to use technology to engage students in a learning process

that extends beyond the classroom and facilitates the development of more globally

competitive students.

Technology offers an array of benefits to students both inside and outside of the

classroom; however, despite its instructional advantages, research indicates that increased

access to technology, has caused a significant increase in student use of social media sites

and student distraction. In 2014, the Pew Research Group surveyed more than 1,000

students, aged 13-17, and reported that 56% of these students went online several times a

day, and 12% went online once a day. Of these teens, 91% went online using mobile devices, and 71% reported having a profile on more than one social network site (Lenhart, 2015).

The growing popularity of social media sites among youth has presented new and often complicated challenges within the middle school climate. Preadolescents and adolescents who are not educated about communicating on the Internet often post inappropriate messages, pictures, and videos without understanding that whatever they post will remain accessible for years to come (Williamson, 2010). For the same reason, preadolescents are also more likely to fall victim to predatory or abusive online behavior (Williamson, 2010). According to Hinduja and Patchin (2015), adolescents are "most susceptible to cyberbullying and least likely to have acquired the skills to cope positively with it" (p. xvi). As a result, schools that house these adolescents will have to deal with the issues that may result from instances of cyberbullying that may disrupt the learning environment (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015).

Research on the psychosocial developmental stages of humans has indicated that social relationships are most important to children between the ages of 12 and 19 (Erickson, 1950). To maintain these relationships, adolescents must communicate with one another; and with new advancements in technology, they prefer to interact and communicate with their peers and others via electronic platforms (Lenhart et al., 2011), specifically, the Internet or social media sites (Lenhart, 2015). While the Internet provides opportunities to develop new relationships, and easily maintain existing ones, it also offers users the luxury of anonymity. As Ybarra, Mitchell, Finkelhor, and Wolak (2007) noted, this level of anonymity may cause users to say things that they would never

say if face-to-face with the person. The freedom that this notion of anonymity allows has led to an increasing level of online mistreatment, violence, and aggression through cyberbullying among teens nationwide (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015).

Hinduji and Patchin (2015) defined cyberbullying as "willful and repeated harm inflicted through the use of computers, cell phones, and other electronic devices" (p. 11). Data show that while cyberbullying may begin anonymously in the virtual environment, it can ultimately affect learning within the school walls. Kowalski and Limber (2007), for example, explained that although the majority of cyberbullying incidents originate outside of school, administrators spend a lot of time during school hours trying to address cyberbullying incidents before they adversely affect the learning environment.

Problem Statement

Despite increased efforts by school districts to address cyberbullying, these incidents continue to occur. Examining the implementation of policies that address cyberbullying through the lens of the person responsible for enforcing them is necessary to determine whether the existing anti-cyberbullying policy requires enhancement or is working to serve the purpose for which it was created.

District A's Administrative Procedure 5143 (Bullying, Harassment, or Intimidation), which was most recently updated in October 2017, was written with the sole purpose of

> maintaining a safe school environment that is conducive to learning and to ensure
> that school administrators and staff take measures to promote the prevention of
> bullying, harassment, and intimidation as well as prohibit reprisal or retaliation
> against individuals who report these acts. (PGCPS, 2017, p. 1)

To execute this administrative procedure, administrators must process and investigate all allegations of cyberbullying, implement strategies to prevent cyberbullying, and protect students that report these incidents; all for the sole purpose of maintaining a safe environment for learning. In Administrative Procedure 5143 (PGCPS, 2017), the *Bullying, Harassment, or Intimidation Reporting Form* defines cyberbullying as, "the use of electronic communication to harm or harass others in a deliberate, repeated, and hostile manner" (p. 1). To provide greater insight into how school leaders are putting this administrative procedure into action on the ground, this researcher proposes to examine the implementation of the policy by investigating how middle school administrators approach and process cyberbullying incidents, identifying any strategies that they have employed to reduce the number of cyberbullying incidents, and exploring their perceptions around the impact that cyberbullying has had on the learning environment in their schools.

Context for the problem. Having been a middle school principal for seven years, the researcher has learned to manage the many responsibilities that come with being a building leader. Her primary responsibility is to provide her students the opportunity to engage in a rigorous instructional program that will ultimately prepare them for high school and beyond. In order to implement and monitor the instructional program in the researcher's school building, it was necessary to establish an environment that facilitated the delivery of quality instruction. This effort required that the researcher work diligently to create a balance between monitoring what happened in the classroom (instructional program) and monitoring what happened outside of the classroom (school

environment). An imbalance between these two areas often resulted in low student achievement, staff and students feeling unsafe, and high turnover rates for staff.

Incidents like cyberbullying begin to pull at the thread of the culture and climate of a school, and it is imperative that administrators address these occurrences immediately. In speaking with colleagues, the researcher discovered that bullying has always been an issue that school leaders have had to address in middle school, but technology has made the investigation and prevention of these incidents a challenge. Unlike traditional bullying, where an adult or another student may actually witness the incident, cyberbullying often has no visible indicators. Many cyberbullying incidents originate outside of the school through the use of personal smartphones or home computers. Typically, by the time these incidents come to the attention of an administrator, it is almost too late to prevent violent acts, as by then, the initial acts have turned into an altercation or some sort of disruption to the learning environment.

The researcher has had the unfortunate experience of receiving an email in the middle of the night from a parent in disbelief because her daughter, one of the researcher's students, had attempted to take her life because of an ongoing cyberbullying incident of which neither the mother nor the school was aware. Like many adolescents, her daughter chose to tell no one of the challenges she was facing. Instead, she decided that she could no longer bear reading the cruel texts and Snapchats about her appearance from one of her peers. Fortunately, this student received medical attention, and her life was spared; however, the researcher's numerous conversations with her middle school colleagues indicate that these extreme circumstances are often an administrator's first notification that a cyberbullying incident has taken place. In the case above, the student

demonstrated no visible signs of distress, and she and the bully had no classes together; so no one ever saw them interacting with one another. All of their interactions took place online.

In informal conversations, many of the researcher's colleagues noted that they typically experience cyberbullying incidents at least once per month, but the number of incidents reported by District A to State A does not reflect this level of occurrence. The six middle schools that participated in this study report an average of one cyberbullying incident per year. Although the district's administrative procedure clearly identifies the steps for addressing and attempting to resolve these incidents, this inconsistency in the actual incidents and the number of cyberbullying incidents reported sheds light on the fact that there is no documented evidence that speaks to the effectiveness of how administrators implement the cyberbullying policy. This lack of accurate data further supports the need for an examination of the ways that middle school administrators actually address and investigate cyberbullying in their buildings, how this task has affected the learning environment, and what strategies school leaders have implemented to reduce the number of incidents in their building.

Scope of the Problem

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC; 2014) reported a link between bullying and suicide among school-age children nationally. At present, no data exist on the specific forms of bullying (i.e., physical, verbal, or cyber) that are correlated with suicide; but young people who are bullied report feeling helpless, hopeless, and unsafe, all of which are feelings that increase a young person's risk for suicide-related behaviors. Data also show that students who perceive their learning environment as

unsafe, show lower standardized test scores than their counterparts (Kwong & Davis, 2015). In response to these reports, many states and counties, like District A have developed policies and procedures that outline how schools and administrators should respond to any alleged incidents of traditional or cyberbullying (Stuart-Cassel, 2011, p. 15).

In District A, when a bullying incident occurs, school administrators must facilitate an investigation and document the investigative process. Such an investigation entails speaking with students, parents, and counselors; making arrangements for meetings; facilitating those meetings; documenting incidents and their resolution on the district's *Investigation Form*; entering the incident into the SchoolMax system (a School Information System used by District A to manage student data, schedules, attendance, and discipline); and monitoring the implementation of the resolution. In addition, in accordance with policy, administrators must work within their school community to put systems and structures in place to assist with preventing cyberbullying incidents within the school building. As the steps for cyberbullying investigations appear succinct and straight-forward, there is some level of autonomy for administrators to address incidents in a manner that best fits the need of their school community. For instance, District A outlines in Administrative Procedure 5143, that bully victims and offenders must receive interventions and support. Suggestions for interventions are provided in the procedure, but the administrative procedure reads, "These interventions may include, but are not limited to, the following actions:" (PGCPS, 2017, p.6). This statement leaves room for interpretation and varied implementation procedures by administrators.

In 2015, the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) reported results from the National Crime Victimization Survey, which was administered to approximately 25 million students ages 12-18 years old during the 2012-2013 school year. The data revealed that 6.9% of the students surveyed reported being cyberbullied (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). The results also showed that 5.9% of the 6th grade population reported being a victim of bullying, while 7.0% of 7th graders, and 6.4% of 8th graders reported the same. Less than half of the participating 6th, 7th, and 8th graders who experienced bullying reported these incidents to an adult (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Research shows that children are reluctant to get an adult involved in cyberbullying incidents for fear of retaliation (Kennedy, Russom, & Kevorkian, 2012).

Figures 1 and 2 depict the age distribution of both bullies and victims of bullying within State A for the 2015-2016 school year, as reported by the State A Department of Education (SADE). The highest number of incidents for both bullies and bullying victims occurred among youth between the ages of 11 and 14, the typical age of middle school students (MSDE, 2016). For this reason, the researcher chose to focus this study primarily on middle schools in District A.
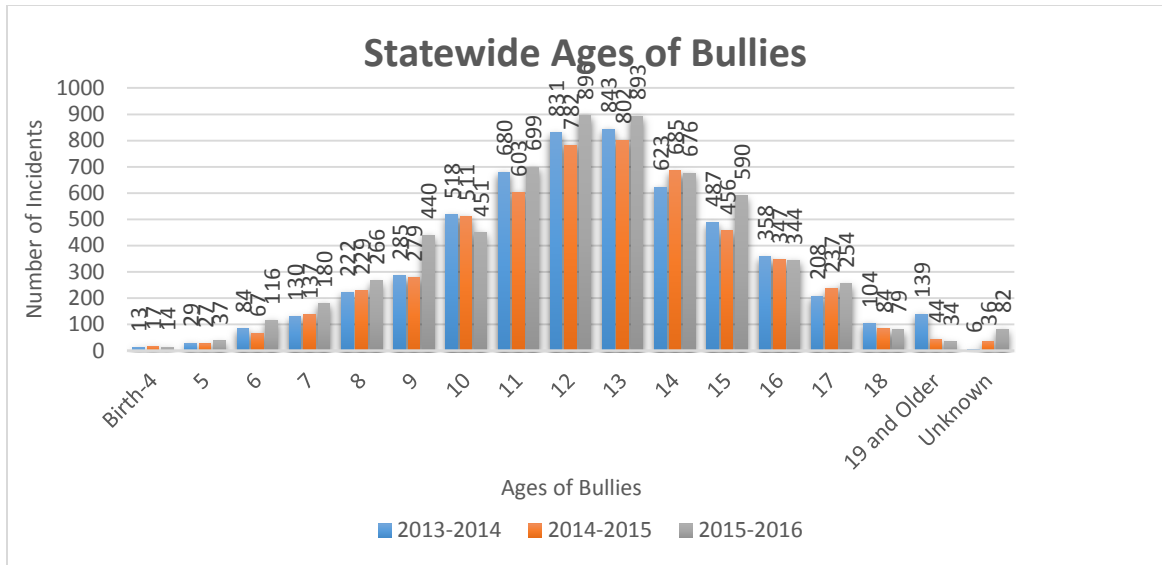
Figure 1. Number of incidents per age of bullies within State A from SY 2014-2016 (MSDE, 2016)
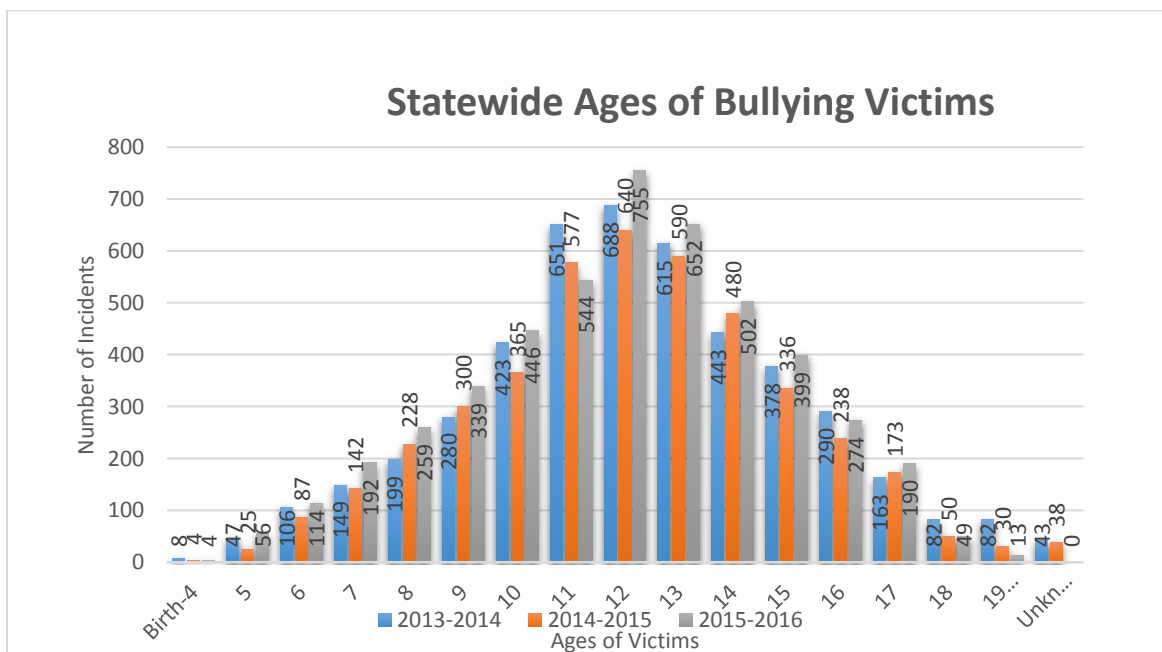
Figure 2. Number of incidents per age of bullying victims within State A from SY 2014-2016 (MSDE, 2016)

Reported incidents of cyberbullying in State A and District A. Since school year (SY) 2011-2012, SADE has captured information on reported bullying incidents in the state and has detailed the collected data in the *Report to the State A General Assembly on Incidents Reported under the Safe Schools Reporting Act of 2005*, published on March

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31st of each year. SADE collects the data contained in this report from each local school system in December of each year.

District A began documenting cyberbullying incidents during SY 2013-2014. Prior to this year, all bullying incidents via technology were categorized under the code *electronic communications*. While the SADE *cyberbullying* description code encompasses incidents that take place via social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter (MSDE, 2016); the *electronic communication* description code includes bullying that occurs via email, text, or sexting (MSDE, 2016). For example, in a case where a cyberbully may use Twitter to post rumors about someone; the harassment may continue with other students commenting or joining in on the conversation via text, which leads to the viral spread of a rumor with the intent to harass or intimidate another student. A school administrator may code the incident in this example using the SADE *cyberbullying* and the *electronic communication* description codes. District A defines cyberbullying as, "The use of electronic communication to harm or harass others in a deliberate, repeated, and hostile manner" (PGCPS, 2017). As a result, the researcher considered both the SADE *cyberbullying* and *electronic communication* codes when capturing cyberbullying data for District A and when referring to cyberbullying incidents in this school district throughout this inquiry.

Figure 3 illustrates data provided by the District A Division of Student Services and shows that the number of bullying and harassment incidents reported to SADE by District A increased from SY 2011-2012 to SY 2013-2014 by 91, and then again by 190 from SY 2014-2015 to SY 2015-2016. These data include all types of bullying and harassment, including cyberbullying and bullying via electronic communication.
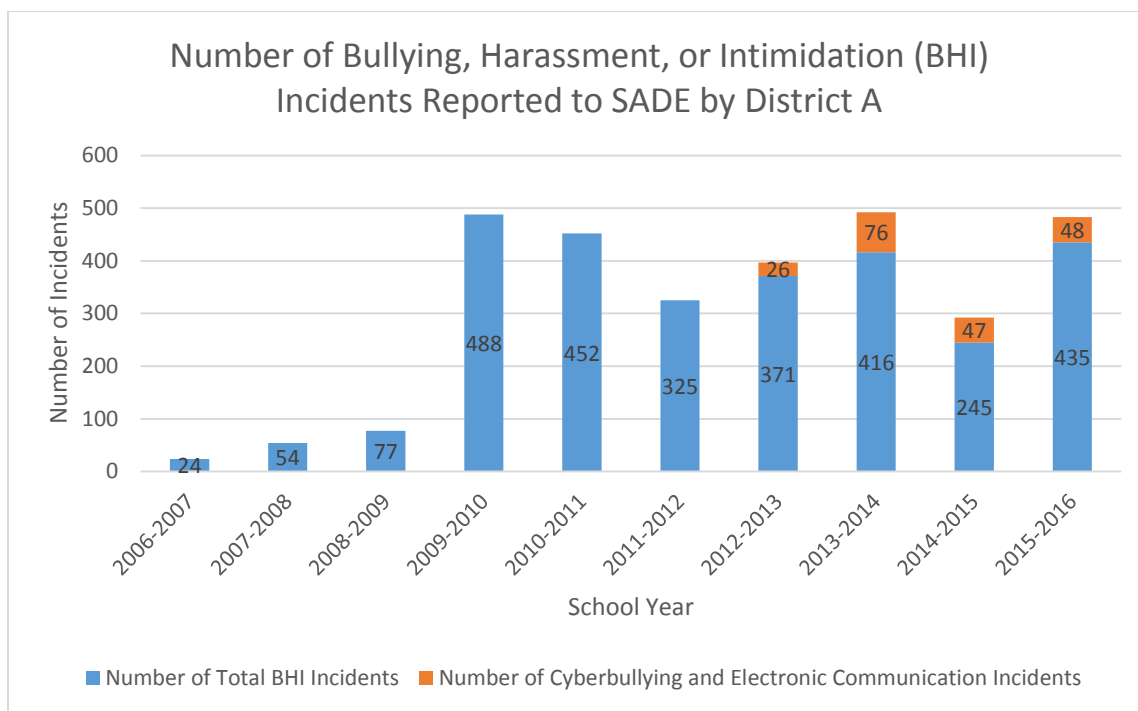
Figure 3. Number of bullying, harassment, or intimidation incidents reported by District A to SADE from SY 2007-2016 (MSDE, 2010-2016)

Figure 3 shows that during SY 2014-2015, the number of incidents decreased by 171 in District A, going from 416 in SY 2013-2014 to 245 incidents reported. This decline may have resulted from the implementation of the July 2013 version of Administrative Procedure 5143. It was during this time that District A introduced the cyberbullying code which required revisiting the administrative procedure with administrators. A decrease was also seen in SY 2014-2015 in the number of cyberbullying and bullying via electronic communication incidents reported. Incidents went from 76 in SY 2013-2014 to 47 the following school year. Although the number of overall occurrences of reported bullying and harassment decreased in SY 2014-2015 for District A, they rose again for SY 2015-2016 while the number of reported incidents of cyberbullying and bullying via electronic communication remained steady, with a difference of no more than two incidents over the last two reported school years (see

Figure 4). Despite the implementation of district policy, school efforts to decrease the

number of these incidents have not been successful over the most recent school years

(MSDE, 2016).
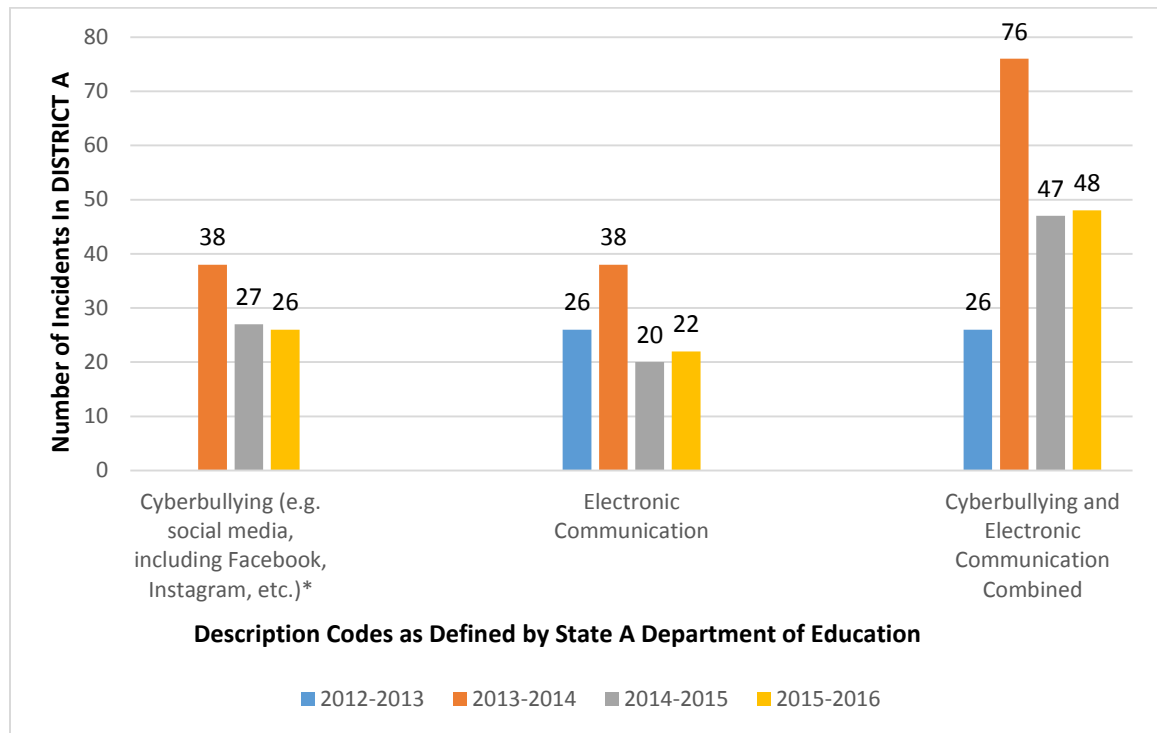
Figure 4. Number of bullying, harassment, and intimidation incidents with description
codes of cyberbullying and electronic communication reported by District A to SADE SY
2012-2016 (PGCPS, 2017).
*New description category added in SY 2013-2014

Figure 4 depicts the number of bullying incidents coded as cyberbullying and

bullying via electronic communication in District A. For SY 2015-2016, the number of

cyberbullying and electronic communication incidents totaled 48 incidents out of a total

of 435 overall bullying and harassment incidents for the year. These data indicate that

over 10% of the bullying incidents in District A captured for SY 2015-2016 involved

cyberbullying or bullying via electronic communication. In addition, for SY 2014-2015,

19% (n=47) of the bullying incidents were attributed to these two description codes,

compared to 18% (n=76) and 7% (n=26) in SY 2013-2014 and SY 2012-2013, respectively (PGCPS, 2017).

Consequences of Not Addressing the Problem

As noted previously, cyberbullying can result in long term psychosocial effects for individuals; and because school communities are comprised of these individuals, it follows that cyberbullying can negatively affect a school community, as well. This section will detail how cyberbullying incidents impact individuals and, ultimately, the overall learning environment within the school building.

Impact on cyberbullies and their victims. Cyberbullying is a fairly new phenomenon, but based on the increasing use of technology in society, the increasing number of reported cyberbullying incidents, and the unfortunate number of suicides related to cyberbullying, some researchers have labeled cyberbullying an "epidemic" that cannot be ignored (Gomez, 2010; Yu, 2013). Hase, Goldberg, Smith, Stuck, and Campain (2015) found that many students who reported being cyberbullied had also been victims of traditional bullying. This finding confirmed Hinduji and Patchin's (2008) earlier conclusion that 85% of cyberbullying victims had also experienced traditional forms of bullying at some point. These data alone indicate that some students could be experiencing bullying on an around-the-clock basis, as an individual does not have to be present to invoke harm through cyberbullying.

Data indicate that students who are victims of bullying normally experience long-term psychological problems, which can include loneliness, reduced self-esteem, increased substance abuse, social anxiety, and depression (Hawker & Boulton, 2000; Loeber & Dishion, 1983; Magnusson, Stattin, & Duner, 1983). Beren and Li (2005)

concluded that these individuals eventually become withdrawn and disengaged from classroom instruction. As symptoms progress, students eventually begin to experience poor attendance and heightened risks of suicidal ideations, and some of them resort to actual suicide attempts (Cook, Williams, Guerra, Kim, & Sadek, 2010).

Research also indicates that victims of bullying are not the only ones at risk of negative outcomes. Anti-social behaviors exhibited by bullies place them at an increased risk of becoming non-productive citizens (Haynie et al., 2001). Haynie et al. found that children who were bullies were at an increased risk of becoming involved in delinquent behaviors, crime, and alcohol abuse as they got older. Similarly, Olweus (1993) concluded that bullies identified by the age of eight were five times more likely to have serious criminal records by the age of 30.

Wachs (2012) also found that cyberbullies tended to exhibit a higher degree of moral disengagement. Wachs (2012) defined moral disengagement as a person's ability to detach their actions from their moral responsibilities or conscience. As Menesini et al. (2003) explained, a cyberbully can inflict harm upon someone without having it adversely affect their conscience or moral compass. This disconnect is usually predicated on the bully's lack of positive peer interactions over the years, which results in their having fewer friends during a time when social relationships and school satisfaction are critical (Wachs, 2012). Barboza et al. (2009) revealed that, due to the lack of meaningful relationships, bullies tend to have weak emotional support systems from peers, teachers, and parents and tend to be a victim of the low expectations of those around them (Barboza et al., 2009).

While cyberbullies are morally disengaged, students who report being bullied exhibit a lower level of connectedness to the school community (Cunningham, 2007). These students do not feel a sense of belonging or a desire to engage in the social aspects of school (O'Brennan, Bradshaw, & Sawyer, 2009). As students spend a large amount of their day in school, the social interactions experienced during that time can influence their perception of their learning environment (Bayar & Uçanok, 2012). This notion is particularly salient for middle school students, as adolescents are most concerned with peer relationships (Erikson, 1950).

Impact on the learning environment. Gruenert (2008), of the National Association of Elementary School Principals, defined school climate as "the attitude of an organization" (p.57), and described culture as "a common set of expectations that evolve into unwritten rules" (p.57). In 2010, Arne Duncan explained that cyberbullying influenced the culture and climate of a school building and could ultimately have an impact on students' performance within the classroom. Macneil, Prater, and Busch (2009) shared similar findings, stating that students cannot thrive academically in an environment where they do not feel safe. Students are better able to focus on learning in a school environment that has fewer behavioral incidents and that the students perceive to be orderly and disciplined (Sulak, 2014). In fact, Sulak noted that "weekly disorder appears to have the largest effect on academic achievement on a campus" (p. 680). Cyberbullies contribute to creating an unsafe environment for their victims, which ultimately affects the culture and climate of the school.

Research indicates that the culture and climate of a learning environment can encourage or discourage bullying behavior. Salmivalli and Isaacs (2005), for example,

found that students could escalate bullying behavior by encouraging and validating the acts of bullies. In these types of school communities, some students may perceive adults in the building as being unable to protect victims of bullying (Cunningham, 2007). Conversely, students can oppose bullying behavior by creating a supportive environment that promotes acceptance of others (Bayar & Uçanok, 2012).

District policies and procedures that address bullying are designed to help school leaders create environments that are safe for learning. Unfortunately, there is little data on the degree to which these policies achieve their intended aims. The present study adds to the existing body of knowledge on the implementation of cyberbullying policies by examining middle school administrators' perceptions of the ways that cyberbullying has affected the learning environment in their schools and identifying the strategies they have employed to reduce its effects on the school environment.

Impact on the principal's role as an instructional leader. The school's role in the prevention of cyberbullying is important to maintaining safe school environments that are conducive to effective teaching and learning, the assurance of which is an integral part of a school administrator's responsibilities (Hallinger & Murphy, 2012; Hinduji & Patchin, 2015). As incidents of cyberbullying continue, administrators must address these incidents, as they are counterproductive to any efforts to improve the school environment and keep students feeling safe (Hallinger & Murphy, 2012). Providing a safe and supportive school environment is a core element of an administrator's job, as is engaging teachers and students in a rigorous academic program (MacNeil et al., 2009). Cyberbullying has added another layer to the myriad of issues that administrators must balance while keeping teaching and learning at the forefront (Kowalski & Limber, 2007).

Hallinger and Murphy (2012) described instructional leadership as the engine for school improvement; and with increased accountability for classroom instruction mandated by the Every Student Succeeds Act (USDE, 2015), it is imperative that principals' fulfill their role as instructional leaders. Cyberbullying incidents can contribute to school leaders becoming overwhelmed with addressing student behaviors, which can eventually lead to feelings of unfulfilled expectations, disappointment, guilt, and burnout (Barth, 1990; Donaldson, 2006). School leaders who are accountable for school improvement must have more practical solutions to managing the myriad of distractions that they encounter each day that pull them away from their instructional management. Providing information to district leaders about how administrators investigate and process cyberbullying incidents may inform decisions on district-wide policies, particularly those related to cyberbullying and technology-use. There is a gap in the knowledge base on administrators' perceptions about how these cyberbullying incidents have impacted the learning environment, which in turn has impacted their role as an instructional leader.

Prior Attempts to Address the Issue

As students spend more time online, cyberbullying creates a growing dilemma that competes with District A's goal of outstanding academic achievement for all students (PGCPS, 2015, p. 12). The Chief Executive Officer for District A has collaborated with district leaders to design a district-wide strategic plan that focuses on high academic achievement for students while establishing systems that address factors, like student safety, that may affect academic achievement. The following sections provide details about the strategic plan and the systems the district has in place to support this plan.

These supports include the administrator's evaluation tool, adopted administrative procedures, professional development, and district level supports for school.

District A's strategic plan. Figure 5 shows that one of the focus areas for District A is providing a "Safe and Supportive Environment." The plan further stated that these supportive learning environments should be "free of conditions that foster fear, harm or other distractions from student learning or optimal productivity for employees" (PGCPS, 2015, p. 14). Cyberbullying is a distraction from student learning that can affect the mental health of its victims (Hase et al., 2015).
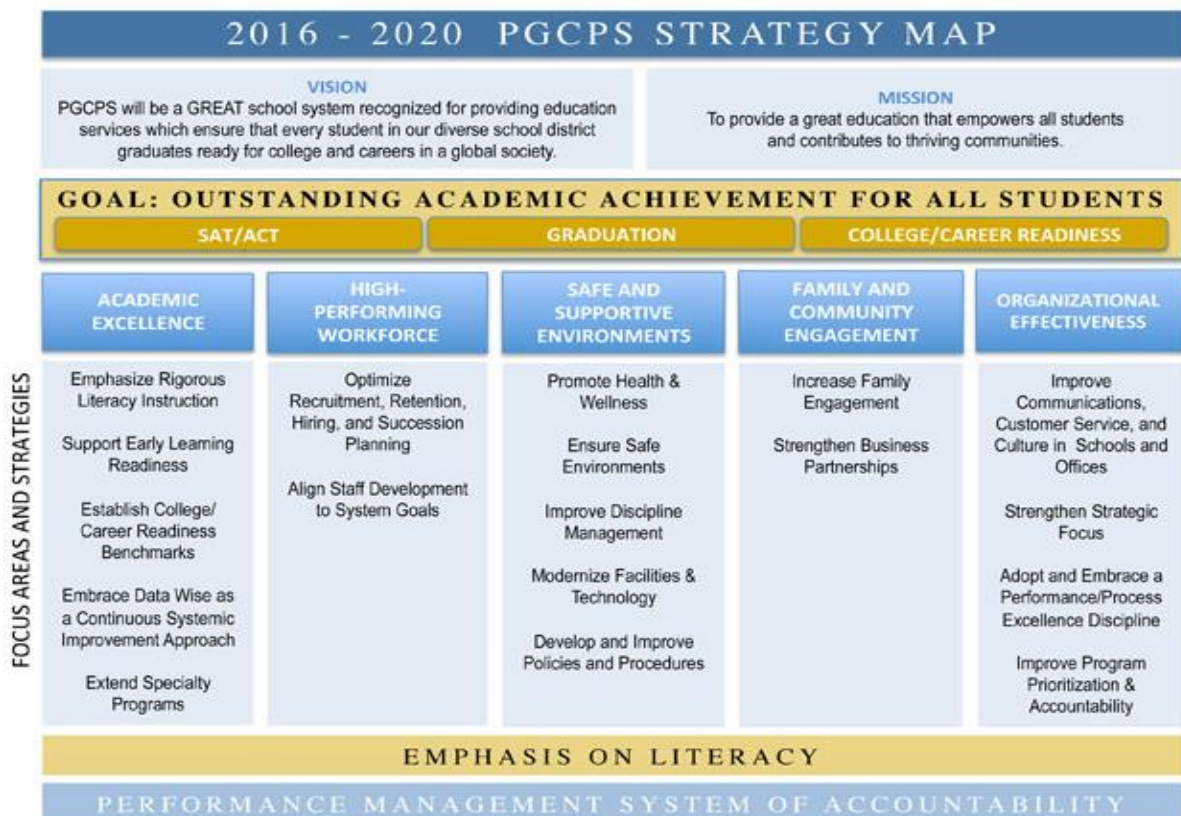
Figure 5. District A Strategy Map (PGCPS Strategic Plan, 2015, p. 12)

District A's evaluation of administrators. District A utilizes an evaluation tool for all administrators that focuses on professional growth and facilitates improved outcomes. The professional growth portion of the evaluation is aligned to the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (National Policy Board for Educational

Administration, 2015). Standard 5 of the evaluation tool (Community of Care and Support for Students) requires school leaders to "[build] and maintain a safe, caring, and healthy school environment that meets the academic, social, emotional, and physical needs of each student," and "[create] and sustain a school environment in which each student is known, accepted and valued, trusted and respected, cared for, and encouraged to be an active and responsible member of the school community" (MSDE, 2017). Because cyberbullying incidents influence the learning environment for and safety of students, the district holds administrators accountable for addressing these incidents; and this expectation is reflected in their evaluation tool (see Figure 6).

District A's administrative procedures. District A has made several attempts to address issues of cyberbullying inside and outside of school buildings by developing, implementing, and revising policies designed to create safe learning spaces for students. To address concerns around misuse of electronic communication and social media, bullying, intimidation, and harassment, District A has updated all of its administrative procedures around these topics. The sections that follow briefly discuss each of the relevant procedures.

Administrative Procedure (AP) 5143: Bullying, Harassment, or Intimidation. The District A Board of Education adopted an anti-bullying and harassment policy (AP 5143) originally in 2009. SADE updated requirements for this procedure most recently in October 2017. The recent SADE update resulted in the distribution of a revised *Bullying, Harassment, or Intimidation Reporting* and *Investigation* Forms to local educational agencies. Prior to this update District A had last revised AP 5143 (see

Appendix A) in August 2016. According to District A (2017), the purpose of this

administrative procedure is as follows:

> [To] maintain a safe school environment that is conducive to learning and ensures
>
> that school administrators and staff take measures to promote the prevention of
>
> bullying, harassment, and intimidation as well as prohibit reprisal or retaliation
>
> against individuals who report these acts. (p. 1)

Professional Standards for Educational Leaders
Standard 1. Mission, Vision, and Core Values Effective educational leaders develop, advocate, and enact a shared mission, vision, and core values of high-quality education, academic success, and the well-being of *each* student.
Standard 2. Ethics and Professional Norms Effective educational leaders act ethically and according to professional norms to promote *each* student's academic success and well-being.
Standard 3. Equity and Cultural Responsiveness Effective educational leaders strive for equity of educational opportunity and culturally responsive practices to promote *each* student's academic success and well-being.
Standard 4. Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment Effective educational leaders develop and support intellectually rigorous and coherent systems of curriculum, instruction, and assessment to promote *each* student's academic success and well-being.
Standard 5. Community of Care and Support for Students Effective educational leaders cultivate an inclusive, caring, and supportive school community that promotes the academic success and well-being of *each* student.
Standard 6. Professional Capacity of School Personnel Effective educational leaders develop the professional capacity and practice of school personnel to promote *each* student's academic success and well-being.
Standard 7. Professional Community for Teachers and Staff Effective educational leaders foster a professional community of teachers and other professional staff to promote *each* student's academic success and well-being.
Standard 8. Meaningful Engagement of Families and Community Effective educational leaders engage families and the community in meaningful, reciprocal, and mutually beneficial ways to promote *each* student's academic success and well-being.
Standard 9. Operations and Management Effective educational leaders manage school operations and resources to promote *each* student's academic success and well-being.
Standard 10. School Improvement Effective educational leaders act as agents of continuous improvement to promote *each* student's academic success and well-being.

Figure 6. Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (National Policy Board for
Educational Administration 2015, 2015, p. 9-18.

In the updated document, District A (PGCPS, 2017) established the following definition for bullying, harassment, and intimidation:

> [Any] intentional conduct, including verbal, physical or written contact, or an intentional electronic communication, that creates a hostile educational environment by substantially interfering with a student's educational benefits, opportunities or performance, or with a student's physical or psychological well-being. (p. 1)

The district then defined cyberbullying as "the use of electronic communication to harm or harass others in a deliberate, repeated, and hostile manner" (PGCPS, 2017, p. 1).

The new guideline mandates that schools report any allegations of student bullying, harassment, or intimidation using the *Bullying, Harassment, or Intimidation Reporting Form* (see Appendix B). After completing the form, schools must then investigate the allegations and report the results of the investigation on the *Bullying, Harassment, or Intimidation School Investigation Form* (see Appendix C). After completing the investigation, administrators must submit copies of all paperwork (the *Bullying, Harassment, or Intimidation Reporting Form*, the *Bullying, Harassment, or Intimidation School Investigation Form*, notes, or any additional evidence) to the Office of Student Engagement and School Support within five school days (PGCPS, 2017).

The 2017 revision of the *Bullying, Harassment, or Intimidation Reporting Form* includes (a) updated definitions of bullying, harassment, and intimidation, as defined by the state; (b) an added definition of cyberbullying; and (c) an update to the electronic communication category, which now includes Facebook, Twitter, Vine, Snapchat, Periscope, kik, and Instagram. The county also revised the form to use the word "alleged"

consistently, to indicate that an investigation had not been completed to determine the validity of the claims noted on the form. It is important to note that although some investigations may reveal that no cyberbullying occurred, the investigative process must still be documented by administrators and submitted to the Office of Student Engagement and School Support. In cases where the bullying allegation has been unfounded, students may still require support from school personnel. Lastly, the new form requires the reporter and administrator to denote whether the incident occurred via Internet on the school property or via Internet outside of the school property (PGCPS, 2017).

AP 5180: Student Use of Social Media in Schools (see Appendix D)**.** District A established AP 5180, a relatively new administrative procedure addressing the use of social media in schools, in August 2013 and revised it in August 2016. This procedure was the first to mention and define the term *cyberbullying* (AP 5180, 2016). This guideline details how and when students can use social media and outlines the consequences for students who engage in inappropriate use that disrupts the learning environment. In addition, the procedure advises parents to monitor their child's use of social media outside of school to prevent school disruptions. The policy indicates that students can be issued discipline in accordance with the Student Rights and Responsibilities Handbook if their actions outside of school impact the learning environment. Although the goal of this procedure is to eliminate, or at a minimum decrease, cyberbullying incidents; there has been no documented information about the effectiveness of the policy and its implementation within the school district.

AP 5132: Portable Electronic Devices (see Appendix E)**.** AP 5132 states that while students are encouraged to use their personal electronic devices (smartphones) for

instructional use, as permitted by the classroom teacher, (a) the use of these devices is not to interrupt the learning environment and (b) the school is not liable for any theft, damage, or loss of these devices when possessed by students on school property.

All administrative procedures are located on the District A website for all staff members to access. Administrators must also review certain important administrative procedures with all staff members at the beginning of each school year. AP 5143, the Bullying, Harassment, or Intimidation Procedure, is one such policy.

Mandated professional development. All staff members, substitutes, and volunteers must watch a series of videos throughout the school year that further explain each of the aforementioned administrative procedures. All staff members, substitutes, and volunteers must then complete and pass an online evaluation that assesses their knowledge of the information shared. If a staff member does not pass the assessment, he must view the video again and retake the test. A report of staff completion and quiz scores are available for school and district administrators (Safe Schools Training, 2018). Volunteers must show proof of completion of this online series, along with proof of fingerprinting, prior to working within any District A school.

District A District Office Support

A number of district offices have played a notable role in providing support for the implementation of the aforementioned administrative procedures and for school and district-wide efforts to address, and ultimately prevent bullying. The Office of Student Engagement and School Support and the Office of Student Services have played a role in fostering the district's anti-bullying efforts.

Office of Student Engagement and School Support. In 2009, after the adoption

of AP 5143, the Office of Student Engagement and School Support worked with school

communities to raise awareness about bullying and to provide training for stakeholders.

This effort involved the training of principals, nurses, pupil personnel workers,

counselors, school psychologists, cafeteria staff, bus drivers, and parents about the

serious nature of bullying. The office staff also provided schools with printed resources to

use as supports for their prevention efforts, Bully Free Zone stickers for bus drivers, a

Stop Bullying Now video toolkit for counselors, and a declaration of November 15-19 as

Anti-Bullying Week (PGCPS Bullying Briefing, 2010).

Office of Student Services. Because of concerns expressed by school

administrators and parents, the Executive Director of the District A Office of Student

Services (OSS) has made bullying a priority for the department (Executive Director,

personal communication, September 28, 2016). According to the Executive Director, the

district has sought out grant dollars to support a bullying prevention program, which

would address both traditional bullying and cyberbullying, for implementation

throughout the school system. In addition, the OSS has hired a part-time employee to

focus solely on addressing issues of bullying within the district. These investments in

personnel and funding supports the school system's efforts to decrease incidents of

bullying throughout the county. Although principals still follow the investigative process

included in AP 5143, this part-time person offers support to schools around bullying

prevention, intervention, and community awareness.

While District A has developed comprehensive administrative procedures that

align with the CEO's vision and mission for the school system, these guidelines fail to

establish parameters for monitoring the implementation and effectiveness of procedures like AP 5143, which defines and addresses bullying, harassment, and intimidation. OSS has stated that, at present, there is no way to monitor the implementation of the policy as it is intended (Executive Director, personal communication, September 28, 2016). The data that this office reports to SADE is reported from school administrators, and the accuracy of this data cannot be confirmed. To address this void in information, the present research study provides insights from the administrators charged with implementing the policy about (a) how they approach and investigate cyberbullying incidents, (b) the impact these efforts have had on their learning environment, and (c) the strategies that they have used to reduce the number of incidents within their school building.

Literature Review

According to Stuart-Cassel (2011), bullying in schools has been a concern for school communities for over 15 years. The issue of bullying was brought back to the forefront of discussions about educational policy and practice after the Columbine High School shooting in 1999, when two student gunmen killed 12 students and a teacher and wounded 24 others (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015). Both perpetrators of the infamous Columbine shooting reported that they had been bullied at school. This incident resulted in new legislation in Maryland, such as the Safe Schools Reporting Act of 2005, which requires school districts within the state to report any acts of bullying, harassment, or intimidation to the Maryland General Assembly (MSDE, 2016).

After the Columbine incident, schools began to address traditional forms of bullying with the hope of preventing such tragic endings for students (Stuart-Cassel,

2011). As technology use by students increased, however, the methods that students used to harass or bully their peers changed. As Hinduja and Patchin (2015) noted, with technology, bullies can maintain a level of anonymity and reach a much larger audience than traditional forms of bullying allow. This review of the extant literature will explore the research on students' exposure to cyberbullying; the characteristics of cyberbullies and their victims; strategies for detecting cyberbullying; the administrator's role as a cyberbullying investigator, reporter, and monitor; the impact of cyberbullying on the learning environment; the principals' role as an instructional leader; and cyberbullying laws and policies.

Exposure to cyberbullying. Lenhart et al. (2011) found that about 95% of all American teens, aged 12-17, spent time online, and 80% of those online teens were users of social media sites. These social media sites are places where teens post information about their social activities. The Pew Research Center's Internet and American Life Project, in partnership with the Family Online Safety Institute collected the following data on social media-using teens through interviews, focus groups, and telephone surveys:

- 88% of social media-using teens had witnessed other people being mean or cruel on social media sites;

- 25% had an experience on a social network site that resulted in a face-to-face argument or confrontation with someone;

- 13% had felt nervous about going to school the day after a negative interaction on social media;

- 8% had gotten into physical fights with someone else because of something that happened on a social networking site; and

- 6% had gotten in trouble at school because of an experience on a social networking site (Lenhart et al., 2011).

In 2003, SADE adopted the Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR) 13A.01.04 *School Safety*, which acknowledged (a) that bullying and harassment had a direct impact on school safety and (b) that creating and maintaining a safe learning environment was a priority for all schools. According to NCES (2013), over 2,000,000 students in the United States, aged 12-18, reported being cyberbullied; and over half of these cyberbullying incidents reportedly occurred through unwanted contact via text messaging (NCES, 2013).

Data indicate that a number of other countries are also experiencing this growing trend in cyberbullying. Holfeld and Leadbeater (2015), for example, found that Canadian students as young as Grade 4 had experienced incidents of cyberbullying simply because of their access to the Internet. The researchers conducted a national survey of 5,436 Canadian students, and the results revealed that the majority of children in Grades 4 through 6 reported accessing the Internet via a desktop computer at home, portable computer, gaming console, iPod/mp3 player, or mobile (smart) phone. Among these children, 30% had a Facebook account, and 16% had a Twitter account. Access to smart phones also increased during these early grades, with 24% of fourth graders, 31% of fifth graders, and 38% of sixth graders reporting ownership (Holfeld & Leadbeater, 2015). The researchers concluded that as the school year progressed, and the fifth and sixth graders communicated with one another using technology, there was an increased

likelihood of their being exposed to incidents of cyberbullying (Holfeld & Leadbeater, 2015).

　　Characteristics of cyberbullies and victims. A review of the literature revealed a plethora of research about the characteristics of students who are most likely to experience cyberbullying—as a victim, bully, or both. Research has shown that there are unique commonalities and risk factors among students who have experienced and/or perpetrated acts of cyberbullying, such as (a) time online, (b) gender, and (c) past incidents of cyberbullying (Kowalski, 2007; Stewart & Fritsch, 2011; Ybarra et al., 2007).

　　Time online. Research indicates that the amount of time that children spend on the Internet can significantly affect the likelihood of their exposure to cyberbullying (Stewart & Fritsch, 2011). According to Lenhart et al. (2011), students of all ages use technology, and as society becomes increasingly technology-driven, access to the Internet and Internet-accessible devices continues to rise. In a similar study, Livingstone and Smith (2014) found that 95% of adolescents, aged 12-17, had Internet access, and 74% had mobile access. Likewise, Madden, Lenhart, Druggan, Cortesi, and Gasser (2013) found that 78% of teens in the same age group had a cell phone, with 47% of those owning a smartphone.

　　Holfeld and Leadbeater (2015) concluded that students' use of smartphones and Internet accessible technology increased as they get older. Burnham and Wright (2012) stated that middle school students tend to have the most experience with cyberbullying because of this increased use of technology, a decrease in the monitoring of their online activity by an adult, and the lack of communication between adults and children.

Conversely, Ybarra et al. (2007) found that students who had a well-established emotional bond with their parent or guardian were more likely to be closely monitored while on the Internet and were more likely to receive information about appropriate and safe online behaviors.

Gender. Research has also shown that gender is a significant determining factor in the likelihood that a student will experience some form of bullying. Wang et al. (2009), for example, concluded that middle school females were more likely to be bullied and become a bully than were their male counterparts. Similarly, Kowalski (2007) found that 15.1% of 1,915 girls surveyed reported being victims of bullying, and 9.5% reported being both a victim and a bully at some point. In the same study, 11.1% of 1,852 boys surveyed reported being bullied online, while 6.8% reported being both bullied and a bully (Kowalski, 2007). Kowalski and Limber (2007) noted that girls tended to participate in more indirect forms of aggression and communicated more online with others because the online forum removed any concerns about physical appearance (p. S28).

Past incidences of bullying. The literature also revealed that a child was more likely to experience cyberbullying if he had previously been a cyberbullying victim. Ybarra et al. (2007) asserted that most victims of bullying eventually became cyberbullies themselves. Data show that this correlation may result from the fact that victims and perpetrators of bullying share similar characteristics. Moore et al. (2011) found that both bullies and victims of bullying tended to (a) exhibit low self-esteem and poor social skills, (b) experience rejection or isolation from their peers, and (c) have very little knowledge about how to navigate social problems. As a result, when these incidents

of bullying occur, victims typically are not equipped to respond responsibly or negotiate the social situation, which adds to the likelihood that they will eventually become the bully themselves (Moore et al, 2011).

Detecting cyberbullying. Researchers have found that students are often conflicted about seeking adult support when cyberbullying incidents occur, which only frustrates the efforts of administrators to address the issue. Hinduja and Patchin (2015) concluded that student victims chose not to inform adults because they believed that adults did not understand technology or were likely to overreact about the situation. In a similar study, Burnham and Wright (2012) found that a number of students felt as if they needed guidance and direction about how to deal with cyberbullying issues, so they felt comfortable going to adults for support; but many times, even when they wanted help, they perceived that their parents or teachers were too overwhelmed or too emotionally unavailable to help. The researchers concluded that these perceptions often led students to seek support from their peers instead of an adult (Burnham & Wright, 2012).

Stauffer, Heath, Coyne, and Ferrin (2012) found that teachers were less likely to intervene in reported cyberbullying incidents that occurred away from school. Although these cyberbullying incidents may have affected students while they were in school, the teachers believed that they had little or no responsibility to intervene when the incident took place off campus. Some of the teachers were also hesitant to report incidents that occurred away from school for fear of retaliation from parents or students (Stauffer et al, 2012, p. 364).

The conflicted feelings that students experience about reporting cyberbullying, coupled with inconsistent reporting of off-campus cyberbullying incidents, ultimately affects a school's implementation of effective prevention strategies.

The impact of cyberbullying on the school environment. Research has shown that incidents of cyberbullying are commonly initiated off of school grounds (Kowalski, Limber, & Agatson, 2008), but many school administrators must still respond to them if repercussions of the incidents are evident within the school environment. District A's AP 5180: *Use of Social Media in Schools* states the following:

> [During non-school hours], students receiving inappropriate, threatening or harassing electronic communication/imagery that will impede their ability or that of their peers to participate in their educational program must immediately inform their parents; and on the next business day inform the school administration and/or their grade level counselor for appropriate intervention. (PGCPS, 2016, p. 4)

This portion of the administrative procedure places the onus upon the student victim to initiate the reporting of the cyberbullying incident. However, Hinduja and Patchin (2015) noted that 80% of cyberbullying victims do not tell an adult, and over 25% of them do not tell anyone. Daniel and Greytak (2011) identified several reasons why students fail to report cyberbullying incidents:

- embarrassment;
- inability to properly categorize what is happening to them;
- fear of retaliation;

- lack of relationship with an adult that they trust and in whom they can confide;

- the belief that nothing can be done; and/or

- concern 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.

When students fail to report cyberbullying incidents, schools are unable to intervene, leaving the opportunity for the school learning environment to become toxic, which can have a negative impact on the overall culture and climate of a school. For instance, schools have become more inclusive environments, and students with disabilities are at a high risk of becoming victims of cyberbullying initiated by their mainstream counterparts (Beer, Hallet, Hawkins, & Hewitson, 2017). Kowalski et al. (2016) also found that students with disabilities who are being bullied are likely to retaliate by bullying because of the perception that there are no alternative responses. Beer et al. (2017) explained that many students with disabilities report having their disability or academic challenges posted online as a part of the cyberbullying; which, Shultz and Hart (2014) noted, often opens the door for other students to chime-in, be a bystander in the matter, or be an "upstander" and risk being bullied for coming to the aid of a peer. Gini (2008) stressed that this division among students within the school community affects the climate of the school; and if it is not addressed by an adult, it can leave students feeling frustrated, scared, and thinking that the behavior is morally acceptable because no one intervened.

Typically, when students are not happy, parents are not happy. Parents need to feel confident in knowing that their child is safe when they are in school (Bryk &

Schneider, 2003). Research by Hester and Fenn (2014) found that parents understood that schools must address cyberbullying issues, but Borawski, Ievers-Lanis, Lovegreen, and Trapi (2003) shared that parents also reported the belief that it was primarily their own responsibility to monitor or supervise the online activities of their child. School laws and policies leave parents with the perception that the school cannot adequately address online issues that mainly happen outside of school (Young, Tully, & Ramirez, 2017). As a result, school administrators must often facilitate fiery discussions between families around cyberbullying incidents that did not originate on school grounds (Juvonen & Gross, 2008). Additionally, Young et al. (2017) discovered that parents are not always satisfied with the results of administrative interventions, as some parents are reluctant to see their child's wrongdoings. These incidents involving the parent community can also prove detrimental to the climate and culture of the school environment, as parents may see the school as an unsafe learning environment and hold little trust in the school administrators' ability to keep their child safe (Tschannen-Moran, 2001).

Many school districts like District A have required administrators to implement procedures to prevent and reduce acts of bullying and provide intervention and support to both bullying victims and offenders. To assist in preventing acts of bullying, harassment, or intimidation, AP 5143 states that school administrators must provide training to all staff around how to implement the policy as it is intended, in part by informing parents and students that bullying, harassment, or intimidation will not be tolerated; confirming that the school community knows where to locate the *Bullying, Harassment, or Intimidation Reporting Forms* within the school building; and ensuring that designated staff members facilitate the following activities within the building:

- hold regular classroom meetings with students to discuss safety concerns;

- clarify and reinforce classroom rules against bullying, harassment, or intimidation;

- conduct classroom lessons on sensitivity and tolerance;

- form an Anti-Bullying, Harassment, or Intimidation Committee to assess the nature and prevalence of bullying at the school;

- celebrate the annual National Anti-Bullying Week; and

- conduct grade level focus groups or a school-wide survey to identify problem areas in the building and the level of bullying, harassment, or intimidation within the school (AP 5143, 2017, p. 6).

Interventions noted in the AP 5143: *Bullying, Harassment, or Intimidation* include the following:

- *Parent/student conferences*. Administrators need to consistently check in with both the victim and bully, as well as their parents, to determine the progress of the agreed-upon resolution while hearing and addressing any new concerns that may arise in the conference.

- *Counseling*. The administrator must ensure that students involved in bullying incidents schedule a counseling session with the professional school counselor, school psychologist, or other appropriate personnel.

- *Behavioral contracts*. The administrator must work with both the bully, the bully victim, and their parents to create a behavioral contract that will act as an agreed upon set of parameters that govern future interactions between the bully and the victim.

- *Positive behavioral supports*. If needed, the administrator must work with the appropriate school personnel to determine if behavioral supports are needed for either student, and if deemed necessary, facilitate the process to assess student behaviors and develop an intervention plan.

- *Support counseling*. The administrator must ensure that the appropriate personnel offers follow up support counseling to the bully, the victim, and any bystander who may have been impacted by the bullying incident.

- *Increased adult supervision*. The administrator must ensure that a system is in place to monitor students involved in bullying incidents during unstructured times (e.g., classroom changes and lunch).

- *Social skills training.* The administrator must ensure that the appropriate school personnel assist all parties with understanding how to navigate future social interactions through role play and behavioral rehearsal.

- *Schedule adjustment*. If necessary, the school administrator must adjust the schedule of all parties involved to aid in creating a safe learning space for the victim and reduce the number of interactions between the victim and the bully.

- *Plan of support*. The administrator must work with all necessary staff and personnel to develop a plan of support for the bully and the victim to ensure that they have the social and emotional support needed to be successful.

Investigative process for District A administrators. AP 5143 details a nine-step investigation process that administrators must undertake in response to allegations of bullying, which includes cyberbullying. Administrators, or their designee, must employ

this investigative process to determine if an act of bullying, harassment, or intimidation actually occurred, and they must facilitate this process every time an allegation is brought to their attention (PGCPS, 2017, p 2-3). The investigation process includes the following nine steps:

1. ***Meet individually with the victim, the accused, and any witnesses to gather information regarding the allegation.*** The number of students accused, or the number of witnesses, can range from one student to an entire class. A typical class size in a middle school in District A averages 27 students. Administrators must meet with these students individually to ensure that students provide honest and uninfluenced statements. Most students are apprehensive about giving statements to school authorities, as it may impact their relationships with peers; so administrators must attempt to ensure the anonymity of each student to reduce opportunities for retaliation from peers (PGCPS, 2017, p 2-3).

2. ***Notify all parties involved in the incident that retaliation against a victim, witness, or bystander is strictly prohibited***. This notification can take place during the individual meetings with students and may require a review of AP 5143, as school representatives will have already informed students about the specifics of the administrative procedure during the school's bullying prevention process. At this time, the administrator also notifies parents about their child's involvement in the matter—whether the child was the alleged victim, offender, or witness. During this conversation, the administrator asks parents to share their views about the matter, seeks to obtain information

about prior interactions between the students, obtains additional accounts from

parents of what happened with the students, and establishes a follow-up plan

with parents to reveal the findings of the investigation. If parents are not

initially available by phone, the administrator may make additional attempts

to contact them throughout the investigation, as a personal conversation with

the parent facilitates the parent's clarity about their child's involvement in the

matter (PGCPS, 2017, p 2-3).

3. ***Document findings and compile all notes taken during the student***

interviews, parent contacts, and information gathered from other witnesses

on the **Bullying, Harassment, or Intimidation Investigation Notes Form**

and attach them to the **Bullying, Harassment, or Intimidation**

Investigation Form. This step requires that administrators accurately capture

all conversations held with all parties using the designated *Notes Form*.

Follow-up questions and points of clarification are often part of those

conversations and must also be captured (PGCPS, 2017, p 2-3).

4. ***Indicate findings on the*** **Investigation Reporting Form,** ***to include whether***

the allegations were substantiated as bullying. If the incident was not

substantiated, the reason must be noted on the form. After hearing accounts

from all parties involved, administrators must make a determination about

whether the incident met the qualifications for an act of bullying, harassment,

or intimidation. If so, the administrator will continue to follow the remaining

five steps of the investigative process. In cases where the allegations were not

substantiated, the administrator does not have to complete the investigative

process. However, if the evidence indicates that an incident did occur and that a problem exists between two or more students, the matter may still require the attention of school personnel (PGCPS, 2017, p 2-3).

5. ***Notify the parents of the victim and offender of the outcome of the investigation.*** Once involved administrators determine that the act qualifies as bullying, harassment, or intimidation; they must make contact the parents to discuss the findings of the investigation, being careful not to relay any confidential or disciplinary information about any other students to the parent. The parent only receive information about his or her child. The administrative procedure outlines what should happen during parent notifications:

   - The parent/guardian of the victim will be informed of the specific steps that the school will take to intervene, interrupt, and monitor the behaviors.

   - The parent/guardian of the offender will be informed of the specific steps that the school will take to intervene, interrupt, and monitor the behaviors, as well as the proposed consequences as stipulated in the *Student Rights and Responsibilities Handbook*.

   - The parent/guardian of the victim may be invited to participate in the development of an intervention plan for their child.

   - The parent/guardian of the offender may be invited to participate in the development of an intervention plan for their child.

   - Each parent/guardian will be provided with a copy of the intervention plan developed for their child (PGCPS, 2017, p.2-4)

6. ***Notify the investigative counselor or school security officer immediately if the bullying, harassment, or intimidation creates imminent danger or qualifies as a delinquent act.*** In some instances, the administrator will determine during the investigation that resolving the matter may require additional resources to protect the students and/or the school community. Investigations can also reveal student involvement in criminal acts that requires the support of more qualified individuals (PGCPS, 2017, p 2-3).

7. ***Log the incident into SchoolMax, indicating the actions taken to investigate the allegation and the outcome****. SchoolMax is an electronic database used by District A employees to capture discipline incidents and provide details about the students involved, the act that was committed, and any consequences issued to individuals involved. The incident will then be assigned a tracking number. If the incident is addressed by the school, but never entered into SchoolMax, the district has no indication that the incident occurred. The Department of Student Services uses the data in SchoolMax to report incidents of bullying, harassment, or intimidation to SADE. Parents of bullying victims are mostly concerned with the safety of their child and will ensure that the school follows through on the plan that has been established to do that; however, parents are not able to determine if schools have submitted the information into the SchoolMax database, as they have no access to that component of the system (PGCPS, 2017, p 2-3).

8. ***Submit a copy of the completed* Reporting, Investigation, and Notes *forms to the Department of Student Services within five school days.*** These forms

are collected from all District A schools through December. The Department of Student Services will then compile a systemic report to submit to SADE which would include information gathered about all bullying incidents within the school district. (PGCPS, 2017, p 2-3).

9. ***Maintain a copy of the forms in the principal's confidential file for five years.*** These forms cannot be placed in the student's cumulative or limited access folders (PGCPS, 2017, p 2-3).

The procedure also includes two additional steps for follow-up actions by the principal or the principal's designee (PGCPS, 2013, p 3-4).

1. ***Hold separate conferences for the victim and offender within ten days after the investigation is complete to ensure that the bullying, harassment, or intimidation has ceased and to determine if there is a need for additional intervention. Individual conferences may occur as part of the counseling intervention****.* During these follow-up conferences, school personnel may find new information that they may need to address. Through the implementation of the many intervention activities, such as support counseling or social skills training, students establish relationships with school personnel that allow them to open up about other concerns and potentially share new information.

2. ***A second conference will be held with the victim four weeks after the initial conference to ensure that the bullying, harassment, or intimidation has ceased.*** Regardless of whether the administrators find that the reported acts are indeed acts of bullying, harassment, or intimidation, they must conduct an investigation. As such, acts of cyberbullying warrant a response, and an

effective administrator addresses the matter as quickly as possible, because it

ultimately affects student safety, as well as teaching and learning, which is an

integral part of an administrator's role (Hallinger & Murphy, 2012).

Stuart-Cassel (2011) asserted, as the head administrator in the building, principals are

responsible for the execution of a district's bullying policy and bear the burden of

accountability for failing to protect cyberbullied students. This confirms why it is vitally

important to learn about cyberbullying through the lens of administrators.

Laws and policies. Hinduja and Patchin (2011) explained that although many

districts have policies and procedures in place to govern their response to cyberbullying,

several federal cases have explored whether schools have overstepped their boundaries or

used faulty judgement in determining whether an alleged off-campus cyberbullying

incident affected the overall educational process at the school. Some judges have ruled in

favor of students or families who contested that their First Amendment right to freedom

of expression had been violated. In attempting to be proactive and following district

policy, some school districts have had to pay thousands of dollars to families after federal

courts determined that the district infringed upon the rights of students in prosecuting

their alleged acts of bullying (Hinduja & Patchin, 2011). Figure 7 details several notable

cases that involved a school or district's efforts to address allegations of cyberbullying.

While not every incident makes it to the judicial system, schools that choose to

ignore or fail to address cyberbullying incidents can be held liable for failing to intervene

on behalf of the safety of a student or school community (Kowaski et al., 2008). School

administrators must provide safe environments for learning, and this responsibility

includes responding to cyberbullying incidents that occur inside and outside of the school

if the incident affects the learning environment. How administrators perceive, approach, and process cyberbullying incidents is important; however, there is little data on administrators' perceptions of how cyberbullying incidents impact the learning environment and how administrators process and investigate incidents.

Court case	Implications
Tinker v. *Des Moines Independent Community School District* (1969)	For school district personnel to restrict expression of controversial or inflammatory opinions, they must demonstrate that the behaviors substantially interfere with school discipline or the rights of others.
Emmett v. *Kent School District No. 415* (2000)	Schools must provide evidence that seemingly threatening online speech is, in fact, threatening to others or that it disturbs school operations.
Wisniewski v. *Board of Education of Weedsport Central School District* (2006)	Students who create online content that could reasonably cause a disruption at school can be sanctioned, particularly when it involves a threat.
Layshock v. *Hermitage School District* (2011) and *J.S.* v. *Blue Mountain School District* (2011)	Schools must diligently and comprehensively collect and provide evidence proving that a substantial and material disruption occurred within the school environment to support their position in a court case.
Kowalski v. *Berkeley County Schools* (2011)	Schools can discipline students for their online, off-campus speech, consistent with *Tinker* v. *Des Moines Independent Community School District* (1969). Speech or behavior that is sufficiently connected to the school environment that materially and substantially interferes with the operations of the school or infringes on the rights of others is subject to appropriate educational discipline.

Figure 7. Court Cases Relevant to Cyberbullying (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015)

In addition, there is a marked lack of data about the best practices that school administrators can employ to reduce cyberbullying incidents. Through this study, the

researcher sought to fill this void by examining middle school administrator's perceptions of cyberbullying and the successful practices they employ to decrease occurrences of cyberbullying in their schools.

The Investigation

A review of the literature revealed numerous studies that explored the phenomenon of cyberbullying, but because cyberbullying involves the use of technology, it is a phenomenon that is always changing; and the way that administrators approach and process cyberbullying incidents may change as technology changes. This review also revealed that no studies exist that examine middle school administrators' perceptions about how cyberbullying in middle schools impacts the learning environment for instructional leaders and students. This exploratory qualitative inquiry study begins to fill that void by adding to the existing body of research on administrators' perceptions of cyberbullying. Through this study, the researcher examined (a) how selected administrators approached and processed cyberbullying incidents, (b) the administrators' perceptions of the impact that cyberbullying incidents have had on the middle school learning environment, and (c) the strategies that they have employed to reduce these cyberbullying incidents.

The researcher selected a qualitative research design because it allowed for the collection of narrative data that shed light on the experiences and perceptions of the administrators (Creswell, 1998). Data collected from SADE's *Bullying, Harassment, or Intimidation in Maryland Public Schools Report* (2016) revealed that students ages 11-14 have the highest incidents of bullying, as both victims and offenders in the state. Additionally, administrators and/or his/her designee have the primary responsibility of

investigating and reporting cyberbullying incidents from beginning to end and therefore

As a result, middle school administrators served as the focus of this research.

To collect data for the study, the researcher interviewed one middle school

administrator and one administrator's designee from the six schools that reported

incidents of cyberbullying to District A during SY 2015-2016 or SY 2016-2017 (up until

February 2017). This inquiry was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do administrators approach and process cyberbullying incidents?

2. What are administrators' perceptions of how cyberbullying impacts the
   learning environment?

3. What strategies have middle school administrators employed to reduce
   cyberbullying incidents?

Chapter Summary

School communities struggle with ensuring that students' use of technology does

not negatively impact the learning environment. Students engaging in cyberbullying may

pose a challenge to administrators' efforts to maintain an environment that is safe for

student learning while providing instructional support to teachers. Speaking to

administrators within schools with documented incidents of cyberbullying allowed the

researcher to gain more insight into how they approach and process incidents, the impact

of cyberbullying on the learning environment, and how specific prevention strategies

have been effective in reducing incidents.

Section II. Study Design

Purpose Statement

The review of the literature revealed a growing concern around cyberbullying among adolescents, as it can have detrimental effects on the psyche of a child; however, there is limited research around how cyberbullying affects middle schools in a large urban school district from an administrator's perspective. Middle school-aged students (ages 11-14) have never known a world without the Internet, computers, and smartphones, and data show that the frequency of their access to technology via smartphones makes them more susceptible to being a victim or perpetrator of cyberbullying (Stewart & Fritsch, 2011).

Taking into account the potential impact of technology on the learning environment, District A has continued to revise and update policies around bullying, appropriate use of technology, and social media while on school grounds. The policy revisions and updates reflect the ever-changing world of technology and are often the result of incidents that have required the attention of school and District Administrators. Ultimately, school leaders are the ones who must enforce district policies that govern the appropriate use of technology, and they are the ones who see firsthand the impact of cyberbullying on their building. As such, the purpose of this study was to explore cyberbullying in middle schools in a large urban school district by examining the perceptions of middle school administrators and their designees' regarding the following:

- Their approach to addressing cyberbullying incidents and implementing the district policy as prescribed in response to such incidents;

- The impact of cyberbullying on the learning environment (inclusive of culture and climate as a whole, as well as the impact on the principal as an instructional leader); and

- The strategies they utilized to (a) reduce the number of cyberbullying incidents occurring in their middle schools, (b) maintain a safe environment for students, and (c) allow themselves more time to engage in instructional leadership behaviors.

As a middle school principal in District A, I have seen a rise in the number of bullying incidents that result from the use of technology. Adhering to the district's policy around the use of technology can become a daily issue for administrators because students, as well as adults, have become physically and emotionally attached to their electronic devices (Roberts, YaYa, & Manolis, 2014). Teachers have learned to engage students in teaching by including technology use into their lessons, but they have also had to constantly address students' use of technology at unauthorized times (Lam & Tong, 2012). Students have constant access to the Internet and various social media applications, as the district has no way of blocking students' access to these sites or applications while in school if the students are not on the school's Wi-Fi. Use of technology, especially mobile phones, opens the door for many covert interactions between students; and school leaders often find themselves addressing cyberbullying issues that they are unable to predict or see (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015). As a result, they often must be reactive in addressing issues of cyberbullying, as opposed to being proactive.

The findings from this study may have implications for many large urban school districts around how to address and document cyberbullying incidents effectively in middle schools where students are more apt to be exposed to these issues. The findings from this study may also assist districts in strengthening their efforts to prevent and intervene during incidents of cyberbullying.

Research Questions

The following research questions served as a foundational guide for the development and implementation of this inquiry:

1. How do administrators approach and process cyberbullying incidents?

2. What are administrators' perceptions of how cyberbullying impacts the learning environment?

3. What strategies have middle school administrators employed to reduce cyberbullying incidents?

Research Design

To respond to the aforementioned research questions, the investigator employed a qualitative research study using an exploratory qualitative inquiry research design. Creswell (1998) described research design as the features that an investigator uses to collect, analyze, and interpret data (p. 293). The exploratory qualitative research design allows the researcher to investigate a research problem where there are no other studies to use as a reference (Lynn & Lynn, 2015) and reveals clues about what has happened or is currently happening with a phenomena.

According to Creswell (2015), qualitative research study is necessary when "the literature might yield little information about the phenomenon of study, and you need to learn more from participants through exploration" (p. 16). According to Yin (2009), the

process for qualitative study includes emerging questions, data collection that is usually conducted at the participants' setting, and data analysis that leads to themes and ends with interpretations of the data collected. In the case of the present study, the qualitative research design enabled the investigator to examine (a) how the participants addressed the social phenomena of cyberbullying, (b) their perceptions of how these incidents impact the learning environment, and (c) the strategies they used to reduce the number of cyberbullying occurrences in their middle school. The exploratory qualitative research design also allowed for the use of a semi-structured interview protocol that enabled the researcher to ask probing questions about cyberbullying hidden beneath the surface of the responses given by the participants.

Methods

   Participants. At the time of this research, District A, a large urban school district on the east coast of the United States, was comprised of 46 middle schools. These middle schools had several different structures: $6^{th} - 8^{th}$ grade, $7^{th} - 8^{th}$ grade, K-7th grade, or K-8th grade. Of the 46 middle schools in the district, seven had documented incidents of cyberbullying or bullying via electronic communication for SY 2015-2016 and SY 2016-2017 (as of Feb. 2017). At the time of this study, the researcher served as the principal of one of the seven middle schools identified, so the sample of target schools was reduced to six to ensure that all data was free of bias.

   Using the District A district and school websites, which are available to the public, the researcher obtained the email addresses of the six middle school principals and sent them each an email inviting them to participate in the study. The email contained an introduction to the study; detailed its purpose; and provided an overview of the

interview questions, the confidentiality clause, and a request for the name of an

administrative designee within their building who assisted with addressing cyberbullying

incidents. In addition, the email clearly stated that the study was a part of the

researcher's dissertation, that it was taking place under the direction of the researcher's

advisor, and that their participation was completely voluntary, with no consequences to

them if they chose not to participate. The researcher sent the same email, minus the

request for an administrative designee, to the individuals identified by the principal (see

Appendices F and G for both emails). One week after sending the first emails, the

researcher followed up with a phone call to the principal and designee to restate the

purpose of the study, answer any questions, and obtain consent from those who agree to

participate.

Table 1 describes the background data collected from the six principal

participants. The six principal participants possessed a span of one to 14 years of tenure

as a school leader. In addition, they had between three and 17 years of experience

working in the middle school setting and had 1 to 6 years of tenure in their current middle

school. Lastly, in their time as middle school administrators, they had experienced

anywhere from two to over 10 years of cyberbullying issues.

Table 1

Principal Participant Background Data

Participants	# years as a principal	# years in middle school	# years at current school	# years with cyberbullying issues as administrator
Principal A*	1	5	1	5
Principal B	4	17	4	>10
Principal C	7	11	6	6
Principal D	3	3	3	3
Principal E	14	5	5	2-3
Principal F	2	7	2	4

*Principal A was the acting principal at the same school prior to becoming the principal

Table 2 details the background information of the administrative designees selected by the school principal. The principal and administrative designee from a school are referenced with the same letter. All of the administrative designees served as the assistant principal in their building. Although Designee EE is noted as the current assistant principal at her middle school, at the time of the study, she was serving as acting principal during her principal's absence. The respondents had spent anywhere from less than one year to 15 years serving in the role of assistant principal. Their years of experience in the middle school setting ranged from less than one year to 28 years. The participants also indicated that they had worked at their current middle school for anywhere from less than one year to seven years. Overall, their years of experience with cyberbullying as an administrator ranged from one year to 12 years.

Table 2

Administrative Designee Participant Background Data

Participants	# years as assistant principal	# years in middle school	# years in current school	# years with cyberbullying issues as administrator
Designee AA	<1	<1	<1	3-4
Designee BB	14	28	7	5
Designee CC	4	4	4	4
Designee DD	15	5	5	12
Designee EE	6	6	6	6
Designee FF	<1	16	1	1

School demographics. The researcher selected the following six schools for this research study, as they have reported incidents of cyberbullying to the district. School A had an enrollment of 718 students in 2016, and had 318 students who qualified for the Free and Reduced Meals (FARMS) program (Maryland Report Card, 2017).
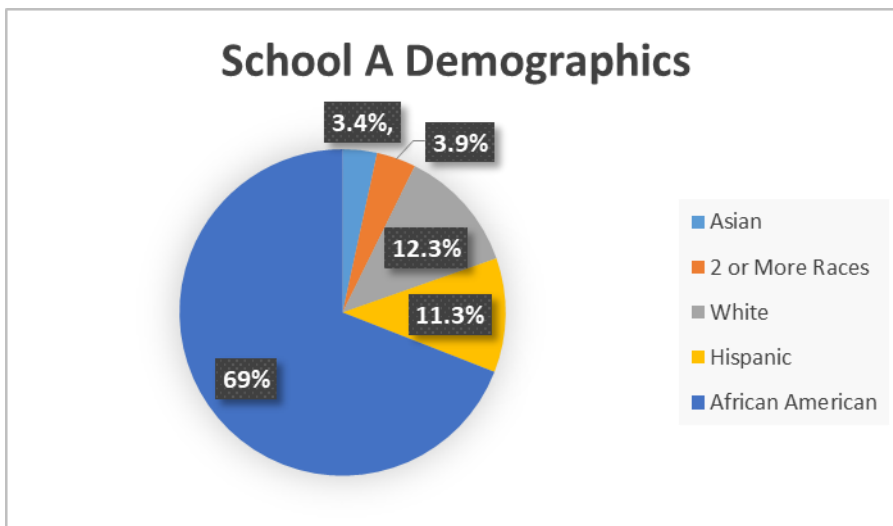
Figure 8. School A demographics

School B had an enrollment of 577 students, and 414 students were eligible for

FARMS program in 2016. See Figure 9 for more details (Maryland Report Card, 2017).
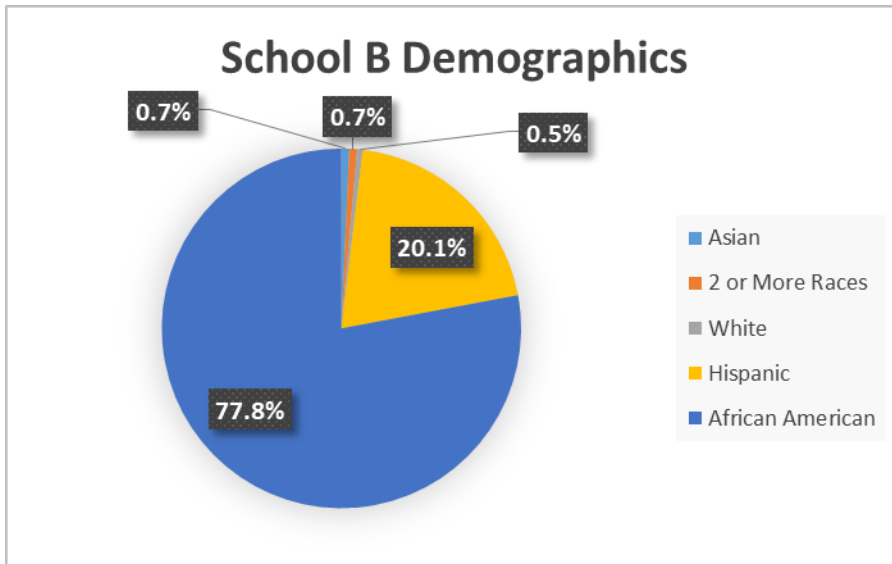
Figure 9. School B demographics

School C has an enrollment of 735 students, 387 of whom qualified for FARMS

in 2016. See Figure 10 for details about School C (Maryland Report Card, 2017).
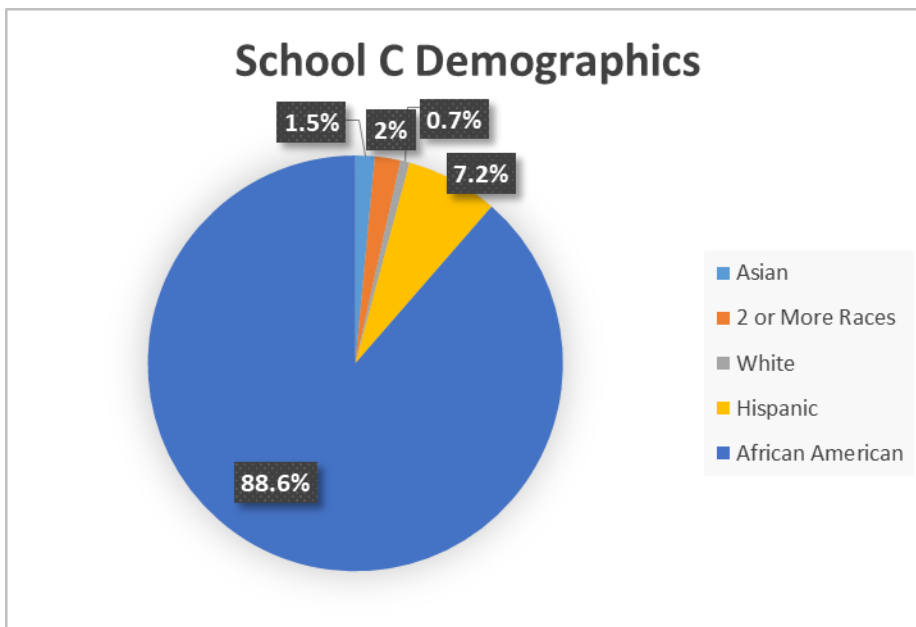
Figure 10. School C demographics

School D had a student enrollment of 828 students, and 668 students qualified for

FARMS in 2016. See Figure 11 for further details (Maryland Report Card, 2017).
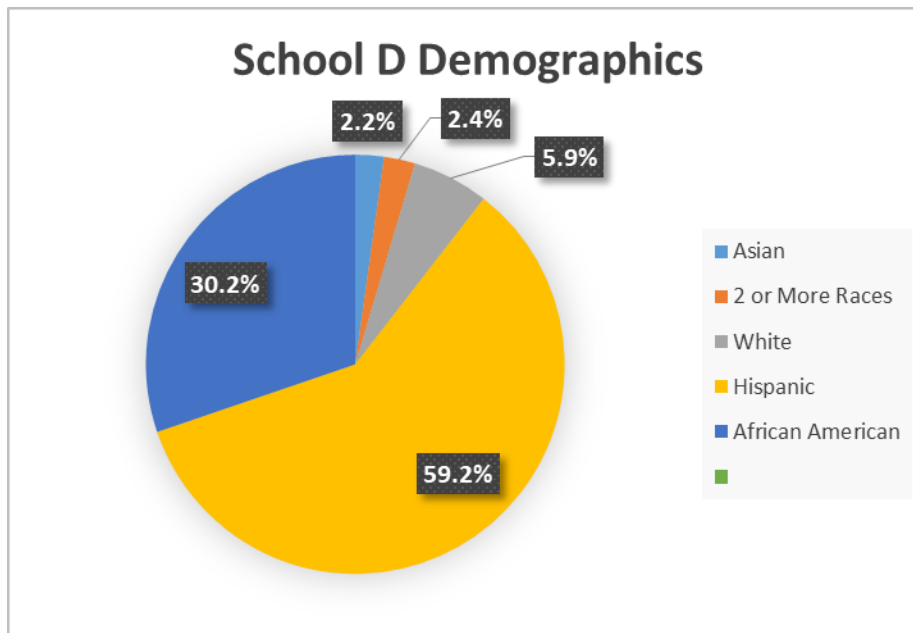
Figure 11. School D demographics

School E had an enrollment of 930 students, 831 of whom where on FARMS in

2016 (Maryland Report Card, 2017). See Figure 12 for more information on School E.
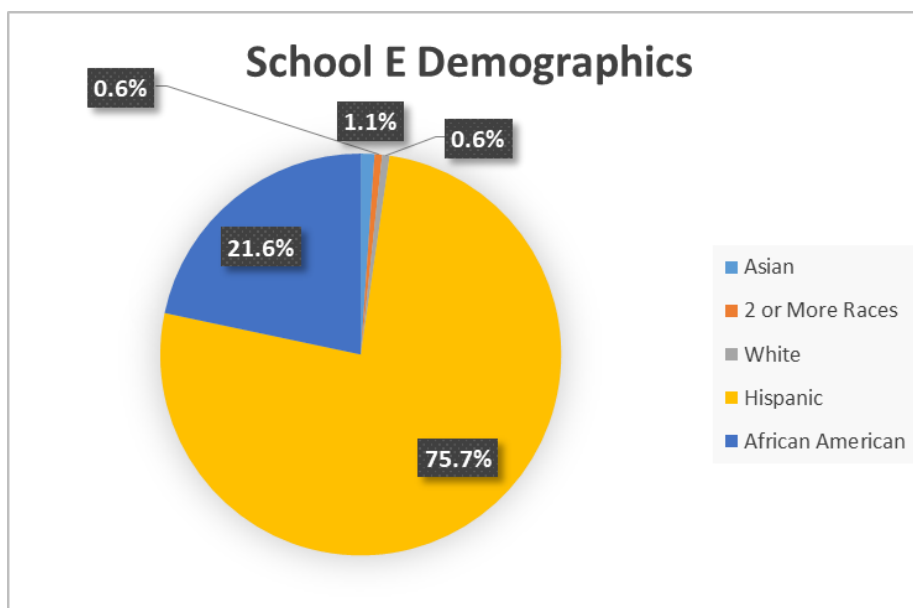
Figure 12. School E demographics

School F had a student enrollment of 1101, and 961 students qualified for FARMS in 2016. See Figure 13 for additional demographic information on School F (Maryland Report Card, 2017).
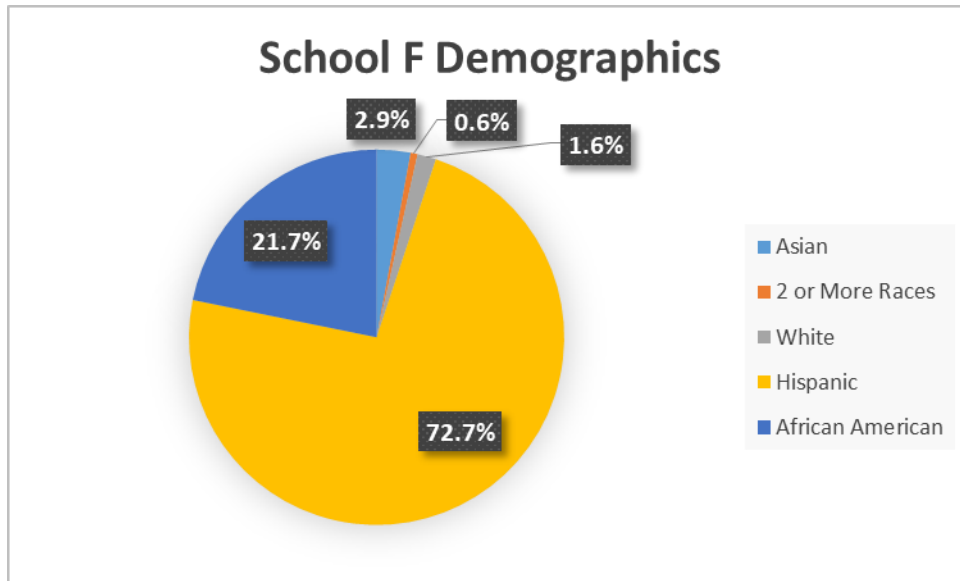
Figure 13. School F demographics

Instrument. Semi-structured interviews in a qualitative study allow the researcher to explore a participant's perceptions of and the meaning that the respondent assigns to a given phenomenon (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Each participant's experience will add valuable data to the body of research on the phenomenon or generate a hypothesis regarding the experiences of focus. Each principal and administrative designee participated in a 60-90 minute semi-structured, face-to-face interview. Opdenakker (2006) explained that face-to-face interviews are characterized by "synchronous communication in time and place" (p. 2). They allow the researcher to capture the participants' thoughts, while also noting any social cues conveyed by the respondent. In addition, there is very little lapse in time between when the researcher asks

the question and when the participant responds, which allows for the participant's

response to be more spontaneous and not rehearsed (Opdenakker, 2006).

Sample interview questions related to the assessment of the administrators'

approach and process included the following:

- How do you address cyberbullying incidents in your school?

- Please describe the process for addressing cyberbullying?

Sample interview questions related to the administrators' perceptions of the impact that

cyberbullying had on the learning environment included the following:

- How cyberbullying impacted student learning in your school? Please explain.

- Has cyberbullying impacted the culture and/or climate of your school? Please

  explain.

Sample interview questions related to strategies used by administrators to reduce the

number of cyberbullying incidents included the following:

- In your opinion, what are the best strategies to reduce cyberbullying incidents

  at your school?

- What do you feel are best policies or programs to reduce cyberbullying?

The complete interview protocol is available in Appendix I. In some cases, the researcher

followed up on the questions presented there with probing questions that delved deeper

into the meaning that the respondents assigned to the given phenomenon. In total, the

interview protocol included 17 questions that sought to gain knowledge about (a) how

middle school administrators addressed and processed cyberbullying incidents, (b) their

perceptions of how these incidents affected the learning environment in their schools, and

(c) the strategies they had used to assist to reduce the number of cyberbullying incidents

that occurred in their building. Table J1 shows the alignment of interview questions and research questions.

Data Collection

     Interviews. The purpose of the interviews was to obtain detailed information to answer the aforementioned research questions. Upon receipt of the principal and/or designee's signed consent to participate, the researcher scheduled a 60-90-minute face-to-face interview at a time and place that was convenient for the participant. While the interview was guided by the protocol (see Appendix I), the researcher also posed probing follow-up questions that allowed the participant to provide greater detail about their experiences addressing cyberbullying. The researcher recorded each interview using a digital voice-recording device. The use of an audio tape will allow the researcher to give her full attention to the participant and capture the body language and social cues of the participant (Opdenakker, 2006).

     At the completion of each interview, the researcher had each audio recording transcribed using Verbal Ink, an online transcription service. Transcription allowed the researcher to review the detailed responses of participants quickly and accurately. The transcription also enabled the researcher to code the specific responses of the participants using themes, patterns, or reoccurring ideas using NVivo.

Data Analysis

     After obtaining the interview transcripts from Verbal Ink, the researcher coded the data for themes and patterns. All participants' names were substituted with pseudonyms as to protect their identity. During the coding process, the researcher used NVivo 11 software to group the data into themes based on patterns found in participant responses to

the interview questions. The researcher coded each individual interview separately and grouped the resulting codes together to determine general themes and patterns for all 12 interviews. This process allowed the researcher to treat each interview as a separate case within a cross-case synthesis of the 12 cases. According to Yin (2009) this approach is best for answering research questions involving multiple cases.

Confidentiality

To maintain confidentiality, the researcher utilized pseudonyms for both the respondents and the participating school district. The researcher housed all audio recordings of the interviews on a micro SD card, which will be kept in the researcher's office for a minimum of three years. No individual data will be shared with the district or any external entities. Finally, at the end of the three-year retention period, all audio recordings, micro SD cards, and flash drives containing data from this research will be erased or destroyed.

Chapter Summary

Cyberbullying policies are created to ensure that school environments are safe spaces for students to learn. District A has developed an administrative procedure that outlines for school administrators and staff the procedures on how to report and address any allegations of bullying, including cyberbullying. As students ages 11-14 are more susceptible to being bully victims and bullies (MSDE, 2016), this study allowed the researcher to question administrators that work directly with students within this age range. Six middle schools within District A have documented incidents of cyberbullying to their district within the 2015-2016 school year. Face-to-face semi-structured interviews with these administrators and their designees allowed the researcher to hear

how cyberbullying incidents are addressed, how these incidents impact the learning

environment, and what strategies have been implemented to help reduce the number of

cyberbullying incidents within their perspective buildings.

Section III. Results and Impact

Administrators in middle schools, which serve students in the peak age group for bullying occurrences, must address cyberbullying in order to provide a safe environment for learning, a key component for students' academic success. Through this study, the researcher sought to explore how middle school administrators in one large urban school district addressed the evolving phenomena of cyberbullying. Specifically, the study examined (a) how respondents implemented the district's policy on cyberbullying, (a) the impact, if any, these incidents had on the school community collectively and the individuals that made up the community, and (c) the attempts the respondents had made to address reoccurring incidents of cyberbullying. The following research questions served as a guide for this inquiry:

1. How do administrators approach and process cyberbullying incidents?

2. What are middle school administrators' perceptions of how cyberbullying impacts the learning environment?

3. What strategies have middle school administrators employed to reduce cyberbullying incidents?

Through the use of audio-recorded interviews that were transcribed using Verbal Ink, an online transcription service, the researcher found emerging themes and patterns within the participants' responses using NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software package. This chapter will summarize how the emergent themes from the data collected during the12 semi-structured participant interviews addressed the research questions. The discussion of the interviews were organized by respondent and then by research question.

Results

Principal A. As noted in Table 1, at the time of the study, Principal A was completing her first year as principal of School A, which housed close to 800 students. Prior to this year, she served as the acting principal at the school and was officially made the principal at the end of the last school year. Although this was her first official principal position in District A, she had previously held the role of middle school principal for four years in the private school setting. She explained that she had dealt with incidents of cyberbullying during each of her five years in the middle school setting.

Approaching and processing cyberbullying incidents. Principal A explained that her core responsibilities as a principal were to accomplish the following:

- ensure rigorous instruction;

- set the tone for the school culture;

- build relationships and expectations for students, staff, family, and community;

- create a safe and orderly environment that fosters quality instruction; and

- ensure that the necessary processes, foundations, structures, and systems for the school are in place to accomplish all of the aforementioned responsibilities.

A commitment to these core duties was evident in Principal A's explanation of why she felt compelled to respond to all cyberbullying incidents. Her response spoke to setting a tone for student interactions and creating a safe space for student learning. She explained the need to focus on educating the whole child, "So part of it is middle school is a tough time. They can be so mean to each other. So, it's trying to plant those seeds of empathy and helping individuals just grow and learn." She further stated that, "There is a need to

teach lessons and the need to help our children and keep them safe and help them to feel...I mean, we know from bullying…those issues can carry on for an entire lifetime." When explaining why cyberbullying could not be ignored, Principal A sat up in her seat, leaned forward, and used her pointer finger to tap on the table to emphasize the words and phrases "empathy," "safe," "help them to feel," and "entire lifetime."

As Principal A spoke about establishing processes to ensure that students were safe so that they could engage in instruction and learning, she identified key components of her process for addressing incidents of cyberbullying. She noted that the process always started with the child making the allegation of bullying; but from there, she always pulled the other children. When asked how many children were normally involved in each incident, she noted, "It could be two people, but usually way more, because of the quick reach of technology. I would say a minimum of five students, but one time it was an entire class section of 25 students."

As the first step in the investigation, Principal A followed up with examining electronic devices, peer mediation, and possibly contacting families. She stated, "Uh, depending on what it is, contacting families, or other service providers may be necessary. A lot of times, we're able to just handle it within the school." Undoubtedly, the amount of time it took to process an investigation of five to 25 students varied. She noted that cyberbullying occurrences happened at least three times a week, with a total of 12-13 incidents a month. These incidents made up about 20% of the school's total disciplinary infractions, taking up at least six hours of her time each week, not including the time that other staff members like school counselors spent assisting in the resolution of the issue.

Principal A explained that, in most cases, the students were able to resolve matters, but she stated that a major barrier to resolving cyberbullying incidents came from students who were unwilling to share information with school personnel. Principal A described one incident that came to the school's attention after an altercation had occurred:

> There's one I just had that started in the summer…It's been going on…going along…and then nobody said anything. And um…although, from the text messages, I could see where her sister was like, "Oh, beat her A-S-S!" And mom chimed in "Yeah, beat that B's A-S-S!" And that one is stemming from the summer. So, nobody said anything all this time, until the girl attacked the other girl, based on her mother's texts and sister's texts saying "Go for it…" um…but that is stemming from the summer. So you, you know, it's how long it was going on, and how much of it there was before it got to us and we found out about it. (Principal A)

Impact on the learning environment. As Principal A explained the effect that cyberbullying had on student learning in her school, she noted that the most significant impact had been the fact that students could not focus and concentrate when they felt unsafe and threatened. She clarified that the impact moved beyond the bully and victim to affect all of the other students who knew what was happening. She described this ripple effect as follows:

> [It's like] an excitement in the building. They're getting excited about the activity. They want to participate in some way, just to be nosy, just for entertainment; or in the case we just had, those other friends are getting really angry because their

friend is being threatened, and now they want to jump in. So, none of them are

focused on education and instruction. (Principal A)

She further stated that this level of distraction could go on for days at a time, but as a

staff, they were consistent in addressing each incident with each child, individually and

through group mediation.

Principal A explained that cyberbullying incidents impeded her ability to ensure

that there was instructional rigor in each classroom and that students were engaged, but it

was necessary because ignoring cyberbullying incidents could negatively affect the

cultural environment that she had worked so hard to develop. In the end, Principal A

lamented that cyberbullying "[take] away from all the work you're trying to do, because

it takes time, it takes energy, and it takes the focus away from that - our purpose."

Strategies to reduce cyberbullying. Principal A appeared frustrated when asked

about the best strategies for addressing cyberbullying. She put both hands up into the air,

as if she was unsure. She shared, "[As] much training as you have, as much talking as

you do, and trying to make those connections with kids ahead of time, until, you know, it

still comes up." This statement reiterated her original point that unless a student

informed school administrators and staff about the issue, they could not resolve it; and

even with proven results, students were still reluctant to share these incidents.

One strategy that she felt had helped reduce the number of incidents over the past

year, was her efforts, as the principal, to be actively involved in handling issues of

cyberbullying. She found that this approach helped students to see the serious nature of

the matter and hear directly from her about the consequences they would encounter if

they had a second occurrence. In addition, as a school, they had grade-level assemblies

where they showed students videos of actual students who had been bullied to help students feel empathy by seeing and hearing from a real victim and instill in them an understanding of how they should respond if a similar issue should arise in their school community.

Principal A shared that although the school faculty and staff worked hard to combat cyberbullying, they could do more by partnering with law enforcement entities. She suggested the following:

> [Police] officers [should] come into the school to talk about the specifics of, you
> know, the programs…around what the impact is to the other kids. I don't think
> kids think a lot about police coming to arrest them, and they really should…press
> charges. I don't think most parents do that. It would be a totally different thing
> coming from a police officer. (Principal A)

Designee AA. Although she had spent the last three to four years in middle schools, Designee AA was a newly appointed assistant principal to School A. She had been serving in that capacity for approximately seven months at the time of the interview. As this position was new to her, Designee AA saw her role one that supported the principal in carrying out her vision for the school. She noted that Principal A placed a significant emphasis on developing the culture of the building to make the school a happy place for teachers and students.

Approaching and processing cyberbullying incidents. Designee AA shared that although she estimated that they only handled about two cyberbullying incidents per month, those incidents made up about 15% or 20% of their disciplinary issues. Designee AA also estimated that she spent at least a couple of hours each month resolving these

matters. When addressing cyberbullying incidents, Designee AA stressed that a major step in the investigation was to ensure that she made parents aware of the incident and told them that they could fill out a *Bullying, Harassment, and Intimidation Reporting Form*. She believed that investigations could become very complicated, because they could involve searching for evidence on cell phones and "…talking to separate people, and then talking to people together, and talking to parents, and talking to higher up administration and figuring out consequences. It definitely takes time out of the day." Designee AA also explained that when dealing with the cyberbullies, "we talk about its seriousness and how that would make others feel, and trying to get them to be more empathetic." Fostering empathy among the students seemed to be a major part of the culture that the administration sought to establish at School A, as it was noted by both Designee AA and Principal A.

Designee AA asserted that cyberbullying must be taken seriously, as it could have major effects on students. She explained that cyberbullying could "diminish their self-esteem, their confidence, and lead them into depression." She also stated that in order to address these incidents appropriately, the school had to know about them and have the support of parents to reinforce consequences at home. She contended that administrators needed additional time to spend on investigating these incidents. According to Designee AA, students were reluctant to share incidents of cyberbullying, and parents were not willing to take away cellphones from students when the school informed them of their inappropriate use. She lamented that these behaviors, or lack thereof, just increased the likelihood of another incident happening with the same student. Another incident would take up more time, as "[in] the school building, time is huge because you have so many

other issues to deal with, and then to find the time to investigate that; our plates just keep getting piled high."

Impact on the learning environment. Like Principal A, Designee AA saw the biggest impact on the ability of students to focus on learning within the classroom when these incidents arose. All parties, including the bystanders, were most concerned about what may happen between the bully and the victim, so their focus is on the actions of those two students. She explained, "[The victim was wondering,] 'What are they going to do to me today, or when is my next message coming through?' So, they can't fully concentrate on learning because they are fearful."

As an administrator, her time was valuable and addressing cyberbullying incidents took her away from "other things that I should be doing, such as getting into classrooms, looking at the teaching of teachers, coaching them and helping them further their teaching strategies." She noted that creating a balance was difficult because cyberbullying required immediate attention.

Strategies to reduce cyberbullying. Other than teaching students to be more empathetic and requesting that parents do a better job at monitoring the online activities of their child, Designee AA did not know of any other strategies that may have assisted in reducing instances at School A. Actually, Designee AA was openly honest when she stated that she was not aware of any policies or programs that could be used to reduce cyberbullying within schools, but she did know that "as a community, we should be offering more and as a school. That's a really good question, because I am unaware of anything except for the responses." *Responses* are what District A refers to as the consequences that students receive for their actions.

Principal B. Principal B has spent all four years of his principalship at School B, which is home to a little under 600 students, and he has spent a total of 17 years in the middle school setting in various capacities. He recalled experiencing cyberbullying issues for the last ten years as a middle school administrator.

Approaching and processing cyberbullying incidents. Principal B shared that his core responsibilities as an administrator included monitoring instruction, providing professional development around the curriculum, and motivating the staff. He stated that incidents of cyberbullying distracted him from being able to fulfill all of these responsibilities, as over 50% of the disciplinary issues that he addressed involved cyberbullying. He noted that he dealt with anywhere from 20 to 25 cyberbullying incidents each month. Although he did not always feel compelled to respond to cyberbullying incidents, he did feel obligated when "someone [felt] uncomfortable" because "then they're not going to learn…bottom line."

Principal B's investigative process included immediately asking to see the electronic evidence, as he noted that many times, students were able to erase or manipulate the evidence before news of the incident reached him. After reviewing the evidence, he gathered all of the participants and witnesses, which could include numerous students across several grade levels. The largest number of students he had to deal with in a cyberbullying incident included at least 15 students who all lived in the same neighborhood. After meeting with participants and witnesses, he contacted parents to make sure that they were aware of the situation, then "lastly, I provide a consequence in reference to the results of the investigation."

Principal B noted that during investigations, although his crisis intervention or security personnel may spend at least three hours investigating incidents, a lot of the resolution lies in the hands of parents. Principal B noted that he could not monitor the social media sites of all of his students, but parents could monitor their own children on these sites. Principal B shook his head back and forth, appearing frustrated and disappointed when he described the need for parental assistance. He saw parents' failure to properly supervise their student's use of technology as a barrier during investigations. In some instances, Principal B found that parents had difficulty monitoring their children on these sites because students used obscure usernames instead of their birth names to mask their identity. In several cases, Principal B stated that students actually created fake profiles pretending to be other students. This tactic led to their accusing the wrong student of cyberbullying in one incident, as the alleged bully had not actually created the social media account even though she appeared to be the perpetrator. It took several hours to resolve this matter, as the fake profiles were realistic; and Principal B stated that he was not "up-to-date on all of these sites. They seem like they change every week."

Impact on the learning environment. Principal B explained that during investigations, students were taken away from class instruction to provide statements or give information about the incident. He saw this removal from the learning environment as a disruption for the students being pulled out of class, the teacher who was missing several students from class, and the other students who had their instruction interrupted as their peers entered and exited the classroom to assist in the investigation. Principal B stated that although many of the incidents did not start in school, "it definitely affects the climate and culture in reference to the students being on a comfortable level." He also

noted that when students were not comfortable in school, it became difficult to focus on learning.

Principal B shared that engaging in the investigation of cyberbullying incidents took away from his instructional focus. He emphasized the following:

> Anytime things take me away from that [instructional focus], it impacts feedback that I can be giving to the teacher at the time or leading a professional development; so it pulls me away from those things which are the core of my job. (Principal B)

Strategies to reduce cyberbullying. Principal B explained that at the beginning of the year, he spent a lot of time establishing the culture and climate of the school and stressing to students how cyberbullying could affect their peers. He declared, "In my opinion, the best thing is for parents to monitor their students on social media." Principal B recognized that parents needed help in becoming aware of the different social media sites that their children frequented. He also shared that students needed to understand "the good, the bad, and the ugly of social media use," and implied that students were not aware of the ramifications of their interactions on the Internet.

Principal B also noted the need for greater community awareness of the frequency of these incidents. He shared that he would like for the community to play a role in assisting schools with curbing these negative online behaviors. He stressed that community leaders could be instrumental in assisting families with understanding what signs to look for and could work with district leaders to create discipline that aligns with today's technology. He stated, "So far, we are behind the technology curve when it comes to discipline or providing rules and regulations for electronics."

Designee BB. At the time of this study, Designee BB had spent 28 of his 35 years in education in the middle school setting. He had served as an assistant principal for 14 years, seven of which he spent at School B. He noted that over the last five years as an administrator, he had seen an increase in cyberbullying incidents. With about two occurrences per week, Designee BB contended that cyberbullying incidents contributed to 80% of the school's disciplinary incidents, which was 30% more than the estimate that Principal B provided.

Approaching and processing cyberbullying incidents. Designee BB described his role as one of support for the principal's agenda and that involved a strong focus on data analysis strategies, but he explained that student safety was what compelled him to respond to all cyberbullying incidents. Designee BB stressed that students did not always tell adults what is happening when it comes to cyberbullying. He described the adults in the building as being "on the outside looking in." As a result, he explained, the investigation process could be difficult and time-consuming.

According to Designee BB, the investigation process included finding the victim and the bully, contacting their parents, and encouraging the parents to talk to their children so that the school could resolve the matter. He characterized most of the parents as helpful, but said that in some instances, "[We] have to call the parents back in," when the students continued to engage in cyberbullying behaviors.

Designee BB found it hard to estimate the amount of time it took to investigate incidents of cyberbullying, but in the most recent incident, he spent approximately three days resolving the matter. The incident involved a student creating a fake Instagram account and posting messages about another student. In the end, the school determined

that the young lady who created the account was posing as the victim and the bully. She was actually posting messages to herself from an anonymous user account that she created. Designee BB stated, "I don't know if she's seeking attention or what, but it was no one; it was just her texting herself." He shared that arriving at this conclusion involved hours of student interviews and parent phone calls. According to Designee BB, this incident confirmed that students did not "understand the ramifications and flashbacks it can cause some of our kids. The ramifications that it can affect that person for the rest of their lives."

Impact on the learning environment. Designee BB affirmed that the administration's efforts to address cyberbullying had reduced its impact on the culture and climate of the school; however, he was concerned that the investigation process pulled students out of class for extending periods of time. He noted that the previously mentioned case, in which the student created the fake Instagram account, affected the entire school community. The student that initially received the blame for posting the derogatory comments was upset, her parents were upset and had disciplined the alleged bully by taking away her access to all electronic devices, the alleged bully's friends were adamant about convincing administration that the rumor in the building was that the Instagram account was fake and created by the alleged bully victim, and the alleged victim's friends were just as adamant that their friend was telling the truth and had a history of being bullied. With all of the buzz in the building regarding the incident, "teachers were also coming to administration explaining what they heard students sharing around the building."

Designee BB noted that the time spent investigating such cyberbullying incidents caused him to fall behind on his formal and informal teacher observations. He admitted that investigating cyberbullying incidents could be "mentally draining for you because you've got to consider so many components. It takes away from what we are here for."

Strategies to reduce cyberbullying. As a school district, Designee BB felt as though the policy around how to address cyberbullying was adequate, but noted the following:

> [Cyberbullying is] not going to go away. If anything it's going to increase; but I think the local district's administrative procedures and guidelines, and the PD they offer us and the teachers, is probably the best way to deal with it. (Designee BB)

Designee BB explained that within the school building, the administration held quarterly grade-level assemblies to address cyberbullying and any other infractions noted within the "Code of Student Conduct Handbook." Students also received reminders on the morning announcements about the ramifications of cyberbullying, and administrators held five- or ten-minute classroom discussions with every class to create awareness about and set school expectations around bullying.

Principal C. Principal C spent the last 11 years working in the middle school setting. At the time of this study, he had served as principal of School C for six years. He also spent one additional year as a principal at another middle school outside of the district. He noted that he had dealt with issues of cyberbullying for the entire seven years that he had served as a principal.

Approaching and processing cyberbullying incidents. Principal C explained that his core responsibility as an administrator was to "ensure that there is an environment conducive to learning which includes making sure there's quality instruction. It also includes making sure that students are safe and secure physically and emotionally." Maintaining a safe environment for learning compelled Principal C to respond to the four to seven cyberbullying incidents that he estimated occurred each month at School C. These incidents made up approximately one-third of all of the disciplinary incidents that took place at School C. Principal C also noted that he truly believed that there were more cyberbullying incidents that were never brought to the attention of the school, so he posited that one third was probably too low an estimate.

When addressing cyberbullying incidents, his school followed the "Code of Conduct for Students." His level of responses to each incident varied from a call to a parent to a warning, or in a small number of cases, a request for an extended suspension. Principal C approached his response to cyberbullying as an opportunity to develop constructive, positive character within his students. He further noted that middle school was a place where students learn academics, but the adults helped them to develop basic social skills and character to ensure that the school environment was a safe space. This character building was included in the resolution process for his building which his school personnel, like security or counselors, carried out on a day-to-day basis. He explained that each resolution took at least two to three hours per incident to resolve, as students were not always forthcoming with information during the investigative process. Principal C described an incident of note:

The alleged victim came to administration with a cell phone that showed images of messages that had been sent on Snapchat about her. Security then went to retrieve the alleged cyberbully from class and to retrieve his phone. Needless to say, the cyberbully was made aware that we were going to be investigating the incident, so he passed the phone to a friend. It took security personnel 1 hour to find the cell phone, as it had been passed to four other students and hidden in a locker. This meant four students had to be questioned, four lockers had to be checked, and four sets of parents had to be called prior to retrieving the cell phone. When the phone was finally retrieved, a portion of the evidence had been deleted or it disappeared like they do on some of these apps, but what students don't realize is that it never disappears. Other kids had taken screenshots of the posts and passed them on. These students confirmed that the young man was the originator of the messages. These phones were checked and used as a part of the evidence presented to the cyberbully's parent. Can you believe that with all of that time and effort spent in gathering evidence, the parent was not cooperative and denied her son's involvement and agreed to challenge any consequence given to her son, as she believed that we could not prove that the username used in the posts [was] from her son, even though his classmates confirmed it was him? The student eventually served a suspension due to his unwillingness to cooperate with the investigation, but it disrupted the ENTIRE…I mean, the whole day. Then in the end, for the parent to act like that, it was really a frustrating day. (Principal C)

Principal C then pointed to a manila folder on his desk that appeared to be at least two inches thick with a rubber band holding it closed. This folder contained all of the

evidence from the investigation, which included statements, pictures of cellphones, and notes from meeting with students, as well as follow-up information that was noted by counselors who continue to meet with the victim. Principal C shook his head as he pointed to the folder.

His description of this most recent cyberbullying incident spoke to what Principal C described as a major barrier when investigating these incidents—access to the actual online communication. Many of the applications were designed to delete messages or posts after a period of time, and unfortunately, by the time the school became aware of an incident, the evidence was often gone.

Impact on the learning environment. Principal C described the investigation process as "a disruption to learning," because the students that needed to be interviewed missed class; and at the onset of the investigation, "[the] administration does not always know how many students are involved. For instance, that last case I described started with two people, but ended up with ten students being involved." As an administrator, he would like to spend the majority of his time "as an instructional leader, improving instruction, giving feedback on instruction, monitoring instruction…and less time having to deal with cyberbullying." Knowing that cyberbullying affected the safety of students, Principal C expressed understanding that the investigations had to take place.

Strategies to reduce cyberbullying. Principal C asked his counseling staff to start each school year by hosting a talk with students about how to avoid bullying, what to do if they are a witness to bullying, and why they should not engage in inappropriate online communications. He also noted that they offered counseling to students after the school staff becomes aware of cyberbullying incidents. In addition, the school had assemblies

where outside speakers came into the building to conduct presentations about the ramifications of cyberbullying and how to avoid getting involved.

Designee CC. Designee CC spent his entire four-year career as an assistant principal in the middle school setting at School C. Prior to his tenure at School C, he worked as a teacher in a school that housed students in grades six through nine. He commented that he had dealt with cyberbullying incidents for the entire four years that he had worked as an administrator.

Approaching and processing cyberbullying incidents. Designee CC noted that his core role as an administrator involved the following:

- maintaining a safe and orderly environment;

- creating a harmonious culture that actually promotes student learning, responsibility, and respect;

- helping to create a rigorous instructional program;

- developing teachers; and

- engaging families in the instructional program of the school.

Designee CC believed that because he interacted daily with students, he was in a better position than parents to address the two to three cyberbullying incidents that School C experienced per month. These incidents made up 25% of the disciplinary issues that Designee CC addressed each month. When describing his investigative process, Designee CC shared that there were a lot of steps in the process, but noted, "Most of them are done between two to five days." The steps included (a) conducting interviews, (b) gathering witness statements, (c) contacting parents of the victim, bully, and witnesses, (d) talking to staff and teachers when necessary, (e) conferring with other building administrators to

get a sense of the involved students' prior history, (f) following-up with parents, (g)

mediating students, and (h) issuing an appropriate consequence. Consequences may be a

mediation, schedule change, or suspension. Although the school conducted an

investigation for all allegations, Designee CC acknowledged that some allegations are not

founded. He further explained the following:

> Even if the allegation is founded or not founded, I submit it. I actually enter the
>
> record in SchoolMax so that people can see that an investigation was done.
>
> Within a couple days, I submit my findings to the Office of Student Affairs.
>
> (Designee CC)

Designee CC described cyberbullying investigations as "time-consuming,"

because they needed to be thorough, but he noted one barrier that really impeded the

investigation process—the fact that parents were not able or willing to monitor the online

activities of their children. Designee CC asserted that parents should have "protocols in

place [that] teach them (children) the ills of using social media as a way to address an

issue." Designee CC shared that in his experience, most parents were defensive and

professed that their child did not actually have accounts on social media sites. Other

parents were just not aware of the different sites, so they were not equipped to monitor

social media platforms about which they had no knowledge.

Impact on the learning environment. When discussing the effect that

cyberbullying had on the learning environment, Designee CC noted the fact that some

students received consequences that caused them to miss school due to a suspension; he

explained that these absences impeded the learning process. In addition, he stated that by

the time cyberbullying incidents came to his attention, they usually had been going on for

quite a while, "so I can only imagine the damage or the impact it has already had on the student by the time it gets to me." Designee CC believed that cyberbullying incidents give parents a perception that the school had a safety issue. Videos could be posted online and reach hundreds of people instantly; but unfortunately, as a school, they were not able to monitor all of these posts, so they could not get ahead of the matter. One video posting could give a negative perception of the school, despite the fact that the school staff and administration worked hard to build a climate that was supportive and welcoming to all students.

Designee CC contended that cyberbullying affected his core responsibility of maintaining a safe and orderly environment and creating a harmonious culture that promoted student learning, so he felt compelled to address incidents as outlined in the district's policy. He commented, though, that the investigative process consumed a lot of time. He explained, "[It] takes away from monitoring the instructional program. It takes away from time spent reaching out to parents. It takes away from me helping to develop my teachers." As a result, Designee CC believed that investigating cyberbullying incidents distracted from the overall mission of the school, because it left less time for them to focus on being proactive in the prevention of incidents.

Strategies to reduce cyberbullying. Designee CC noted that as a school, they implemented the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) system to reinforce positive behaviors among students that can help support the school's work around building a positive culture and climate for students. Their PBIS system reinforced a climate of respect and responsibility; encouraged a safe and orderly environment and acceptance of order, and supported efforts to educate students about bullying and

cyberbullying and how to avoid both types of acts. Students who upheld the PBIS values received rewards in the form of "school money," which they could use to attend school activities or buy items from the school store. Designee CC added that as a school, School C needed to work on organizing activities for parents to help them support the school's anti-bullying efforts. He recognized that parents were not sure about how to monitor social media activity and were unaware of the signals that might indicate that an issue was on the horizon. He believed parents to be a critical component of reducing cyberbullying incidents.

Designee CC shared his perception that the district cyberbullying policy, as it was written, was effective. He stated that the policy allowed for the school to make central office and state-level administrators aware of the incidents using the *Bullying, Harassment, or Intimidation Reporting Form*. Designee CC believed that this process was critical in bringing awareness to cyberbullying across the state.

Principal D. At the time of the study, Principal D had served as principal of School D, which served approximately 800 students, for three years. His time at School D had been his first experience in the middle school setting. Principal D shared that he had dealt with cyberbullying incidents throughout his entire tenure in at the school.

Approaching and processing cyberbullying incidents. According to Principal D, his top two priorities as principal were making sure that teaching and learning takes place and ensuring that kids are safe and feel comfortable learning. He estimated that cyberbullying incidents occurred about four to five times per month at School D and posited that these incidents made up approximately 45% to 50% of all disciplinary infractions at the school.

When addressing cyberbullying, Principal D reported initiated the following

steps: (a) meet with the kids involved; (b) have counselors mediate with the students; (c)

ask students to print out evidence from the electronic devices; (d) contact parents; (e)

mediate again, with parents, if necessary; (f) inform parents of next steps; and (g) issue a

suspension, if needed. Principal D noted that in one instance, a student had to be

transferred to a different school, as she posed a threat to the safety of students. When

asked to explain further, Principal D shared the following:

> [The] student just would not stop posting messages. What also compounded the
>
> matter was that the parents of the cyberbully supported the actions of their child
>
> and even became belligerent during a mediation that involved both sets of parents.
>
> It just started to become an everyday occurrence that caused the victim to suffer
>
> emotionally because she was fearful every day that something was going to
>
> happen during the school day. I asked for the bully to be transferred out of my
>
> building. (Principal D)

Principal D further stated that in his experience, most of the cyberbullying incidents

involved young ladies, and "it is never seems to be a one-on-one argument. It tends to

blow up into a group fight or group argument." These investigations tended to take

longer, and Principal D noted that they could involve five to six students. In the case that

he described, Principal D said the investigation involved three to four students daily, as

the bully posted harassing messages on a daily basis.

Impact on the learning environment. Principal D stated that over the last two

years, cyberbullying incidents had declined among his students, but he admitted that there

was still a small percentage of students that continued to engage in inappropriate online

interactions. Most incidents seemed to occur after a weekend or a long break. Principal D explained that "on any given Monday, or any Monday after a break, you have an incident where a girl is walking down the hallway looking for a particular girl because something was said over the Internet or the group chat." These students' behaviors disrupted learning and created the perception that the school was an aggressive environment. Over the years, students had grown to understand that staff members were there to protect them, and so the students were more likely to report incidents before the situation resulted in an altercation.

Principal stressed the necessity of ensuring that students had a safe space for learning, but he also noted that fostering this safe space left him with less time to focus on teaching and learning in the building. He explained,

> It takes time away from me as a principal [being able] to go into the classrooms,
> support our teachers, observe instruction, getting formal observations done and
> take care of those things in the school that need to be addressed right away.
> (Principal D)

Strategies to reduce cyberbullying. According to Principal D, the number one driver in the reduction of cyberbullying in School D was the involvement of students. He explained that getting students to feel comfortable notifying adults before an altercation took place was critical. Ideally, Principal D believed that districts should limit cell phone use within schools. He suggested putting up some sort of firewall that would deter students from accessing the internet during the school day from their cell phones. He later countered that statement by saying,

[Kids] tend to find ways to get around firewalls, so to me, the ultimate policy is to either get rid of the cell phone or allow kids to have the traditional flip phone that can be used to strictly call parents. (Principal D)

Designee DD. Designee DD has been an assistant principal for 15 years, and had spent five years of those years in a school that housed students in Grades K-8. At the time of this study, he had worked at School D for four years as an assistant principal. Designee DD stated that he had dealt with cyberbullying incidents for the pasts 12 of his 15 years as an assistant principal, and it all began with students using emails to harass one another.

Approaching and processing cyberbullying incidents. Designee DD viewed his primary role as one of ensuring (a) that students come to school, (b) that the environment is conducive to learning, (c) that parents are pleased with the education that their child receives, and (d) that teachers receive the support that they need to deliver quality instruction. As the administrator assigned to seventh grade, Designee DD posited that he experienced approximately one cyberbullying incident per month, and noted that less than 10% of the overall disciplinary concerns that he resolved related to cyberbullying. Designee DD explained that addressing these incidents involved taking statements from all students involved, talking to parents, involving the security officer when needed, and involving a police officer when needed. He noted that he took these matters seriously, as two of his biological children had been cyberbullied when they were in school. Designee DD recalled,

I can remember seeing how devastated my own children were. Luckily, my wife and I were capable of working with the school to address the incident and offer support to my daughter. I kept thinking, "What if they had harmed themselves or

committed suicide?" I can't imagine! And both times, they were in middle school. (Designee D)

When asked how long each investigation took, Designee DD estimated that simple incidents typically took about two hours to resolve. The incident that his children experienced initially involved only one person; but by the time the matter had gotten to the school, it had expanded to encompass seven people. Designee DD explained that administrators occasionally invested more than a few hours resolving issues of cyberbullying, but it depended on the number of students involved. He noted that during the present school year, he had dealt with a significantly lower number of cyberbullying incidents than he did in previous years. He pointed to an accordion file on his desk where he kept information gathered during cyberbullying incidents, as he occasionally needed to refer back to prior incidents to gain insight on student relationships.

Designee DD asserted that the largest barrier to resolving the few cyberbullying investigations that he conducted had been dismissive parents. He described parents as "very defensive, and not really feeling like they feel that their children are capable of engaging in some of the things that children do online." He stated that parents were essential to the effort to curb cyberbullying, as they could monitor students' online behaviors when they were away from school.

Impact on the learning environment. Designee DD acknowledged that student victims of cyberbullying definitely dealt with psychological repercussions. He noted that he handled a situation with "a couple girls who, uh, revealed that they were lesbians. This was probably one of the most serious cases I've had to deal with. Those two students had to be removed from this school." He explained that the learning environment

was affected during this incident because the two victims were constantly crying in class, skipping class, and taking part in altercations that occurred during class and in the hallways. He also noted that the two victims' academic programming made it difficult to separate them, as they both needed specific courses that were only offered at certain times. As a result, they were constantly seen together and regularly caused distractions in the classroom. He added that their classmates who attempted to protect them also became victims of cyberbullying.

Strategies to reduce cyberbullying. Designee D asserted that the best strategy that School D had implemented to reduce cyberbullying was to educate students about the impact cyberbullying can have on the lives of victims. Their school had also partnered with law enforcement officers who came to the school to work with students who tended to engage in aggressive activities. This initiative allowed students to (a) hear directly from police officers the consequences that they could face when engaging in negative activities online and (b) engage in other positive activities in the community.

Principal E. Principal E reported serving as a principal for 14 years, and had spent the last five years at School E, which housed a little over 900 students. She noted that she had dealt with cyberbullying incidents for her past two to three years as an administrator.

Approaching and processing cyberbullying incidents. Principal E estimated that she addressed one to two cyberbullying incidents per month, and noted that less than 5% of the disciplinary issues that she resolved each month involved cyberbullying. Principal E stated that her core responsibilities as a principal were "[to] build the academic and social abilities of the students in my care in hopes of them becoming productive members

of society." Principal E viewed addressing cyberbullying incidents as an opportunity to grow the social development of a child; so it naturally took up 40% of her time, as she saw aiding in this development as one of her core responsibilities. She explained that cyberbullying matters could escalate very quickly, with a victim engaging in self-harm or having a physical confrontation with the alleged cyberbully.

When conducting the investigation, Principal E reported that she began by communicating with the students involved; then conducted a peer mediation, if possible; contacted parents; and issued the appropriate consequence, as needed. The consequences ranged from suspension to the involvement of local law enforcement officers, when necessary. Principal E noted that mediations usually resolved matters, but she also stated that in some recent cases, students were not willing to talk with one another because of advice from their parents or feelings of discomfort when in the same room with the other party. As a result, she had to spend more time with the professional school counselor to convince the students to talk with one another.

Principal E estimated that most investigations took approximately to one day to resolve, and she identified the biggest barrier to investigating these incidents as children's occasional lack of honesty. She believed that when students failed to tell the truth, it changed the course of the investigation until the lie was discovered. In many cases, after learning the truth, administrators would have to backtrack and involve different students. Principal E also noted that, unlike traditional bullying, cyberbullying could sometimes leave very little evidence because students could delete and alter posts, which made it difficult for administrators to uncover the truth of about the incident. She stressed that students could either help or hinder investigations.

Impact on the learning environment. In a statement about peer pressure, Principal E explained, "[At] the adolescent age, they're so concerned with what their peers think about them, and so the peer influence of being accepted ranks higher than even the academic component." She went on to share that when students engaged in cyberbullying incidents, academics were not their primary concern, and they became unfocused within the classroom. She also noted that during investigations, administrators often removed students from the classroom for interviews; and if a new detail or piece of information arose during the investigation, they sometimes had to go back to speak with a student that was returned to class. She also noted that oftentimes, even after the student had been sent back to class, the teacher became concerned because they notice that the student appeared distracted.

Principal E noted that they had worked very hard at creating a zero tolerance policy for bullying, so students were very clear about what transpired when they were caught engaging in online activities that led to cyberbullying. As a result, neither their school culture nor climate had been negatively affected by cyberbullying.

Strategies to reduce cyberbullying. Principal E explained that the staff at School E worked to teach children how to navigate communication with one another when using the different social media applications like Snapchat and Instagram. Principal E shared her understanding that students would likely continue to use these applications, so she felt it to be in the school's best interest to teach them how to use them responsibly. She even stated that although staff received adequate training around cyberbullying, students could use more training. She suggested the following:

If somehow we could do a social skills elective in terms of confident usage of

social media or dangers of social media where all of the students had to go

through that, I think it would be a benefit not only for cyberbullying, but for them

dealing with those predators that out there for child pornography and other things.

(Principal E)

In addition, Principal E stressed the important role that parents played in monitoring the

online activity of their children. She believed that parents needed to understand that they

still had control over the phones. She also emphasized the fact that it would help the

school tremendously if parents would have conversations about proper phone usage and

make themselves aware of the signs that indicate that something may be going on with

their child.

Designee EE. Designee EE was actually the assistant principal of School E; but at

the time of the interview, she was completing her first month as the acting principal. She

explained that she had served six years as a middle school administrator and had spent all

of those years at School E. She reported dealing with cyberbullying her entire tenure as

an administrator.

Approaching and processing cyberbullying incidents. Designee EE estimated

that the school typically addressed three cyberbullying incidents per month. She posited

that each incident took up to three hours to investigate. The respondent explained that

when investigating incidents, the administration (a) obtained statements from all students

involved, (b) attempted to retrieve the electronic devices of the bully and victim, (c)

conducted a mediation, and (d) either placed students in in-school or out-of-school

suspension. Designee EE noted that 90% of their student population was comprised of

English Language Learners. The majority of their students spoke Spanish, so communication during investigations could be difficult. She shared that School E did have members of its staff that were fluent in Spanish that could assist, but translating all parts of interviews and conversations with students and parents required more time. She stated that in some instances, communication on the electronic devices was in Spanish, so that too required translation and some interpretation.

Designee EE stated that these incidents usually involved groups that averaged about five students. As students in middle school traveled or gathered in what Designee EE describes as "cliques"; when an incident occurred, it could include a minimum of five students. One member of a clique usually had problems with a person from another clique, so all of their friends became involved. The need to include all students in the group in the investigation often caused it to take even longer.

Impact on the learning environment. Designee EE did not view isolated incidents of cyberbullying as having an effect on the entire student population; she believed the impact was restricted to the parties involved. She stated that for those parties, it was important to address the matter quickly, because "if I'm not providing an environment that is safe, students will either act up, won't come to school, or [will] keep dropping out."

Designee EE explained that School E was a 1:1 iPad school, meaning that every student in the building was assigned an iPad for use throughout the school day. The students checked the iPads out in the morning and returned them at the end of every school day. Students used the iPads throughout the day as a part of their instructional program. Designee EE noted that because every students had an iPad, the teachers and

staff members had to be very vigilant about monitoring activities on those and all other electronic devices in the students' possession. She explained that most of the cyberbullying incidents actually originated from personal cell phones, as the students knew that activity on the iPads could easily be monitored by school officials.

Strategies to reduce cyberbullying. Designee EE shared that at the beginning of the school year, School E held grade-level assemblies where they reviewed pertinent district policies. These discussion included a focus on cyberbullying. In addition to large assemblies, the school conducted small group discussions where the school counselors met with classrooms to address bullying, its impact on the bully, and the consequences that may result from making poor choices online. When asked about any policies or programs that helped to reduce cyberbullying, Designee EE stated that she did not know of any policies or programs that addressed cyberbullying.

Principal F. Principal F had served as the school leader for School F, which served approximately 1100 students, for four years prior to the study, and she had spent seven years in the middle school setting. She recalled that she had dealt with her first cyberbullying incident at least four years before the study, but she had noticed a stark increase in the occurrence of cyberbullying over the last two years.

Approaching and processing cyberbullying incidents. Principal F shared that her main responsibility as a building administrator was to provide a high-quality education to her students by retaining highly-qualified teachers and ensuring that the instruction was rigorous enough to prepare students for the future. Although Principal F estimated that she personally addressed about two cyberbullying incidents per month; she attributed 75% of the school's disciplinary issues to cyberbullying, as she believed that her assistant

principals addressed these incidents daily. She explained that "a lot of the incidents that escalate is because of social media, what people are posting or what people are saying, and so it infiltrates into the school; and that's how a lot of physical incidents get heightened."

Principal F shared that her process for addressing cyberbullying incidents involved (a) gathering statements from students, (b) contacting parents, (c) attempting to mediate the situation between the involved students, and in some cases, (d) issuing a consequence. She noted that this process could be smooth when all parties were accessible. However, there were times when some parents could not be reached via telephone. Principal F stated, "[Just] like in many schools, there are a number of parents who do not have [a] good phone number in the system. These, of course, are the parents of students who are frequently involved in incidents."

Principal F added that, as a follow up to the cyberbullying incident, the bully must do a "PSA" (public service announcement) over the intercom system, where they shared who they were, what they had done, what they had learned from the experience, and what they would do if they found themselves in the same situation in the future. Principal F described this consequence as an opportunity for the student to be held accountable to the school community within which they disrupted instruction for one or more people.

Impact on the learning environment. Although faculty and staff and School F encouraged students to inform the adults in the building if there about any issues that needed to be addressed, Principal F stated that they were not always forthcoming. As a result, when cyberbullying incidents occurred in the building, there was usually "a rumbling of the conversations and the plans" throughout the building. She commented

that this sort of chatter was distracting at times in the classroom, as students became much more interested in their peer's relationships than they were in the day's instruction.

Principal F also noted that students were often called out of class to give their statements during an investigation, which interrupted their time in class. She explained that while the administrators took these statements as quickly as possible so that the students could return to class; if students were not cooperative, the incidents could not be resolved in a timely manner. She also acknowledged that that students were not fond of being seen as a "snitch," so administrators put a lot of time and effort into ensuring the anonymity of the students giving statements. Principal F stated that the administrators often had to be very creative. She shared the following examples of the administrators' creativity:

> Additional students are called so that no one is aware of the identity of the real witness we are looking for, students are asked to run an errand for the teacher which leads them to the office where the administrator will take their statement, [and] in one case, the students were asked to come down to take a make-up test, then they were asked to type their statement into the computer just like they were taking an online assessment. (Principal F)

Principal F stated that this protection of the witnesses' identities helped to ensure their cooperation in the future, if needed. However, she admitted that these strategies could be time consuming. She acknowledged that the investigations impeded upon her agenda for the day, but she understood that addressing them was necessary and helped to avoid major incidents.

Principal F went on to say that even when the school thought they had resolved certain issues, they would come back up. She discussed one cyberbullying issue that they had revisited at least five times during the last school year. She went on to say, "The parents are cooperative, the students have been counseled, but for some reason, they keep lashing out online at one another."

Strategies to reduce cyberbullying. Principal F chose to combat cyberbullying by providing opportunities to celebrate students and their diversity, while bringing awareness to different social issues that may affect students' everyday lives. She explained that engaging in these activities allowed students to become more aware about what happened in the world around them and helped them to develop empathy towards others and tolerance of differing opinions. She shared her hope that through these activities, some students would find their voice while learning how to appreciate the differences in other people.

Designee FF. Designee FF shared that she was just beginning her first year as an assistant principal, after spending 16 years in the middle school setting. She stated that even though she was in the midst of her first year, and it was only two months into the school year, she had already experienced issues with cyberbullying.

Approaching and processing cyberbullying incidents. Designee FF described her core responsibilities as making sure that students had a safe and supportive environment that facilitated student growth, academically and socially. As the administrator assigned to sixth grade, Designee FF noted that she had only had to address one cyberbullying incident during the current school year. She explained that through her investigation, she determined that the problem had been going on for weeks before it came to her attention.

She speculated about why students were not reporting these issues, "I honestly think that it happens so often that maybe they can't discern what's considered bullying and what's not bullying."

Designee FF emphasized the importance of being patient during the investigative process; because it was usually a situation that had been going on for some time, and the victim could be experiencing mental trauma. As a result, her process involved the following steps: (a) meeting with the victim and the bully separately, then together; (b) contacting parents; (c) scheduling mediation for the students; (d) scheduling a meeting that included parents to discuss next steps; (e) issuing consequences, and (f) scheduling follow-up meetings with the victim to check on his or her progress. Designee FF stressed that the district's administrative procedure is very clear about the steps that administrators must take to process these incidents, but she acknowledged that the process was time-consuming. She elaborated by sharing the following about the incident that she had addressed so far during the current school year:

> So that one incident was one full day of reporting and having students write out statements and speaking with them. So that was a full day of just getting the reporting part down, but then as far as addressing it, then there's the conference with the parents, speaking to the parents on the phone, having the parents come to school. So the total time was at least a day and a half. (Designee FF)

One of the barriers that Designee FF admitted facing as a new administrator was the fact that she had not had the opportunity to establish relationships with students, as both she and they, as 6th graders, were new to the school. She believed that in middle school, students needed to feel that they could trust you before they would share sensitive

information like cyberbullying incidents. She expressed her hope to work with her sixth grade team of teachers to establish relationships with students by assisting students with their transition to middle school.

Impact on the learning environment. Designee FF shared that she had seen the emotional effect that cyberbullying incidents could have on students. She stated that to receive the supports that they needed to get through an incident like cyberbullying, students had to spend a lot of time out of class meeting with administrators, security, and counselors. She added, "I've seen students have to step out of the class and go the bathroom crying in relation to finding out that they were being bullied through social media." She explained that in some instances, the victim did not find out about the cyberbullying until they got to school. They might not have seen the online messages while at home, but their peers made them aware of the posts when they got to school. Designee FF described this sequence of events as the most devastating to students, because the they did not have the support of their family to help them in that moment. The student that she witnessed running into the bathroom shared with Designee FF that it felt as if "the walls [were] closing in on me. I felt like everyone knew but me, so people were talking about me and laughing behind my back the whole day."

Designee FF asserted that this student's description spoke to the fact that students who were not directly involved in the matter were preoccupied with what was happening between the bully and the victim. They were distracted in the classroom. Designee FF stated that the bystanders were constantly checking their phones during class and commenting verbally or online about the posts, making the issue even greater.

From her perspective as a new administrator, Designee FF expressed some disappointment in the fact that "incidents such as cyberbullying take me away from being an instructional leader, which is the reason why I was hired." She acknowledged that cyberbullying incidents affected her ability to fulfill her core responsibilities. She commented that although cyberbullying incidents did not occur daily, when they did occur, resolving them could take over a couple of days.

Strategies to reduce cyberbullying. Designee FF stressed that the best strategy that she had found for reducing cyberbullying occurrences was to be proactive. During the first week of school, she met with the sixth grade class and reviewed pertinent topics like cyberbullying. In addition, she worked with the counselors to rotate into classrooms for 30 minutes to have a more in depth conversation about bullying with students in a smaller group that allowed for a question and answer period. She had also worked with her team of teachers to establish a system for her grade level where students could anonymously report incidents like cyberbullying. Through this system, students could slip a note to a teacher at any time to report a concern. The teacher would then bring it to the attention of the administrator. She noted that the team was constantly meeting to revise their plans, because they were beginning to notice what Designee FF described as "a shift" with the students, where they were beginning to feel more comfortable in their setting. She speculated that as a result, they would begin to revert back to old misbehaviors like cyberbullying. She concluded by stating, "[There] is so much that is going on, whether it's during school hours or at home, that's the whole part of cyberbullying; there's no time constraint."

Analysis of Results

Through this study, the researcher sought to answer the following three research questions about the phenomenon of cyberbullying within six middle schools in one large urban school system where schools had reported incidents of cyberbullying to the district.

1. How do administrators approach and process cyberbullying incidents?

2. What are middle school administrators' perceptions of how cyberbullying impacts the learning environment?

3. What strategies have middle school administrators employed to reduce cyberbullying incidents?

During the analysis process, the following codes emerged from the data, which the researcher categorized into three major themes: (1) Leadership Behaviors, (2) Environmental Impacts, and (3) Systems and Structures. From these three major themes, several sub-themes emerged; however, this chapter will present the findings through the lens of the three major themes. Table 3 details all of the prevalent themes and subthemes revealed in the data.

Table 3

Themes and Subthemes Based on Research Questions

Research question	Major theme	Subthemes
#1 – How do administrators approach and process cyberbullying incidents?	Leadership behaviors	Investigation, gathering evidence, informing parents, mediation or counseling, and dispensing consequences
#2 – What are middle school administrators' perceptions of how cyberbullying impacts the learning environment?	Environmental impact (Community, student, and administrator)	Eroding an environment where students feel safe and secure; Distracting from instruction and learning, teacher support, and administrative duties
#3 – What strategies have middle school administrators employed to reduce cyberbullying incidents?	Systems and structures	Educating students on the effects of cyberbullying; Parent awareness, monitoring child's social media; Performing mediation or counseling

Research Question 1. Research Question 1 dealt with leadership behaviors

related to cyberbullying and asked, "How do administrators approach and process

cyberbullying incidents?" The subthemes for this question included (a) investigation, (b)

gathering evidence, (c) informing parents, and (d) dispensing consequences.

The researcher asked participants directly about how they addressed

cyberbullying within their schools. Participants also responded to additional questions

that gave the researcher more information about the investigative process used by each

school. When asked about how they approached and processed cyberbullying incidents,

the administrators clearly noted that cyberbullying was not tolerated by in their schools,

and they indicated that they approached these incidents in a systematic manner that often

began with an investigation and occasionally ended with the issuance of consequences to

students. All participants seemed to experience a sense of urgency when addressing these incidents. When asked if they always felt compelled to respond to cyberbullying incidents, 11 of the 12 participants responded that it was necessary to take every cyberbullying incident seriously for several reasons that all revolved around student safety and its impact on the academic success of the students involved.

All 12 participants described the investigative process as a lengthy procedure, and they noted that cyberbullying incidents took anywhere from one hour to a day and a half to resolve. The respondents gave several reasons for the length of the process, including students' unwillingness to report incidents, students' lack of honesty during investigations, the large number of students that were often involved in an incident, the cooperation of the parent (or lack thereof), language barriers, students' use of usernames that could not be traced back to the actual perpetrator, and students tendency to delete or alter the evidence.

The 12 respondents reported experiencing anywhere from one (Principal E) to 20-25 (Principal B) cyberbullying incidents each month. The administrators viewed the time that it took to resolve these issues as a necessary sacrifice to maintain a safe environment for learning, but they acknowledge that the process was a distraction from their instructional focus. Although these 12 middle school administrators took the time to investigate each cyberbullying incident, the documentation of their work and effort rarely reached beyond the schoolhouse. Principal A stated, "A lot of times, we're able to just handle it within the school." Handling matters 'within the school' may provide insight into why the district had 48 incidents of cyberbullying reported across all 208 schools and centers within the district when incidents are reportedly happening at a minimum of once

per month in one middle school. It is important to note that Administrative Procedure

5143 (PGCPS, 2017) require administrators to log each cyberbullying incident into

SchoolMax noting the actions taken to investigate and resolve the incident (PGCPS,

2017, p. 3).

While they did not directly reference the district's administrative procedure, the

participants were clearly aware of the steps involved in the investigative process; but it is

important to note that when describing the process, only one of the 12 administrators,

Designee CC, mentioned documenting the cyberbullying incident on the district's

Bullying, Harassment, and Intimidation Form and in SchoolMax, the district's system for

tracking student disciplinary actions. Ideally, the district's system should reflect the same

number of cyberbullying incidents that the respondents from these six middle schools

reported during their interviews. On the contrary, however, a review of the data revealed

that there were only 11 cyberbullying incidents reported to the District across all 46

middle schools for SY 2015-2016 and SY 2016-2017 (up until February 2017).

When probed about their opinions regarding the discrepancy in the number of

cyberbullying incidents reported to the District and what they reported experiencing on a

monthly basis, concern for the reputation of school and students as well as lack of time

were the main reasons provided. Specifically, five of the respondents felt that not

reporting to the District may have been an oversight for some based on the fact that the

number of hours spent investigating the matter may have overwhelmed administrators.

Principal C stated, "After taking two to three hours on an investigation, I am done. I have

to get into classrooms or meet with teachers. Honestly, sometimes I think I just forget."

Designee DD, as well as three other respondents, reported that they felt that an elevated

number of reported cyberbullying incidents could send the wrong message about their school or certain students. Designee DD added, "No one wants to be the school that has 10 cyberbullying incidents and all of the other schools have one or two. We are going to look bad and the fact of the matter is, those 10 [incidents] may be coming from just a few students, not the entire school." Designee BB shared, "Some kids just make a mistake. Do we really want to put on their record that they are a bully because they had one incident (shrugs shoulders)?"

Research Question 2. Research Question 2 dealt with the environmental impact of cyberbullying and asked, **"What are middle school administrators' perceptions of how cyberbullying impacts the learning environment?"** When both school principals and assistant principals discussed how cyberbullying affected the learning environment, three subthemes emerged that reflected a clear environmental impact on students, administrators, and the school community as a whole.

Subtheme 1. The fist subtheme for this research question spoke to the way that cyberbullying eroded an environment where students felt safe and secure. Respondents contended that cyberbullying impeded the learning process and had damaging effects on students' attitudes and self-esteem. They commented that children victimized by cyberbullying often felt alienated and had difficulty concentrating in class, which ultimately affected their academic progress in school. Overwhelmingly, respondents expressed concern for their students' welfare and safety in an academic environment.

The participants believed that they played an important role in the security and well-being of students and assumed the responsibility of ensuring that each child received

a comprehensive education that was free from bullying under any circumstances. Designee CC captured the sentiment of all respondents in the following response:

> I just think all of my students should feel safe in this school, and while cyberbullying doesn't always happen in school, it has tentacles that reach out to the school and so it's my job to respond. I want to make sure that my students are safe, that they are able to focus on learning rather than on their safety…(Designee CC)

*Subtheme 2***.** The second subtheme related to Research Question 2 focused on the degree to which cyberbullying distracted from time best used for student learning, teacher support, and administrative duties**.** Respondents expressed that cyberbullying incidents were an obvious distraction to the victim and the alleged cyberbully, but it also became a distraction to witnesses. Respondents noted that when cyberbullying incidents occurred, students were often preoccupied with what was happening online instead of their classroom instruction. They also shared that the investigation process required that administrators conduct interviews with both the alleged cyberbully and the victim, which required them to leave class and miss valuable time designated for learning activities. Further, investigations also included witnesses, who also had to leave class for a period of time. Most of the respondents also mentioned that students were not always cooperative during the investigation; which meant that after completing the interview process, administrators often found that some students that they had questioned were not actually involved in the matter. These students also missed classroom instruction.

Surveyed respondents contended that they devoted too much of their time to investigating cyberbullying incidents. One administrator reported spending a day and a

half on one investigation. They consistently noted that their time could be better used to support teachers and refine learning activities for students. The participants specifically identified a lack of time for conducting teacher observations, providing feedback to teachers, reaching out to parents, and providing professional development for teachers. Designee FF, for example, stated the following:

> I was hired as an instructional leader. I was hired to help change this school instructionally, academically. I was hired to help those teachers to help students. So whenever anything comes along like the cyberbullying incidents I spoke about, that is a full day that has just been taken away from me and my ability to do the job that I was hired for.

This response exemplifies the fact that the respondents recognized the importance of ensuring that quality instruction occurred in the classroom, but that they also understood that the environment had to suitable and safe for instruction to take place. As a result, they all took matters like cyberbullying very seriously, which meant that they occasionally had to set aside some of their other core responsibilities to deal with the issue when it arose.

    Subtheme 3. Subtheme 3 involved the respondents' acknowledgement that unaddressed cyberbullying incidents could result in physical confrontations or self-harm on the part of the victims. The participants explained that cyberbullying often led to physical and verbal altercations; and in some instances, the victim internalized the abuse to an extreme degree and harmed himself. They shared that cyberbullying could have a devastating effect on children who might, as a result, experience long-term physical and mental disorders. The administrators stated that in many cases, the students did not let

them know about a cyberbullying incident until it had gotten to the point where the victim already exhibited mental distress or a confrontation arises. As a result, the respondents found themselves being more reactive then proactive when addressing cyberbullying incidents.

Research Question 3. Research Question 3 dealt with systems and structures for dealing with cyberbullying. The question asked, "What strategies have middle school administrators employed to reduce cyberbullying incidents?" When discussing the strategies that they had employed to reduce cyberbullying within their schools, the respondents had an array of responses that included both students and parents. It was clear that a combination of strategies in the home and at school are necessary to address issues of cyberbullying.

Subtheme 1. Subtheme 1 involved communicating and educating students about the effects of cyberbullying. Respondents expressed the need for more education on the effects of cyberbullying among students and parents. They endeavored to communicate the school's expectations of positive behavior and adherence to policies related to cyberbullying whenever possible. The participants all stated that they had employed school-wide and grade-level activities to address cyberbullying, and the majority of the respondents emphasized the need to help students develop empathy for their peers. They believed that incidents would decrease if students understood the effect that cyberbullying could have on a person. The respondents had all seen firsthand the effects of cyberbullying on students and considered it a priority to inform students of their expectations for acceptable behavior in the academic environment.

Administrative Procedure 5143 (PGCPS, 2017, p. 6) outlined examples for school leaders of developmentally appropriate activities that schools must to conduct to prevent bullying, harassment, or intimidation. These activities include holding regular classroom meetings with students to discuss safety concerns, conducting classroom lessons on sensitivity and tolerance, forming an anti-bullying committee, celebrating national anti-bullying week, and conducting grade-level focus groups or a school-wide survey to identify problem areas and the level of bullying within the school. Although this list is a short one, 10 out of 12 of the respondents mentioned employing one or more of these strategies to reduce cyberbullying within their building. In nine of these 10 instances, the participants characterized these activities as isolated events that took place at the beginning of the school year. Designee FF, for example, stated the following:

> At the start of the year we brought the entire sixth grade together and one of the tough conversations was around bullying and we really spent time honing in on cyberbullying since we know that's where the biggest platform is for bullying. (Designee FF)

It may prove helpful for the administrators to revisit these activities throughout the school year instead of planning them as isolated "one-and-done" events. In addition, all of the respondents spoke about having individual conferences with parents as a part of their resolution process for cyberbullying incidents; however, these one-on-one conferences resulted from the parent's child being involved in an incident. Involving parents in the prevention process could prove beneficial in reducing the number of cyberbullying incidents in the target schools.

Subtheme 2. Subtheme 2 dealt with parental awareness and monitoring of their student's social media usage. Respondents consistently pointed to the key role that parents played in helping to prevent cyberbullying by remaining aware of and monitoring their child's use of social media platforms, emails, and websites. They characterized this parental participation as the first line of defense against cyberbullying among adolescent children in urban schools. As many cyberbullying incidents originated outside of the school, they all noted that parents' intentional monitoring of technology was helpful in addressing, and ultimately preventing, incidents. The participants agreed that many parents were not aware of the different social media sites or applications that their child might utilize, but they felt as though parents were equipped to (a) engage in discussions with their child about the importance of appropriate online behavior or (b) take the mobile phone from their child when they engaged in negative behavior online. Principal E expressed the following sentiment, "I think parents forget that you've given your child this phone, but they're still a child. So, it's kind of your responsibility to periodically check the phone or take the phone or have conversations about proper usage."

The respondents all believed that parental support was a critical piece to resolving cyberbullying incidents, and they all mentioned engaging parents during the investigation process. Some participants also noted that parents could be a barrier to the process if they were reluctant to believe that their child would engage in negative behaviors online or if they were not aware that their child had social media accounts. The following two statements are examples of the respondents' perspectives about parental awareness and monitoring of their students' social media accounts:

Designee AA: "I think parent support is huge. Getting the parents to understand the seriousness, getting them to realize, yes your son or daughter did do this and they are not the angel you claim they are, is huge."

Designee CC: "I think the largest obstacle is parents not being able to monitor the activity of their children on social media, online, and just not having protocols in place to teach them the ills of using social media…The majority of the times when I'm investigating something regarding cyberbullying, the parents are at first very defensive because they confessed to the child not having Instagram or Snapchat."

Subtheme 3. Subtheme 3 spoke to the mediation and counseling that administrators employed during and after the investigation of a cyberbullying incident. All of the respondents noted that they performed various types of mediation or counseling with students and parents during the investigation process. Even if they did not find concrete evidence that cyberbullying took place, administrators shared that they often opted to perform some type of mediation or counseling process to ensure that the students were aware of how negative behaviors could impact their lives and the lives of others.

Limitations

There were three limitations of this study. First, the researcher selected the six middle schools that participated in the study because they had reported incidents of cyberbullying in prior school years. As District A includes 46 middle schools, it may have been beneficial to hear from the schools that had no reported bullying incidents. The

strategies that they implemented to reduce cyberbullying might add to the body of knowledge about the district's work around addressing cyberbullying incidents.

Secondly, although the researcher asked principals to identify administrative designees that addressed cyberbullying incidents within their school buildings, all of the selected designees were assistant principals. During interviews, participants did identify other members of their staff, like security and counseling staff, that aided in addressing cyberbullying incidents in their building. However, when asked, the principals only recommended that assistant principals participate in the study. Perspectives from other members of the school community may have been beneficial, as their interactions with the students could yield a different perspective on the cyberbullying phenomenon.

The last limitation involved the fact that the study only involved middle schools. Future research studies may enhance these findings by also interviewing elementary and high school administrators. The data from those interviews may yield a better understanding of if, and how, cyberbullying manifests prior to and after middle school. Understanding how cyberbullying begins may shed some light on how middle school administrators should approach prevention and resolution processes in their buildings.

Recommendations for the District

There are several recommendations that District A may consider when addressing cyberbullying in middle schools. One recommendation is that the district should consider taking a closer look at how schools document cyberbullying incidents. All of the respondents in the present study noted a detailed process by which they addressed cyberbullying within their buildings. While the processed employed by the participants may not have been in the prescribed order of Administrative Procedure 5143, it was

evident they were knowledgeable of the district's requirements. The only requirement that all but one of the administrators seemed to omit was the documentation of the incident on the *Bullying, Harassment, or Intimidation Forms* and within the SchoolMax discipline tracking system. This omission may reveal why the participants estimated that they responded to so many cyberbullying incidents within a month when the district's data showed only 48 incidents district-wide for all elementary and secondary schools during school year 2015-2016.

The district should consider an online tracking system similar to the one used to track employee incidents. This online tracking system allows administrators to type all notes and information directly into the online form. Because the platform is connected to the district's database that houses student information, some required information is prepopulated by the tracking tool; which would allow administrators to type into the document, then automatically share it with all of the parties that needed to be notified about the incident. This tool would streamline the process for administrators, and hopefully, increase the likelihood that schools will document and report all cyberbullying incidents to the district Office of Student Services.

The second recommendation is that the middle school administrators interviewed could benefit from more prevention programs specifically designed to address bullying. All of the respondents noted that they employed several different activities throughout the year to increase students' awareness of the ramifications of participating in cyberbullying, yet only one school talked about using the Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS) program to reinforce the positive behaviors

that they want students to exhibit in school and online. Each of the six participating schools use the PBIS program to address student behavior, but only one administrator mentioned having any knowledge of programs that were available to assist in reducing cyberbullying incidents. These administrators may benefit from receiving guidance on how to enhance programs that they already have in place to fit their current needs.

The third recommendation is that the district should consider providing in-house assistance to schools that have over ten cyberbullying incidents per month. Although this recommendation may be idealistic and could put a financial strain on the district, it could prove useful in providing support to high-incidence schools. Three respondents reported having between 12 and 25 cyberbullying incidents each month. Even though administrators are not always obligated to handle these incidents, the respondents reported addressing the issue personally because they could result in such harm to students, physically and emotionally. As a result, these administrators spent an inordinate amount of time on non-instructional tasks. Monitoring instruction, providing feedback to teachers, and identifying professional development opportunities for teachers are critical pieces to academic achievement in schools. When middle school administrators are spending the majority of their time facilitating investigations, they are unable to be effective instructional leaders within their school buildings.

In addition, the district should consider strengthening efforts to increase parental awareness about cyberbullying. All of the respondents noted that parents were a critical part of the resolution process; but parents are not as technologically savvy as their children, and as a result, they often have a difficult time monitoring their students' online activities. The district's IT professionals may be able to lead small professional

development sessions within schools for parents around the latest social media

applications and strategies that parents can adopt to monitor those apps. Even if parents

walk away with a simple checklist of what they can do on a weekly or daily basis to

check their child's activity online, it would be helpful for schools who are often left in the

dark about students' online activity outside of the school building.

Lastly, the district should work with its Department of Family and Community

Engagement in order to develop strategies to support parents around how to appropriately

address issues of cyberbullying with their child while working in conjunction with their

school. These same types of supports could be beneficial for administrators within the

middle schools as they are not always equipped with the most appropriate strategies to

support students and families through cyberbullying incidents.

Conclusion

Cyberbullying incidents, whether they occur outside of school or within the

school building, can disrupt learning for the victim, the cyberbully, and other student

witnesses. It is a problem that cannot be ignored, because it competes with the school's

efforts to provide a safe and supportive school environment where all students can learn.

Research has shown that students cannot excel academically in an environment where

they do not feel safe, and incidents of cyberbullying interfere with students' feelings of

safety.

Although school leaders are working hard to resolve cyberbullying incidents, they

are often unaware of the incidents until they have affected the learning environment.

School district's like District A have policies to address cyberbullying, with the hopes of

reducing its occurrence; however, until now, there has been little to no research on how

these policies are being implemented on the ground level. This research study provided insight into the problem of cyberbullying at the school level through the voices of the people that are ultimately responsible for addressing these incidents. It also provided the district with recommendations for improving the process by which schools address these incidents. As students continue to increase their online activity, the number of cyberbullying incidents that occur each year may continue to increase, particularly in middle schools; as a result, schools need key supports that will aid them in addressing the issue of cyberbullying and ensure that students can focus on learning and administrators can give the majority of their attention to the instructional tasks that will move their school forward academically.

Appendices

Appendix A: Administrative Procedure 5143
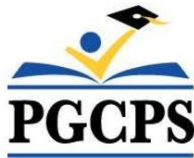
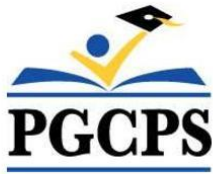|	**ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURE**	5143
PGCPS		Procedure No.
	BULLYING, HARASSMENT, OR INTIMIDATION	October 27, 2017
		Date

I.   **PURPOSE:** The purpose of this procedure is to maintain a safe school environment that is conducive to learning and to ensure that school administrators and staff take measures to promote the prevention of bullying, harassment, and intimidation as well as prohibit reprisal or retaliation against individuals who report these acts.

II. **INFORMATION:** In accordance with the provisions of Section 7-424.1 of the Education Article of the Annotated Code of Maryland, the Maryland State Board of Education developed and adopted a model policy to address bullying, harassment, and intimidation. All local school systems were required to establish a policy prohibiting bullying, harassment, or intimidation based on the model policy by July 1, 2009. This procedure focuses on student to student bullying, harassment, or intimidation. Allegations of students being bullied by an employee are to be addressed under Administrative Procedure 4170, Discrimination and Harassment.

III. **BOARD POLICY:** It is the intent of Prince George's County Public Schools to maintain safe environments that are conducive to learning. The purpose of this procedure is to ensure that school administrators take measures to promote the prevention of bullying, harassment, or intimidation in the learning environment and inform parents of these efforts. (Board Policy 5143)

IV. **DEFINITIONS:**

A. "Bullying, harassment, or intimidation (BHI)" are:

- anti-social behaviors that are conducted with the intent to cause harm and are characterized by an imbalance of power;

- intentional conduct, including verbal, non-verbal, physical, or written conduct, or an intentional electronic communication, that creates a hostile educational environment by substantially interfering with a student's educational benefits, opportunities, or performance, or with a student's physical or psychological well-being;

- motivated by an actual or a perceived personal characteristic including race, national origin, marital status, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, ancestry, physical attributes, socio-economic status, familial status, or physical or mental ability or disability;

- threatening or seriously intimidating; and

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PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURE

BULLYING, HARASSMENT,
OR INTIMIDATION

5143

Procedure No.

October 27, 2017

Date

- occurring on school property, at a school activity or event, or on a school bus; or, substantially disrupts the orderly operation of a school.

B. "Electronic communication" means a communication transmitted by means of an electronic device, including, but not limited to, a telephone, cellular phone, computer, or pager.

C. "Retaliation" is an act of reprisal or getting back at a person for an act he/she has committed.
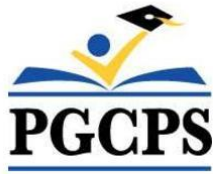
V. **PROCEDURES:**

A. Reporting of Allegations

All reports must be written and submitted to the school using the *Bullying, Harassment, or Intimidation Reporting Form*. Reports must be promptly and appropriately investigated by school administrators/designee, consistent with due process rights, using the *Bullying, Harassment, or Intimidation Incident School Investigation Form* within two (2) school days after receipt of the form. Copies of the Bullying, Harassment or Intimidation Forms can be requested from the school, or downloaded from the website: www1.pgcps.org.

B. Investigation of Alleged Incidents

All allegations of BHI must be promptly and thoroughly investigated by the local school. The investigation must be documented using the Investigation Form and the Investigation Notes Form and include all notes or communication logs related to the specific incident.

The following actions are to take place in order to allow the school administration/designee to determine the appropriate course of action to address the behavior. School administrators/designee will determine whether bullying, harassment, or intimidation occurred by taking the following steps:

1. Meet individually with the victim, the accused and any witnesses to gather information regarding the allegation.

ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURE
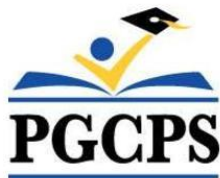
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2. Notify all parties involved in the incident that retaliation against a victim, witness or bystander is strictly prohibited.

3. Document findings and all notes taken during the student interviews, parent contacts, and information gathered from other witnesses on the *Investigation Notes Form* and attach the notes to the BHI Incident School Investigation Form.

4. Indicate findings on the Incident School Investigation Form to include whether or not the allegation was substantiated as bullying or not substantiated as bullying. If the incident is not substantiated the reason must be noted on the form.

5. Notify the parents of the victim and offender of the outcome of the investigation once the investigation has been completed. The notification must respect the confidentiality of the victim and the offender. Therefore, specific information related to disciplinary consequences will not be provided.

6. Notify the Investigative Counselor or School Security Officer immediately if the bullying, harassment, or intimidation creates imminent danger or qualifies as a delinquent act.

7. Log the incident into SchoolMax indicating the actions taken to investigate the allegations and the outcome (refer to the online SchoolMax Discipline Training Guide; PGCPS log-in is required).

8. Submit a copy of the completed *Reporting, Investigation and Notes Forms* to the Department of Student Services (student.services@pgcps.org) within five (5) school days.

9. Copies of the forms MUST be maintained in the principal's confidential file for 5 years. These forms are not to be filed in the student's cumulative folder or limited access folder.

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C. Parental Notification

The school administrator/designee will immediately notify parent/guardian of the victim and the parents of the offender of the incident.

1. The parent/guardian of the victim will be informed of the specific steps that the school will take to intervene, interrupt and monitor the behaviors.

2. The parent/guardian of the offender will be informed of the specific steps that the school will take to intervene, interrupt, and monitor the behaviors as well as the proposed consequences as stipulated in the Student Rights and Responsibilities Handbook.

3. The parent/guardian of the victim may be invited to participate in the development of an intervention plan for their child.

4. The parent/guardian of the offender may be invited to participate in the development of an intervention plan for their child.

5. Each parent/guardian will be provided with a copy of the intervention plan developed for their child.

D. Follow-up actions by the principal/designee:

1. Separate conferences for the victim and offender will occur within ten (10) school days after the investigation to ensure that the bullying, harassment, or intimidation has ceased, and to determine whether there is a need for additional intervention. Individual conferences may occur as part of the counseling intervention.

2. A second conference will be held with the victim four (4) weeks after the initial conference to ensure that the bullying, harassment, or intimidation has ceased.

E. Central support for parents and school administrators

1. In instances where the bullying, harassment or intimidation incident is unresolved, and/or parent/guardians are not satisfied with the investigation, support may be requested by the school or parent/guardian from the Department
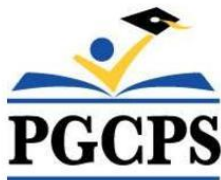
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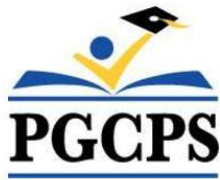| October 27, 2017 |
|---|
| Date |

of Student Services.

2. Support may be inclusive of, but not limited to, the following:

    ✓ Independent review of the bullying, harassment, or intimidation report, investigation and notes;
    ✓ Interview of parties involved in data collection and disposition;
    ✓ Review of disciplinary action as deemed appropriate, under the Student Rights and Responsibilities Handbook related to the incident(s);
    ✓ Consultation with the parent/guardian and school-based personnel on alternative strategies and supports; and
    ✓ Consultation with other involved offices regarding findings and recommended actions.

    The Department of Student Services will work with the school to ensure that the incident is investigated and that the resolution is appropriate. The Department of Student Services may amend the findings and recommendations of the school pursuant to review.

F. Prevention

    All schools will implement procedures to prevent and reduce acts of bullying, harassment, or intimidation.

    1. Each school-based administrator will provide annual in-service training to all staff on procedures to prevent, identify, investigate and report allegations of bullying, harassment, or intimidation.

    2. Schools will inform students and parents that bullying, harassment, or intimidation will not be condoned.

    3. Parents will be informed about the availability of the *Bullying, Harassment, or Intimidation Reporting Form* through appropriate school communication (i.e., school web site, parent newsletters, student handbook, etc.)
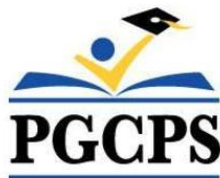
4. *Bullying, Harassment, or Intimidation Reporting Forms* will be available in the main office, counselor's office and other locations in each school.

5. Schools will inform students about the availability and use of the *Bullying, Harassment, or Intimidation Reporting Form* and its use during orientation sessions during the first week of school.

6. Copies of the form will be available on the Prince George's County Public Schools website.

7. Schools are required to conduct developmentally appropriate prevention activities such as:

   a. Holding regular classroom meetings with students to discuss safety concerns.

   b. Clarifying and reinforcing classroom rules against bullying, harassment, or intimidation.

   c. Conducting classroom lessons on sensitivity and tolerance.

   d. Forming an Anti-Bullying, Harassment, or Intimidation Committee to assess the nature and prevalence of bullying at the school.

   e. Celebrating the annual national anti-bullying week.

   f. Conducting grade level focus groups or a school-wide survey to identify problem areas in the building and the level of bullying, harassment, or intimidation within the school.

G. Interventions

Schools must provide intervention and support to victims and offenders to address acts of bullying, harassment, or intimidation. These interventions may include, but are not limited to, the following actions:

1. Parent/student conferences.

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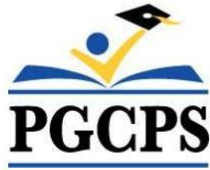OR INTIMIDATION

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2. Counseling with the professional school counselor, school psychologist, pupil personnel worker, professional school nurse and other appropriate professional staff.

3. Behavioral contracts.

4. Positive behavioral supports, such as functional behavioral assessments and behavioral intervention plans, etc.

5. Support counseling for the victim.

6. Support counseling for the offender.

7. Support counseling for bystanders.

8. Increased adult supervision during unstructured times (i.e. classroom changes, lunch, recess, etc.).

9. Social skills training, including role playing and behavioral rehearsal.

10. Schedule adjustment.

11. Development of a plan of support for the victim and offender.

The response/intervention must be documented in SchoolMax.

H. Consequences

Consequences and support strategies for students committing acts of bullying, harassment, or intimidation; engaged in reprisal or retaliation; or reporting false accusations shall be consistently and fairly applied after appropriate investigation has determined that such an offense has occurred. A range of consequences is contained in the Student Rights and Responsibilities Handbook.

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VI.   **RELATED PROCEDURES:**
Administrative Procedure 0700, Information Technology Services Acceptable Usage Guidelines;
Administrative Procedure 4170, Discrimination and Harassment; and
Administrative Procedure 10101, Student Rights and Responsibilities Handbook.

VII.   **MAINTENANCE AND UPDATE OF THESE PROCEDURES:** These procedures originate with the Division of Student Services. Regular updating of these procedures will be accomplished, as needed.

VIII.   **CANCELLATIONS AND SUPERSEDURES:** This Administrative Procedure cancels and supersedes Administrative Procedure 5143, dated July 1, 2013.

IX.   **EFFECTIVE DATE:** October 27, 2017.

Attachments:

1. Bullying, Harassment, or Intimidation Incident School Investigation Form
2. Bullying, Harassment, or Intimidation Reporting Form
3. Investigation Notes Form
4. Procedure Flow Chart

Distribution: Lists 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 9, 10, 11 and 12

Appendix B: Bullying, Harassment, or Intimidation Reporting Form

Clear Form

BULLYING, HARASSMENT OR INTIMIDATION REPORTING FORM

Directions: Bullying, harassment, and intimidation are serious and will not be tolerated. This is a form to report alleged bullying harassment, or intimidation that occurred during the current school year on school property, at a school-sponsored activity or event off school property, on a school bus, on the way to and/or from school*, or on the internet-sent on or off school property; or that substantially disrupted the orderly operation of the school. Bullying, harassment and intimidation includes any intentional conduct, including verbal, physical or written conduct, or an intentional electronic communication, that creates a hostile educational environment by substantially interfering with a student's educational benefits, opportunities or performance, or with a student's physical or psychological well-being. (Definitions for Bullying, Cyberbullying, Harassment, and Intimidation are provided below.)

1. *Bullying* – A pattern or behavior when a person repeatedly uses power in an intentional manner, including verbal, physical, or written conduct or intentional electronic communication against one or more students.
2. *Cyberbullying* – The use of electronic communication to harm or harass others in a deliberate, repeated, and hostile manner.
3. *Harassment* – Includes actual or perceived negative actions that offend, ridicule, or demean another individual with regard to race, national origin, marital status, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, ancestry, physical attributes, socioeconomic status, familial status, physical or mental ability, or disability.
4. *Intimidation* – subjecting an individual to intentional action that seriously threatens and induces a sense of fear and/or inferiority.

Conduct that is of a sexual nature is generally thought to mean actions, language, or visual materials which specifically refer to, portray, or involve sexual activity or language. Conduct of a sexual nature may include overt sexual solicitations, inappropriate touching, sexual jokes, and inquiries about a person's sex life. Sexual harassment is the broader term that encompasses conduct of a sexual nature such as unwelcomed sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical contact of a sexual nature. Sexual harassment also includes acts that are not overtly sexual but rather are directed at individuals based on their gender such as profanity or rude behavior that is gender-specific.

If you are a student, the parent/guardian of a student, a close adult relative of a student, or a school staff member and wish to report an incident of alleged bullying harassment, or intimidation, complete this form and return it to the principal at the student victim's school. You may contact the school for additional information or assistance at any time.

(PLEASE PRINT ALL INFORMATION)

Today's date: _____ / _____ / _____
                    Month   Day   Year

School: _____

School System: __Prince George's County Public Schools_____

PERSON REPORTING INCIDENT	Name: _____
Telephone: _____	E-mail: _____

Place an **X** in the appropriate box: ❑ Student ❑ Parent/guardian of a student ❑ Close adult relative of a student ❑ School Staff ❑ Bystander

1. Name of alleged student victim(s): _____ Age: _____ School _____
   _____ Age: _____ School _____
   _____ Age: _____ School _____

2. Name of alleged witness(es) (if known):
   _____ Age: _____ School _____
   _____ Age: _____ School _____
   _____ Age: _____ School _____

3. Name(s) of alleged offender(s) (if known):   Age   School   Is he/she a student?

   _____ _____ _____ ○Yes ○No
   _____ _____ _____ ○Yes ○No
   _____ _____ _____ ○Yes ○No

Maryland State Department of Education in accordance with the Safe Schools Reporting Act of 2005   7-16

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4. On what date(s) did the incident happen?:

_____ / _____ / _____   _____ / _____ / _____   _____ / _____ / _____
Month   Day   Year   Month   Day   Year   Month   Day   Year

5. Place an **X** next to the statement(s) that best describes what happened (choose all that apply):

❑ Any bullying, harassment, or intimidation that involves physical aggression (specify)_____
❑ Getting another person to hit or harm the student
❑ Teasing, name-calling, making critical remarks, or threatening, in person or by other means
❑ Demeaning and making the victim of jokes
❑ Making rude and/or threatening gestures
❑ Excluding or rejecting the student
❑ Intimidating, extorting, or exploiting
❑ Spreading harmful rumors or gossip
❑ Related to the student's disability
❑ Related to the student's perceived sexual orientation
❑ Cyber bullying (e.g. social media including Facebook, Twitter, Vine, Snapchat, Periscope, kik, Instagram, etc.)
❑ Electronic communication (e.g. email, text, sexting, etc.)
❑ Gang related
❑ Gang recruitment
❑ Human trafficking/Prostitution recruitment
❑ Racial Harassment
❑ Sexual Harassment
❑ Sexual in nature
❑ Other (specify) _____

6. Where did the incident happen (choose all that apply)?

❑ On school property   ❑ At a school-sponsored activity or event off school property   ❑ Via Internet- sent off school property
❑ On a school bus   ❑ On the way to/from school*   ❑ Via Internet- sent on school property
*Will be collected unless specifically excluded by local board policy

7. Describe the incident(s), including what the alleged offender(s) said or did. _____
_____
_____
(Attach a separate sheet if necessary)

8. Why did the bullying, harassment or intimidation occur? _____
_____
(Attach a separate sheet if necessary)

9. Did a physical injury result from this incident? Place an **X** next to one of the following:

◯ No   ◯ Yes, but it did not require medical attention   ◯ Yes, and it required medical attention

10. If there was a physical injury, do you think there will be permanent effects? ◯ Yes ◯ No

11. Was the student victim absent from school as a result of the incident?   ◯ Yes ◯ No
If yes, how many days was the student victim absent from school as a result of the incident? _____

12. Did a psychological injury result from this incident? Place an **X** next to one of the following:
◯ No   ◯ Yes, but psychological services have not been sought   ◯ Yes, and psychological services have been sought

13. Is there any additional information you would like to provide? _____
_____
_____
(Attach a separate sheet if necessary)

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Maryland State Department of Education in accordance with the Safe Schools Reporting Act of 2005   7-16

Appendix C: Bullying, Harassment, or Intimidation Investigation Form

<div style="text-align: right;">

CLEAR FORM

</div>

BULLYING, HARASSMENT, OR INTIMIDATION INCIDENT SCHOOL INVESTIGATION FORM

School Personnel Completing Form: _____ Position: _____

Today's date: _____ / _____ / _____
Month   Day   Year

School: _____

School System: Prince George's County Public Schools _____

Person Reporting Incident (From reporting form) Name: _____

Telephone: _____ E-mail: _____

Place an X in the appropriate box: ❑ Student ❑ Parent/guardian ❑ Close adult relative
❑ School Staff ❑ Bystander

---

1. Name of student victim(s): _____ Age: _____ Days absent as a result of the incident: _____
   _____ Age: _____ Days absent as a result of the incident: _____
   _____ Age: _____ Days absent as a result of the incident: _____

2. Name(s) of alleged witness(s) (If known):   Age   School
   _____ _____ _____
   _____ _____ _____
   _____ _____ _____

3. Name(s) of alleged offender(s) (If known):   Age   School   Is he/she a student?   Days absent due to incident
   _____ _____ _____ ◯Yes ◯No _____
   _____ _____ _____ ◯Yes ◯No _____
   _____ _____ _____ ◯Yes ◯No _____
   (Please print)
   Total number of alleged offenders: _____

INVESTIGATION

4. What actions were taken to investigate this incident? (choose all that apply)

   ❑ Interviewed alleged student victim
   ❑ Interviewed alleged offender(s)
   ❑ Interviewed alleged witnesses
   ❑ Witness statements collected in writing
   ❑ Interviewed school nurse
   ❑ Reviewed any medical information available
   ❑ Interviewed teachers and/or school staff
   ❑ Interviewed student victim's parent/guardian

   ❑ Interviewed alleged offender's parent/guardian
   ❑ Examined physical evidence
   ❑ Reviewed/Obtained copy of police report
   ❑ Conducted student record review
   ❑ Examined video evidence
   ❑ Conducted meeting with Resource Officer
   ❑ Reviewed social media site
   ❑ Other (specify) _____

5. Why did the harassment, intimidation, or bullying occur (alleged motives)? (choose all that apply)

   ❑ Because of race
   ❑ Because of national origin
   ❑ Because of marital status
   ❑ Because of sex
   ❑ Because of sexual orientation
   ❑ Because of gender identity
   ❑ Because of religion
   ❑ Because of disability
   ❑ Because of physical appearance
   ❑ The reason is unknown

   ❑ To impress others
   ❑ Just to be mean
   ❑ Gang related
   ❑ Gang recruitment
   ❑ Human trafficking/Prostitution recruitment
   ❑ Determined not to be Bullying
   ❑ Determined not to be Harassment
   ❑ Determined not to be Intimidation
   ❑ Because of another reason (specify) _____

Maryland State Department of Education in accordance with the Safe Schools Reporting Act of 2005   07-16

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6. Where was the incident reported to have happened (choose all that apply)?

   ❏ On school property   ❏ At a school-sponsored activity or event off school property
   ❏ On a school bus   ❏ On the way to/from school*   ❏ Via Internet- sent on school property
   ❏ Via Internet- sent off school property

   *Will be collected unless specifically excluded by local board policy

7. What corrective actions were taken in this case (choose all that apply)?

   ❏ None were required, this was a false allegation
   ❏ None, the incident did not warrant any corrective action
   ❏ None, no Bullying occurred
   ❏ None, no harassment occurred
   ❏ None, no intimidation occurred
   ❏ None, the alleged incident could not be verified
   ❏ Determined as a conflict and not bullying, harassment or intimidation
   ❏ Student conference
   ❏ Student warning
   ❏ Letter of apology
   ❏ Mediation
   ❏ Counseling
   ❏ Parent letter
   ❏ Parent phone call

   ❏ Parent conference
   ❏ Detention
   ❏ In-school suspension
   ❏ Out-of-school suspension/expulsion
   ❏ Behavior contract
   ❏ Alternative placement/setting
   ❏ Plan of Support to include a "go to" adult in the school
   ❏ Community Service
   ❏ Separation from other student to include transfer or change in schedule
   ❏ Meeting with Resource Officer
   ❏ Referral to Counselor or Therapist
   ❏ Developed template for safety plan
   ❏ Other (specify) _____

8. Did a physical injury result from this incident? Place an **X** next to one of the following:

   ◯None observed   ◯Injury observed   ◯Medical documentation provided

9. Was the student victim absent from school as a result of the incident?   ❏ Yes ❏ No
   If yes, how many days was the student victim absent from school as a result of the incident? _____

10. Additional pertinent information gained during the interview:

_____
_____

<div align="center">(Attach a separate sheet if necessary)</div>

11. Investigator notes:

_____
_____
_____

<div align="center">(Attach a separate sheet if necessary)</div>

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Maryland State Department of Education in accordance with the Safe Schools Reporting Act of 2005   07-16

Appendix D: Administrative Procedure 5180: Student Use of Social Media in Schools

	ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURE	5180
PGCPS *Great By Choice*	STUDENT USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN SCHOOLS	Procedure No.
		August 17, 2016
		Date

I. **PURPOSE:** To establish guidelines for students related to the use of social media in schools, to differentiate between the appropriate and inappropriate use of social media and to articulate consequences when the inappropriate use of social media disrupts the educational environment, constitutes cyber bullying and/or creates a hostile learning environment.

II. **INFORMATION:** Social media has become a powerful tool for the transmission of information. When used appropriately, social media is a valuable educational tool enabling students to begin to build a positive digital footprint. When misused, however, social media may substantially disrupt opportunities for learning and negatively affect the student's future career and college aspirations. Parents are strongly encouraged to monitor their child's use of social media in and out of school, which may impact their child's or other student's educational opportunities.

III. **DEFINITIONS**:

A. "Bullying, Harassment and Intimidation" (BHI) are anti-social behaviors that are carried out repeatedly over time with the intent to cause harm and are characterized by an imbalance of power.

B. "Cyber Bullying" is a form of indirect or social bullying that uses technology via text or images to humiliate, harass, embarrass, tease, intimidate, threaten, or slander one or more students. Cyber bullying is the act of being cruel to others by sending or posting harmful material (including compromising photographs) online or through a cell phone or other electronic device.

C. "Social Media" is an electronic medium where users may create and view user generated content such as, uploaded or downloaded videos, photographs, blogs, podcasts, wikis, instant messages, texts, tweets and/or email content. Social media is any form of online publication or presence that allows end users to engage in multi-directional conversations in or around content on the website. Examples of social media sites include, but are not limited to, Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, Instagram, Google+ etc.

IV. **PROCEDURES:**

A. **Approved Social Media Sites**

PGCPS acknowledges the rapid change and advancement of technology, which can be used in productive and innovative ways for instructional purposes. As the Chief Executive Officer's designee, the Chief

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ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURE

STUDENT USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA
IN SCHOOLS

5180

Procedure No.

August 17, 2016
Date

Information Officer shall:

1. Identify the social media sites, applications and software deemed appropriate for instructional purposes on the PGCPS network or on PGCPS devices (see Attachment to Administrative Procedure 4126, Employee Use of Social Media);

2. Provide updates to the list on the PGCPS website at appropriately designated times during the school year; and

3. Discontinue access to any designated social media site, application or software deemed inappropriate for instructional purposes.

B. **Appropriate Use of Social Media by Students in the School Environment**

1. Under the supervision of a teacher as a part of the instructional program, students may be required to access and use social media in school. Such activity must be aligned to the curriculum standards, educational goals and objectives of the lesson or unit of study.

2. Students may only access information they are authorized to use and that they will need for assignments and/or other school related activities.

3. Students **MUST** protect and keep their passwords confidential.

4. Student should keep their email addresses and phone numbers private at all times.

C. **Inappropriate Use of Social Media by Students**

Students are prohibited from inappropriately using social media, which includes, but is not limited to:

1. Accessing or linking to websites that contain material deemed vulgar or offensive. This includes, but is not limited to: websites containing any text, graphic, audio, or visual representation of sex, acts of perversion, or any vulgar or obscene material, containing images or representations of full frontal or partial nudity lacking in any educational, scientific or artistic value. Users **MUST** avoid

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STUDENT USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA
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these websites and should under no circumstances possess any of these materials in the school setting.

2. Accessing websites promoting hatred, racial, religious, sexual discrimination, use of illegal drugs, alcohol, tobacco and/or criminal activities.

3. Using abusive or otherwise objectionable language in either public or private messages.

4. Posting anonymous or signed messages that are defamatory.

5. Identifying one's self with another person's name or any misrepresentation of one's true identity.

6. Posting libelous, inflammatory, purposely disruptive statements or similarly inappropriate material, obscene language, serious threats or gestures, defamatory audio, visual or written content.

7. Targeting one or more students, parents/guardians, teachers or staff using negative comments, photographs, or threats.

8. Attempting to interact with or monitor the activities of administrators or other PGCPS employees on social networking sites.

D. Student Responsibilities

1. Each student has a responsibility not to interfere with the education of other students.

2. Students are expected to adhere to the Information Technology Services Acceptable Use Guidelines.

3. Students are to refrain from using electronic devices in a manner deemed inappropriate by the Prince George's County Public Schools.

4. Students should report any inappropriate electronic content received on school equipment to their classroom teacher.

5. Students should not accept personal invitations from staff members or volunteers to use social media or personal/private email

ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURE

STUDENT USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA
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addresses, and should immediately report any such invitation to their principal.

6.   During non-school hours students receiving inappropriate, threatening or harassing electronic communication/imagery that will impede their ability or that of their peers to participate in their educational program **MUST** immediately inform their parents. On the next business day, students must inform the school administration and/or their grade level counselor for appropriate intervention.

E.   School System Responsibilities

The school system does not control the personal use of the aforementioned technology outside of the school. However, in instances where students are found to have used social media in ways that create an actual or potential threat to students, staff or administration, or could reasonably be expected to materially interfere with the school environment, the school will apply disciplinary action in accordance with the *Students Rights and Responsibilities Handbook.*

Therefore, parents are strongly encouraged to monitor their child's use of social media outside of school, which may impact their child's or other student's educational opportunities.

V.   RELATED PROCEDURES:

Administrative Procedure 0700, Information Technology Services Acceptable Usage Guidelines;
Administrative Procedure 4126, Employee Use of Social Media;
Administrative Procedure 4170, Discrimination and Harassment;
Administrative Procedure 4218, Dating and Inappropriate Relationships Among Students and Employees, Independent Contractors and Volunteers;
Administrative Procedure 5132, Cell Phones and other Portable Electronic Devices;
Administrative Procedure 5142, Gangs and Similar Destructive Group Behaviors;
Administrative Procedure 5143, Bullying, Harassment or Intimidation; and
Administrative Procedure 10101, Code of Student Conduct.

VI.   MAINTENANCE AND UPDATE OF THESE PROCEDURES: This procedure originates with the Division of Student Services, Department of Student Engagement and School Support and will be updated as needed.

ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURE

STUDENT USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA
IN SCHOOLS

5180

Procedure No.

August 17, 2016

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VII. **CANCELLATIONS AND SUPERSEDURES:** This Administrative Procedure supersedes the version dated August 1, 2013.

VIII. **EFFECTIVE DATE:** August 17, 2016

Distribution: Lists 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 10 and 11

Appendix E: Administrative Procedure 5132: Portable Electronic Devices

ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURE

PORTABLE ELECTRONIC DEVICES	5132
	Procedure No.
	August 1, 2014
	Date

PGCPS
Great By Choice

I. **PURPOSE:** The purpose of this Procedure is to provide a district-wide process to ensure that the use of portable electronic devices (PEDs) is permitted and encouraged for instructional use, provided that it does not disrupt the educational environment.

II. **POLICY:** Prince George's County Public Schools (PGCPS) permits the use of PEDs for instructional purposes during the school day, and at other times with the approval of school administrators. School administrators are encouraged to approve staff requests to permit students to use PEDs for instructional use or at other appropriate times on school property. (Board Policy 5132.) The school system assumes no liability for theft, loss, damage or unauthorized use of student-owned PEDs possessed by students on school property.

III. **DEFINITIONS:**

A. "Cell phone" includes, and is not limited to, iPhones, "smart" phones, Internet enabled phones and other PEDs that are capable of placing and/or receiving telephone calls (including personal listening devices such as earphones, ear buds, "Bluetooth", etc.), text messages, browsing the internet, creating and distributing videos, taking photographs, and the like.

B. "Disrupt the educational environment" includes, and is not limited to, any use of portable electronic devices that interferes with:

1. Teaching and/or learning during school hours, including conduct that is insubordinate, profane, illegal, obscene, violent, disrespectful, harassing, intimidating or otherwise impermissible in the Student Rights and Responsibilities Handbook; and

2. The safe operation of the school bus, such as causing distraction for the bus driver due to lights from PEDs that are used when it is dark outside; passing PEDs around the bus, taking photos, recording videos or similar conduct which may affect the bus driver's ability to safely operate the school bus.

C. "Electronic communication" means a communication transmitted by means of an electronic device, including, but not limited to, a telephone, cellular phone, computer, or pager.

D. "Portable Electronic Device", or PED, is an electronic device that emits an audible signal, visual signal, vibration, displays a message, or otherwise summons the possessor. This may include, but is not limited to: cell phones, paging devices, electronic emailing devices, radios, tape players, CD players, DVD players, video cameras, iPods or other MP3 players, portable video game players, laptop computers, personal digital assistants (PDAs), cameras, iPads, e-readers and any device that provides a connection to the Internet.

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ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURE

PORTABLE ELECTRONIC DEVICES

5132
Procedure No.

August 1, 2014
Date

E.   "School Hours" means the time a student enters the school bus or school property until the end of the school's designated "school day" or when the student exits the school bus. "School Day" means the regular school day with a designated starting time and ending time as defined by the local school system. "School day" may also include different starting and ending times for students with extended instructional hours, or who are involved with school-related field trips or extracurricular activities.

F.   "School property" includes parking lots, school buses, and outside or inside all areas of the school building.

G.   "Turned off" or "powered off" means the device is not activated. Devices in quiet, vibrate or other modes, except off, are not considered turned off or powered off.

H.   "Use" includes carrying or possessing a PED that emits an audible signal, vibrates, displays a message or otherwise summons the possessor. A PED in an "off" position or silent mode and stored out-of-sight in a back-pack, book bag, pocket, purse, vehicle, locker, etc. shall be not be deemed "in use."

IV.   **PROCEDURES:**

A.   Approved Use of PEDs in Schools:

   1.   Students are permitted to use PEDs while riding to and from school on PGCPS buses, as long as it does not impact the safe operation of the school bus. Students may not use PEDs while getting on or off the school bus.
   2.   Students are encouraged to use PEDs for instructional purposes, with school administrator approval.
   3.   At times when PED use is not permitted, PEDs must be turned off or on silent mode and stored in a back-pack, book bag, pocket, purse, locker, vehicle, etc.
   4.   The school principal or designee may allow additional times for students to use PEDs at school, such as during lunch period, in approved designated areas, or during the following times:

      a)   Before or after the school day on school property;
      b)   During after school, evening or weekend extracurricular activities while on school property;
      c)   While attending school sponsored or school related activities on or off school property; or

ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURE

PORTABLE ELECTRONIC DEVICES

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d) In an emergency situation with the permission of the teacher, instructor, counselor, coach, school security, program director, or administrator.

B. Prohibited Use of PEDs in Schools:
1. The use of PEDs at any time other than those specified in Section IV.A above.
2. The use of PEDs in locker rooms or bathrooms.
3. "Sexting" or the taking and/or transmission of nude or sexually explicit photos or videos in school.
4. The unauthorized or unlawful sharing or electronic posting of images taken or stored on PEDs during school hours and/or on school property.
5. Taking, uploading or sharing photos, recording audio, or capturing video during the school day in a manner that reflects bullying, harassment, intimidation or cyber bullying.
6. Using PEDs in any manner that reflects violations in the Student Rights and Responsibilities Handbook.

C. Administrators, faculty, and staff may request at any time that students must turn off and put away PEDs. Failure to do so may result in disciplinary action and possible confiscation by the school principal. School administrators are required to consult with parents/guardians regarding a student's misuse of a PED and appropriate responses in accordance with the Code of Student Conduct.

D. Responses to Alleged Violations of this Procedure:

1. Any staff member, student or individual having knowledge or reasonable suspicion of alleged violations of this procedure should promptly report this information to the school principal/designee.

2. The school principal/designee will respond to alleged violations of this procedure in accordance with the Student Rights and Responsibilities Handbook.

3. In limited, urgent circumstances requiring immediate action, the school principal may confiscate a PED if he/she reasonably believes that confiscation is necessary to help protect the health, safety or welfare of students or staff. The school principal shall take reasonable measures to label and secure the item until such time the PED is returned to the student or parent/guardian as soon as possible.

E.   Waiver of Liability:

1. Student owned PEDs: Students assume full responsibility for their PEDs. The school system may not assume liability for theft, loss, damage or unauthorized use of PEDs possessed by students on school property.

2. PGCPS-issued PEDs: Students are responsible for using PGCPS-issued PEDs in a manner that is consistent with the Information Technology Acceptable Use Guidelines in Board Policy 0115 and Administrative Procedure 0700. Students or parents/guardians shall timely report any damage, such as breakage, malfunction or loss, of PGCPS-issued PEDs to the proper school authority, such as school security, the school principal/designee, or a school administrator. If the cause of the reported damage is due to the student's misuse, PGCPS may require payment for the cost of repair or replacement of the PED.

V.   **RELATED PROCEDURES:** Administrative Procedure 0700, Information Technology Services Acceptable Usage Guidelines; Administrative Procedure 5142, Gangs, Gang Activity and Similar Destructive or Illegal Behavior; Administrative Procedure 5143, Bullying, Harassment or Intimidation; Administrative Procedure 5150, Student Responsibilities, Rights, Involvements; Administrative Procedure 5180, Use of Social Media in Schools; Administrative Procedure 10101, Code of Student Conduct; and Administrative Procedure 10201, Disruptive Acts Requiring Security Measures.

VI.   **MAINTENANCE AND UPDATE OF THESE PROCEDURES:** These procedures originate with the Division of Student Services and will be updated as needed.

VII. **CANCELLATIONS AND SUPERSEDURES:** This procedure supersedes Administrative Procedure 5132, Cell Phones and Other Portable Electronic Devices, dated August 23, 2010.

VIII. **EFFECTIVE DATE:** August 1, 2014.

Distribution: Lists 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 10, and 11

Appendix F: Email to Principals Requesting Participation

Dear Principal,

I am a middle school principal in your school district and I am currently enrolled as a doctoral student at University of Maryland. I am writing to invite you to participate in my research study entitled, *A Qualitative Analysis of Middle School Principals' Perceptions of Cyberbullying*.

The purpose of this study is to increase the understanding of cyberbullying from the middle school administrator's perspective. Specifically, how cyberbullying affects student learning in your building and its impact on your role as an instructional leader. I am contacting middle school administrators of schools that have reported incidents of cyberbullying to the school district within the last two school years. Your participation in this study is strictly voluntary with no consequences if you choose not to participate. If you decide to participate in this study, you will complete one 60-90 minute face-to-face interview at a time and place of your convenience. The interview questions will give context to your perceptions on cyberbullying's impact on the learning environment, how you address it impact on your time in completing your core work, and any strategies that have been employed to reduce these incidents. With your permission, the interview will be audiotaped for the purpose of note taking accuracy and authenticity. For confidentiality purposes, you and your school's identity will be coded with pseudonyms and referred to by those pseudonyms throughout the duration of this study. All audio recordings and transcriptions will be kept on a micro SD card and flash drive that will be stored in a locked file and/or password-protected computer file throughout the entire research study. In addition, I would like to solicit the name of any administrative designees from within your building who also assists with addressing cyberbullying incidents. Their participation will provide me with an additional perspective from your school.

If you decide to participate in this study, please contact me via email at mdanielle1098@yahoo.com. Please include in your email the name of any administrative designees from your building that address cyberbullying incidents. Feel free to contact me if you have any questions about the study or need clarification. This study is being conducted under the supervision of my dissertation advisor, Dr. Stephanie Timmons Brown, faculty at University of Maryland. She can be reached at stbrown@umd.edu.

Appendix G: Email to Administrative Designees Requesting Participation

Dear (*Insert Name of Principal Designee*),

I am a middle school principal in your school district and I am currently enrolled as a doctoral student at University of Maryland. I am writing to invite you to participate in my research study entitled, *A Qualitative Analysis of Middle School Principals' Perceptions of Cyberbullying*.

The purpose of this study is to increase the understanding of cyberbullying from the middle school administrator's perspective. Specifically, how cyberbullying affects student learning in your building and its impact on your role as an instructional leader. I am contacting middle school administrators of schools that have reported incidents of cyberbullying to the school district within the last two school years. Your principal has identified you as a person who assists with addressing cyberbullying incidents within your school. Your principal's participation coupled with your participation will provide me with varying perspectives from within the same building. Your participation in this study is strictly voluntary with no consequences if you choose not to participate. If you decide to participate in this study, you will complete one 60-90 minute face-to-face interview at a time and place of your convenience. The interview questions will give context to your perceptions on cyberbullying's impact on the learning environment, how you approach and process these incidents, its impact on your time in completing your core work, and any strategies that have been employed to reduce these incidents.   With your permission, the interview will be audiotaped for the purpose of note taking accuracy and authenticity. For confidentiality purposes, you and your school's identity will be coded with pseudonyms and referred to by those pseudonyms throughout the duration of this study. All audio recordings and transcriptions will be kept on a micro SD card and flash drive that will be stored in a locked file and/or password-protected computer file throughout the entire research study.

If you decide to participate in this study, please contact me via email at mdanielle1098@yahoo.com. Feel free to contact me if you have any questions about the study or need clarification. This study is being conducted under the supervision of my dissertation advisor, Dr. Stephanie Timmons Brown, faculty at University of Maryland. She can be reached at stbrown@umd.edu.
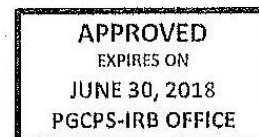
Appendix H: Informed Consent Letter

<u>University of Maryland College Park</u>

Initials _____ Date _____

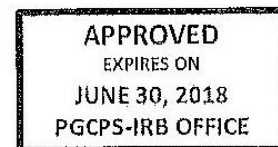| Project Title	A Qualitative Analysis of Middle School Principals' Perceptions of Cyberbullying
Purpose of the Study	This research is being conducted by Danielle H. Moore as a part of my doctoral dissertation under the direction of Dr. Stephanie Timmons Brown, my advisor at the University of Maryland, College Park. We are inviting you to participate in this research project because you are a middle school principal or an administrative designee in a Prince George's County Public school (PGCPS) district that has reported at least one incident of cyberbullying to the district in the last two school years. The purpose of this research project is to explore the perceptions of middle school administrators of cyberbullying and its impact on their role as instructional leaders. The following three research questions will guide this study: 1. What are middle school administrators' perceptions of how cyberbullying impacts the learning environment? 2. How do administrators approach and process cyberbullying incidents? 3. What strategies have middle school administrators employed to reduce cyberbullying incidents?
Procedures	You will participate in a 60-90 minute face-to-face interview in a location and at a time that is convenient for the participant. The interview will consist of questions such as: 1. Has cyberbullying impacted student learning in your school? Please explain. 2. What do you feel are the best strategies to reduce cyberbullying incidents at your school? 3. How much time do you spend investigating/addressing cyberbullying incidents? All interviews will be recorded using a digital audio recording device and will be uploaded upon completion for transcription by Verbalink Transcription Services. Upon completion of your scheduled interview, you will receive a $25.00 gift card.
Potential Risks and Discomforts	There are no known risks for involvement in this study. You may feel emotionally uneasy speaking about your core work responsibilities being impacted by cyberbullying which may cause some individuals to have concern about the anonymity and the confidentiality of their responses. In order to avoid a breach of confidentiality, the researcher intends to maintain sole ownership

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JUNE 30, 2018
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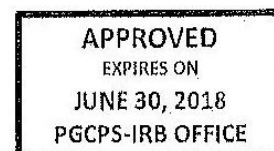|	of the data collected. Your name and school's name will be coded with pseudonyms and all voice recordings will be stored on microSD and flash drives that will be stored in a locked file and/or password protected work computer file throughout the entire research study. We are prepared to excuse you from the interview at any point if do not wish to continue.
Potential Benefits	There are no direct benefits from participating in this research. However, we hope that, in the future, other people might benefit from this study through improved understanding of how cyberbullying impacts the work of middle school administrators. It could also help identify strategies or programs that could be implemented in middle schools across the district to help reduce the number of cyberbullying incidents.
Confidentiality	Any potential loss of confidentiality will be minimized by utilizing safeguards to protect the identities and maintain the anonymity of all participants. You and your school will be assigned a pseudonym and the school district will be referred to as the "Eagle County Public School System". Finally, your answers will be confidential and no one will know how you answered any of the questions. All responses obtained from your interview will be transcribed and coded. The audio recordings of these interviews will be housed on a microSD card and the transcriptions of the interviews will be stored in Microsoft Word on an encrypted flash drive that will be kept in a locked file and/or password-protected work computer file throughout the research process. Finally, at the end of the three-year retention period, per university guidelines, all audio recordings, microSD cards, and flash drives containing data from this research will be destroyed. If we write a report or article about this research project, your identity will be protected to the maximum extent possible. Your information may be shared with representatives of the University of Maryland, College Park or governmental authorities if you or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law.
Right to Withdraw and Questions	Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, there will not be any effect on your relationship and standing with Prince George's County Public Schools. If you decide to stop taking part in the study, if you have questions,

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	concerns, or complaints, or if you need to report an injury related to the research, please contact the investigator: *Danielle Moore at (301)452-4731 or mdanielle1098@yahoo.com .*
Participant Rights	*If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact:* **University of Maryland College Park** **Institutional Review Board Office** **1204 Marie Mount Hall** **College Park, Maryland, 20742** **E-mail: irb@umd.edu** **Telephone: 301-405-0678** This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.
Statement of Consent	Your signature indicates that you are at least 18 years of age; you have read this consent form or have had it read to you; your questions have been answered to your satisfaction and you voluntarily agree to participate in this research study. You will receive a copy of this signed consent form. If you agree to participate, please sign your name below.
Signature and Date	NAME OF PARTICIPANT [Please Print]	
	SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT	
	DATE	

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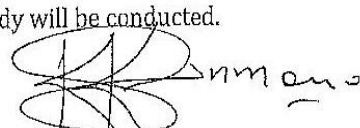EXPIRES ON
JUNE 30, 2018
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PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
DEPARTMENT OF TESTING, RESEARCH AND EVALUATION
DIVISION OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

Principal Permission to Conduct Research Study[1]

Do not write in this box – DTRE use only		
September 11, 2017	June 30, 2018	DRE-RA-1718-031
Authorization Date	Authorization Expiration Date	DTRE Application Number

Mrs. Danielle Moore has received conditional authorization from the Department of Research and Evaluation to conduct the following research study:

" A Qualitative Analysis Of Middle School Principals' Perceptions Of Cyberbullying"

in Prince George's County Public Schools. The researcher would like to conduct the study in:

School

Implementation of this study is contingent upon the researcher securing the **permission** of the principal in the above-listed school in which the study will be conducted.

DTRE Staff Signature

_____ Approved   _____ Disapproved

Remarks:

_____   _____   _____
Principal Name   Signature   Date

Should you have any question or concerns about this matter, please call Dr. Kola K. Sunmonu at (301) 780-6807 **before** granting permission.

1   The researcher is responsible for returning the original signed copy of this form to the Department of Research and Evaluation, Room 19, Owens Road Facility, 1616 Owens Road, Oxon Hill, MD 20745

Appendix I: Interview Protocol

1. How many years have you been a _____ (Principal, Assistant Principal, or Resident Principal)? (*Background Information*)

2. How many years have you been in the middle school setting? (*Background Information*)

3. How many years have you been in your current middle school building? (*Background Information*)

4. During your tenure as a middle school administrator, how many years have you been experiencing cyberbullying issues? (*Background Information*)

5. As you are evaluated using the DISTRICT A Administrator Leadership Standards, what do you see as your core responsibilities as a middle school administrator? (*Research Question 2*)

6. For this interview, cyberbullying is defined as "The use of electronic communication to harm or harass others in a deliberate, repeated, and hostile manner." In a month's time, how many incidents of cyberbullying do you estimate your school addresses? (*Research Question 2*)

7. In comparison to all other discipline issues that you may address within a given month, what percentage of those issues would you contribute to cyberbullying? (*Research Question 2*)

8. How do you address cyberbullying incidents in your school? (*Research Questions 1*)

    a. Please describe the process for addressing cyberbullying?
    b. Do you always feel compelled to respond to cyberbullying? Why or Why not?
    c. What drives your decision to respond? What are the different levels of response?

9. In a month, how much time do you estimate that you spend investigating/addressing cyberbullying incidents? (*Research Question 2*)
    a. Is it worse during certain times of the year?

10. How would you rank your school in terms of high, medium or low incidents of cyberbullying? What factors are contributing to your designation? (*Research Question 2*)

11. What barriers, if any, do you perceive to be present when investigating/addressing cyberbullying incidents? (*Research Question 1*)

12. Has cyberbullying impacted student learning in your school? (*Research Question 2*)
    a. Please explain.

13. Has cyberbullying impacted the culture and/or climate of your school? (*Research Question 2*)
    a. Please explain

14. In your opinion, what are the best strategies to reduce cyberbullying incidents at your school? (*Research Question 3*)

15. What do you feel are the best policies or programs to reduce cyberbullying? (*Research Question 3*)

16. Thinking back to the core responsibilities you identified in question #1, please describe/explain how the time spent addressing cyberbullying impacts your core responsibilities? (*Research Question 2*)

17. What are three things you wish policymakers and/or the community knew about cyberbullying?

Appendix J: Alignment between Interview Protocol and Research Questions

Table J1

Research Questions, Interview Questions, Research Methods, and Data Sources

Research question	Interview question	Research methods	Data sources
1. How do administrators approach and process cyberbullying incidents?	Question #8a	Interviews	Interviews
	Question #8b		
	Question #8c		
	Question #11		
2. What are middle school administrators' perceptions of how cyberbullying impacts the learning environment?	Question #5	Interviews	Interviews
	Question #6		
	Question #7		
	Question #9		
	Question #9a		
	Question #10		
	Question #12		
	Question #13		
	Question #16		
3. What strategies have middle school administrators employed to reduce cyberbullying incidents?	Question #14	Interviews	Interviews
	Question #15		

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