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**School Leaders’ Perceptions of Cyberbullying Legislation in Texas:
Understanding David’s Law Implementation**

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Understanding David's Law Implementation**

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Lindsie O'Neill Almquist

Treatise

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

The University of Texas at Austin

August, 2019

Dedication

I dedicate this difficult work to my Jesus and family. This is proof that patience and perseverance has rewards: Hebrews 6:15. God, Thank you for “Just a closer walk with Thee.” To my love and precious husband, Cody Leon. Where do I begin? You are the real MVP behind this work. You are SO kind, supportive, and loving. Thank you; I adore and love you.

I dedicate this work to my babies. Ellis Blake, you were born just 5 months before I started my doctorate. You read Crotty and many more pieces of literature with me, but most importantly you are my why. I pray you break glass ceilings and remember you can do anything you set your mind to. This is proof. Love you baby girl. Briggs Leon, you were born during this program, just 6 months after I started it, to be exact. I am still in disbelief of that very reality. You are the light of my life, and the best giver of kisses and hugs. Thank you for being the best surprise. Love you little man.

Mom and Daddy Jimmy (DJ), thank you for always helping and being there for our kids when we’ve needed you. I can never thank you enough. Aunt Liz, thank you for your “aunt” time when we needed to focus on school. I appreciate you! Aunt Beth and Uncle Gary, thank you for watching Ellis and Briggs while I was working on this. You have been here for me willing to help and encourage. It means more than you know.

Lastly, I dedicate this work to my sweet, former high school student, EJ Garza. We recently lost you to what law enforcement says was catfishing, but I believe it’s evil. This form of cyberbullying was so intense that it led perpetrators to manipulate and destroy you, a precious 2017 graduate from a Texas public school. In honor of you, and in hopes of assisting school leaders to combat cyberbullying, I have done this. Miss you; I hope I have helped to move this work forward.

Acknowledgements

This journey has brought a lot of heartache and joy. I am so thankful I have completed my goal of obtaining my doctorate. With that being said, I am forever thankful to many people who have paved the way for a little redheaded girl who started in a trailer with rats on WIC and food stamps in rural south Texas.

First, I want to thank Dr. Sandroussi, my interim Superintendent in Skidmore-Tynan ISD who allowed me to go to school there, and it changed the course of my life. Thank you for inspiring me to be a Superintendent one day.

Thank you to my elementary Principal, Mr. Clint Cowart, who still encourages and supports me. I wouldn't and couldn't have done it without you.

Thank you to Mark Estrada, Superintendent of Lockhart ISD and a member of the UT CSP Cohort 26. Thank you for hiring me for my first AP job. Thank you for encouraging me to do RYHT and UT CSP. I would not be where I am today without you and your encouragement.

Thank you to Jarrell High School. Thank you for allowing me to lead while doing this work and having two babies; I know you felt the burden, but you were just fine without me. I am proud of who you are and was honored to serve you. Dr. Chapman allowed me to complete my superintendent hours under his leadership. Thank you for allowing me to do that as well as serve JHS' students. I appreciate you.

Thank you to my secretary, Mrs. Judy Balderas, and Nadine Johnson Elementary School for the patience and support this past summer as I finished this work. There were many sleepless nights and stressful days. I could not have done it without you. Thank you from the bottom of my heart.

Dr. Olivarez, thank you for allowing me into the program and believing in me. Dr. Ovando, thank you for working with me on this treatise. I appreciate you immensely. Dr. Pringle, thank you for supervising my coursework and being a rural, small town voice when I needed you. Dr. Sharpe, thank you for your heart and hugs. I can never repay you. Dr. Lopez, thank you

for your mentorship through TALAS and your guidance through ups and downs of this work and my professional life. CSP Cohort 28: Hook'em. We did it. Dr. Katrina Kardiasmenos, thank you for all of your support and editing help. Luanne Golden, thank you for your assistance with editing and making my work the best it can be. You're both awesome! Dr. Reyes, thank you for your feedback and help along the way. Dr. Bukoski, thank you for your kindness and strength along the way as well. I am honored to know you. Dr. Somers, thank you for your feedback with my SQE. Hortensia Palomares and Andrea Kehoe, thank you for always keeping me in the loop and your constant encouragement as well as navigational assistant through this process; You both rock! Andrea, thank you for all of your kindness and love in the summer of 2019. I don't think I could have done it without you. The end was dark, yet you were a ray of sunshine.

Dr. Estrada Thomas, thank you for hiring me while I finished my doctorate. You're a blessing to watch and learn from as well as to work for. Dr. Sormani, thank you for trusting and allowing me to lead. Laurie Juardo, thank you for your guidance and for believing in me. TALAS & Dr. Stan Paz, the last two years have been a great learning experience for me, and your strong, kind souls exuberate executive leadership. To each of you, much love.

Lastly, thank you to my precious and dear family. I know the last two years have been rough, but we made it, stronger than ever. You are amazing and I am forever thankful that it's under our belt. You were and are my three biggest fans with lots of kisses and hugs while I become a Doctor of Education. I love you, Cody Leon, Ellis Blake, and Briggs Leon Almquist. You have my whole heart.

Abstract

School Leaders' Perceptions of Cyberbullying Legislation in Texas: Understanding David's Law Implementation

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Bullying and its effects on students have become a common concern among school leaders. Bullying can occur in cyberspace on such platforms as SnapChat, Tumblr, or on other social media applications (commonly known as apps), and is often referred to as "cyberbullying." Recently in Texas, Senate Bill 179, called David's Law, was enacted and implemented in public schools during the 2017-2018 academic year.

Given its initial implementation, limited research has focused on school leaders' perceptions of David's Law. Identifying how school leaders are interpreting and addressing David's Law is imperative to provide insight about cyberbullying and protecting school children. This study focuses on school leaders' perceptions of David's Law in Texas public schools. The qualitative study answers the following questions:

1. How do school leaders interpret David's Law in their school district?
2. What do school leaders do to address David's Law requirements and guidelines?

This study was conducted following a qualitative research approach in order to identify the perceptions of school leaders in regard to the initial implementation of David's Law in Texas public school districts. Further, the qualitative study follows Creswell's (2013) guidelines to

“interpret the larger meaning of the story” related to cyberbullying (p. 191). A total of six participants were selected for this study including a central office leader, a high school principal, an assistant principal, a counselor, a parent and a teacher. Data was collected through interviews, document reviews, and a researcher’s reflective journal.

Findings indicate that school leaders interpret David’s Law as a set of expectations and an accountability mechanism. In addition, they employ specific district wide strategies, such as development of policies and procedures; David’s Law-focused professional development; inclusive collaborative partnerships; and education of all stakeholders. These findings provide insight for school leaders interested in implementing David’s Law.

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Chapter I: Introduction to the Study

Bullying and its effects on students have become a common concern among school leaders. Bullying can occur in cyberspace on such platforms as Nik, SnapChat, After Hours, Tumblr, Tinder, or on other social media applications (commonly known as apps), and is often referred to as “cyberbullying.” Bullies are also using games such as Fortnite and Minecraft to lure and/or bully individuals sexually. “Catfishing” is another form of bullying used in cyberspace where predators impersonate someone else to entice individuals into a romantic situation or convince them to do harm to themselves (Catfishing, 2019). Situations have occurred where individuals killed themselves after being coaxed out of money and/or had sexually explicit photos or other information held against them.

As always, school leaders are expected to ensure the safety of students at all times. Hinduja and Patchin (2010) shared that bullying has increased suicide ideation, while Plemmons et al. (2018) shared that suicide ideation and attempts have increased in the past seven years for teens. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (2018) reported that individuals who experience bullying have increased risks for suicide, suicide attempts, or suicide ideation. An increase in the loss of lives, as a result, has prompted laws to change schools’ responsibility in preventing bullying and cyberbullying. With the number of students struggling with bullying, cyberbullying, and/or social-emotional needs, awareness and proactive measures in schools have been established (Polanin, Espelage, & Pigott, 2012). School leaders have established bullying prevention awareness programs with a responsive, proactive, and responsible emphasis on cyberbullying. Similarly, meeting or addressing the increasing demands of a more diverse student population calls for school leaders to be aware and implement protocols and processes to support all students’ physical and social-emotional needs.

School leaders are held responsible for all components of student safety, from within the campus walls to outside for a student’s academic or extracurricular activities. School leaders have a responsibility for protecting students under various state laws and meeting expectations of safety and security, especially pertaining to bullying and cyberbullying. Along with outside

entities supporting school districts, district school leaders must create and establish rules and protocols to protect students physically and social-emotionally (Fisher & Tanner-Smith, 2015). Safety and security have a broader scope than physical safety in and out of schools (Martin, 2013).

Within the last eight years, specific laws for the safety of students have been enacted. In 2011, House Bill 1942 (HB 1942) was put into place to protect students from bullying. Since the enactment of HB 1942, school districts have been required to have professional development for identifying bullies, responding to bullies and outcries, reporting bullying, and preventing cyberbullying. Texas schools adopted prevention, investigative, and reporting policies to address bullying. In addition, HB 1942 required school leaders to have anonymous bullying report systems on their websites to help combat bullying.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2014), suicide is the second leading cause of death for American teenagers and young adults. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2017) indicated that one out of every ten boys and one out of every five girls are cyberbullied. In 2016 alone, there were over 44,000 deaths by suicide in the United States (Xu, Murphy, Kochanek, Bastian, & Arias, 2018). These statistics cause great concern for schools, as students struggling with bullying and/or suicide ideation is an obvious reality. One of the measures a school leader must take in Texas public schools comes from a law that was established in 2017. David's Law was enacted in the 85th Legislative session in 2017, but did not go into effect until after the school year started on September 1, 2017. This is the Texas law combating cyberbullying or bullying with a focus on expectations and accountability for schools. In order to address the increase of cyberbullying incidents in Texas, David's Law amended the Texas Education Code (TEC) § 37.0832 from a pattern of acts to a "single significant act" that can be labeled as cyberbullying or bullying. The law defines bullying as:

A single significant act or a pattern of acts by one or more students directed at another student that exploits an imbalance of power and involves engaging in written or verbal expression, expression through electronic means that: (i) has the effect or will have the

effect of physically harming a student, damaging a student's property, or placing a student in reasonable fear of harm to the student's person or of damage to the student's property; (ii) is sufficiently severe, persistent, or pervasive enough that the action or threat creates an intimidating, threatening, or abusive educational environment for a student; (iii) materially and substantially disrupts the educational process or the orderly operation of a classroom or school; or (iv) infringes on the rights of the victim at school. (S. 179, 2017)

David's Law is named after David Molak, a 16-year-old student, who committed suicide in San Antonio, Texas, due to cyberbullying. Senator Jose Menendez and Representative Ina Minjarez called upon the Texas legislature to push for anti-cyberbullying laws in the state of Texas in honor of David Molak and Matt Vasquez, who was also encouraged to kill himself over social media harassment and cyberbullying. The focus was to ensure that help, healing and recovery was available to students like Matt Vasquez, who received help and did not end up committing suicide. Menendez and Minjarez wanted to ensure legislation was changed to prevent and combat cyberbullying in Texas public schools. David's Law was established to empower school leaders and law enforcement to cease cyberbullying and allow for rehabilitation of students, like Matt Vasquez. Senator Menendez's office shared in a press release:

Texas laws need to keep pace with evolving technology. Students like David Molak and Matt Vasquez were being harassed and threatened on social media, not in the gym locker room. David's Law will empower school administrators and law enforcement to go after and reprimand the bullies who prey on students, while focusing on rehabilitation. (The Senate of the State of Texas, 2016)

David's Law places responsibility on schools to bring awareness and new policies to combat cyberbullying. In addition, it classifies cyberbullying as a Class A misdemeanor and allows for law enforcement to issue subpoenas to uncover anonymous names and online identities. Intervention and investigation of an online situation is required by all public schools when cyberbullying is suspected through tips, investigations, and/or allegations. Parents of

students are held responsible, as well, if they are aware and do not take action. If something happens online and the school is made aware of it, then the school leaders must intervene, even if it happens after hours or off school grounds. The goal is to prevent cyberbullying and/or teen suicide due to online harassment or cyberbullying, as in David Molak's story (David's Law, 2017).

With the increase in policies, awareness and advocacy, students are more aware of the negative effects of bullying or cyberbullying another individual. Districts have alternative disciplinary consequences and responsibilities to protect students (HB 1942). One responsibility, for example, is anonymous bullying reporting systems mandated per HB 1942. The legislature felt strongly that students had the right to be safe at school. One of the components of HB 1942 is that school boards can transfer a student being bullied to another campus or classroom with parental consultation. It was also mandated that districts adopt and implement a bullying policy with minimal guidelines in order to combat bullying, ensure availability of counseling, and set procedures for reporting incidents.

Until David's Law, there were no explicit disciplinary expectations or protocols that had to be adhered to by school leaders in Texas public schools. Now, school districts are required to have cyberbullying policies, parental notification for the victim or bully (or alleged bully), and anonymous reporting access for stakeholders. The Texas Association of School Administrators (TASA) (2017) wrote it best in regard to the final version of the bill:

SB 179, known as "David's Law:" Bullying that occurs on or is delivered to school property or to the site of a school-sponsored or school-related activity, on or off school property; bullying that occurs on a publicly or privately owned school bus or vehicle being used for transportation of students to or from school or a school-related activity; and cyberbullying that occurs off school property or outside of school-related activities if it interferes with a student's educational opportunities or substantially disrupts the orderly operation of a classroom, school, or school-related activity. The bill:

- amends Education Code provisions on bullying to include cyberbullying;

- requires a school district board of trustees to adopt a policy that establishes procedure for providing notice of an incident of bullying to a parent or guardian of an alleged victim on or before the third business day after the date the incident is reported as well as notice to the parent/guardian of the alleged bully within a reasonable time;
- allows school districts to establish a districtwide policy related to bullying prevention and mediation;
- specifies the placement or expulsion of certain students for certain bullying behavior;
- specifies reports that school principals may make to local law enforcement;
- allows continuing education requirements for classroom teachers and principals to include instruction related to grief-informed and trauma-informed strategies;
- requires TEA to maintain a website with resources related to student mental health needs;
- amends the Health and Safety Code to expand the list of certain procedures that school districts may develop;
- amends the Civil Practice and Remedies Code to specify relief for cyberbullying of a child, and to require that the Texas Supreme Court promulgate forms for use as an application for injunctive relief in suits relating to cyberbullying;
- amends the Penal Code to include certain actions within the offense of harassment (para. 1).

With the senate bill, school leaders work with law enforcement on issues, and there is more latitude to expel or discipline students for cyberbullying (David's Law, 2017). Given this recent law, it is important to focus on how school leaders are interpreting the bill and what they are doing to reduce cyberbullying incidents in order to protect students. This chapter includes the problem, purpose of the study, research questions, a brief overview of the methodology,

explanation of terms, delimitations and limitations, as well as assumptions and significance of the study.

Statement of the Problem

Texas public school leaders are expected to protect and ensure the safety of students in all aspects. In response to new legislation, school leaders must create processes and protocols for the safety of students. For instance, David's Law places responsibility on Texas public schools to combat cyberbullying that in turn creates harmful effects on students. With David's Law focused on reducing cyberbullying, it is appropriate to review cyberbullying information for this study (David's Law, 2017).

Much has been written about cyberbullying and the repercussions and harmful effects of such action(s) (Donegan, 2014; Nixon, 2014; Patchin & Hinduja, 2006; Schneider, O'Donnell, Stueve, & Coulter, 2012; Slonje & Smith, 2008; Willard, 2007). Cyberbullying is defined in this research as an imbalance of power, intentional electronic harassment or mistreatment on related constructs such as social media bullying, online gaming bullying, Internet bullying, and any harassment via a digital device or virtual world where the perpetrator has intentionality to harm another individual or where there is electronic aggression whether the perpetrator is known or there is anonymity (Menesini et al., 2012; Nixon, 2014; Patchin & Hinduja, 2006). Prior research reports that cyberbullying is excessive in America and individuals are abusing themselves and/or committing suicide due to the harmful behavior (Allen, 2012; Hinduja & Patchin, 2013; Kalpidou, Costin, & Morris, 2011; Li, 2010). There are cyberbullying laws and statutes throughout the United States; however, each state handles cyberbullying and school consequences or disciplinary actions differently (Woda, 2015). States across America have had court cases as a result of situations where individuals have experienced negative side effects due to cyberbullying (Bell v. Itawamba County School Board, Rosario v. Clark County School Dist., Tatro v. University of Minnesota, Moreno v. Hanford Sentinel, Inc., and Kowalski v. Berkeley County Schools).

Recently, in Texas, David's Law was enacted in public schools. However, due to its implementation during the academic year, 2017-2018, it is imperative to identify school leaders' perceptions of David's Law. Identifying how David's Law is being interpreted by Texas public school leaders and what they are doing to reduce the harmful act provides implications in combating cyberbullying for all Texas public school children.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to identify the perceptions of school leaders pertaining to David's Law in Texas public schools, and to focus on school leaders' interpretations of the initial implementation of the law since it has been in effect for only two years. David's Law was enacted to protect students from harming or killing themselves due to cyberbullying. This qualitative study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How do school leaders interpret David's Law in their school district?
2. What do school leaders do to address David's Law requirements and guidelines?

Brief Overview of Methodology

This study was conducted following a phenomenological approach and qualitative guidelines. A qualitative method allowed the researcher to identify and analyze the perceptions of school leaders in regard to David's Law in a Texas public school district. Further, this qualitative research was conducted according to Creswell (2013) as a narrative research approach which allowed the researcher to "interpret the larger meaning of the story" (p. 191).

Through purposeful and snowballing selection, school leaders were asked to participate in this research (Creswell, 2018). Purposive is also referred to as judgmental sampling, and it is where the researcher locates individuals that meet a specific set of criteria or characteristics in a population. Snowball sampling allows for inclusion of additional participants who meet a specific criterion and may be willing to volunteer in the research (Creswell, 2013; Johnson & Christensen, 2012). Major urban school leaders and one parent were a part of the study for a total of six participants. Those selected through purposeful sampling were an assistant principal, a principal at the high school level, and a central office administrator, who serves as the district

discipline coordinator. Participants selected through snowball sampling were a counselor, a teacher and a parent. Data resources included interviews, document reviews, and the researcher's journal. Data was collected, coded and categorized following an inductive process (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Coding techniques or methods were used and a triangulation of the data was substantiated. Themes throughout the research were made evident through this process.

Definition of Terms

Bullying - "An individual or group who incites physical or emotional abuse on another individual or group" (Polanin et al., 2012).

Cyberbullying - An umbrella term for the imbalance of power, intentional electronic harassment or mistreatment on related constructs such as social media bullying, online gaming bullying, Internet bullying, and any harassment via a digital device or virtual world where the perpetrator has intentionality to harm another individual or where there is electronic aggression whether the perpetrator is known or there is anonymity (Menesini et al., 2012; Nixon, 2014; Patchin & Hinduja, 2006).

School leaders - Texas public school leaders working with a high school or in a central office, such as assistant principals, principals, counselors, educators, central office staff, assistant superintendents, deputy superintendents, and/or superintendents.

Stakeholders - Individuals associated with Texas public schools including students, teachers, school leaders, community members, families, and businesses.

Limitations/Delimitations

Given the qualitative nature of this study, it is not possible to make wide generalizations. In addition, this study only focuses on David's Law in public schools. Therefore, findings may not apply to private or charter schools. This study only includes school leaders as defined in the definition of terms. This study was conducted after the initial implementation of the law and the researcher did not intend to evaluate the outcomes of this law.

Assumptions

It is assumed that the participants understand what cyberbullying is and their role in the implementation of the law within Texas public schools. It is further assumed that school leaders have been following David's Law since September 1, 2017, and that the participants will have knowledge and understanding as well as experience with David's Law. This research is based on the assumptions that the participants are honest, transparent, and not guarded due to any political or power issues. The researcher presumed that the participants were familiar with the requirements of the law and how it had impacted school districts in Texas.

Significance of the Study

This study focuses on David's Law and the perceptions of school leaders in Texas public schools in regard to the law. School leaders can assist and empower school districts in the protection of students' lives, assisting with implementation, personnel needs, and/or funding. This research can inform Texas school leaders about advocacy, education, and empowerment to protect students from cyberbullying and its harmful effects. This research can function as a tool for other school leaders and be both resourceful and informative since it is a newly enacted law (David's Law, 2017). The findings of this study may provide insight into how school leaders are addressing David's Law in Texas public schools. Preventing suicide and cyberbullying is the intent of David's Law along with ensuring that individuals are held responsible for their choices. David's Law has changed the education code law in the state of Texas, which has greatly affected Texas public schools and the expectations to reduce cyberbullying incidents and/or their harmful effects. The insights and perspectives of school leaders may provide a knowledge base for other school districts engaged in the early stages of its implementation.

Summary

The purpose of this study is to identify and understand the perceptions of school leaders in regard to David's Law. Since its enactment in 2017, school leaders have a key responsibility to protect, prevent and combat cyberbullying among students. Therefore, it is imperative to explore the perceptions of school leaders in regard to David's Law in Texas public schools,

particularly after the initial stages of implementation. In summary, this chapter includes a statement of the problem, the purpose of the study with research questions, a brief overview of the methodology, definitions of terms, limitations and delimitations of the study, assumptions made by the researcher, and the significance of the study.

Chapter II: Literature Review

Safety and security in public schools have a broader scope than physical safety alone on and off campus grounds (Martin, 2013). One of the major goals of safety in schools is the prevention, reduction and elimination of students' harmful behaviors, such as cyberbullying. Much has been written about this type of bullying in schools, both its repercussions and effects (Donegan, 2014; Nixon, 2014; Patchin & Hinduja, 2006; Schneider, O'Donnell, Stueve, & Coulter, 2012; Slonje & Smith, 2008; Willard, 2007). Another research stream reports that cyberbullying is excessive in America and individuals are harming themselves as well as committing suicide due to the harmful action(s) (Allen, 2012; Hinduja & Patchin, 2013; Kalpidou, Costin, & Morris, 2011; Li, 2010). With the totality of research, there is much to be synthesized and learned about cyberbullying.

This literature review examines the empirical work related to cyberbullying in public schools. For the purpose of this review, cyberbullying is defined as an imbalance of power, intentional electronic harassment, or mistreatment on related constructs such as social media bullying, online gaming bullying, Internet bullying, and any harassment via a digital device or virtual world where the perpetrator has intentionality to harm another individual or where there is electronic aggression whether the perpetrator is known or there is anonymity (Menesini et al., 2012; Nixon, 2014; Patchin & Hinduja, 2006).

Given the increasing number of incidents of bullying, particularly cyberbullying, protecting students has become a top priority for schools and school leaders. There appears to exist extensive research in regard to incidents with cyberbullying. However, this review provides an analysis of safety and security in schools, bullying in schools, cyberbullying in schools, school leaders, parents and guardians, and community support.

Safety and Security in Schools

The National Center for Educational Statistics (2018) indicates that 94 percent of principals control access to their buildings and security measures are higher than in previous years. Since the school shootings in Parkland, Florida, and Santa Fe, Texas, the United States (U.S.) Department of Homeland Security has refocused its emphasis on school security. Different governmental agencies have placed their priority on enhancing school safety and creating plans for protecting schools (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2018).

The safety and security of students has become campus leaders' top priority as one of the critical governmental agencies to prevent and reduce harm or casualties among adolescents. Many countries like the United States hold campus leaders to high expectations when it comes to the safety and security of students. For example, in Australia, "The School Education Act 1999 and School Education Regulations 2000 empower the principal to deal with persons disrupting school premises" (AU Department of Education, 2018). Similarly, schools in the U.S. have addressed concerns and incidents associated with bullying and cyberbullying, particularly with adolescents.

Bullying in Schools

Bullying is occurring across America in public schools and elsewhere. Some strongly affirm that as a nation we can combat and end bullying while others indicate otherwise, such as Donegan (2014):

Bullying is deeply engrained in American culture. Our society illustrates the pinnacle of capitalistic competition. This win-or-die-trying atmosphere, the competitive college acceptance process, and much of the corporate world, contribute to many of the bullying problems that we battle today. The issues of bullying and cyberbullying can only be

contained in the short term and not eliminated completely due to how deep-seeded they have become in our competitive society. (p. 39)

Along with societal issues, there are deeply rooted issues concerning bullying among students. One study looked at peers and their reactions to the behavior of bullying. Among the findings, it was discovered that students engage in bullying behavior because of their social status or position of power among their peers (Dijkstra, Lindenberg, & Veenstra, 2008).

Addressing bullying requires awareness and understanding of its behaviors and the impact it has on students. Bullying can change and take several forms. Its behaviors evolve based on the situation and circumstances with an individual, society, family, peer, or community (Swearer & Hymel, 2015). Furthermore, Wang, Iannotti, and Nansel (2009) identified four different forms of bullying: physical (i.e., assault), verbal (i.e., threats or insults), relational (exclusion or rumor spreading), and cyber (i.e., aggressive behavior on technology). From these, cyberbullying has increased tremendously, which affects student safety in all schools.

Cyberbullying in Schools

The evolution of the Internet, phone applications commonly known as “apps,” and social media has prompted the emergence of cyberbullying. This type of bullying occurs in cyberspace, on such platforms as Nik, SnapChat, After Hours, Tumblr, Tinder, or other social media apps. In addition, cyberbullying is performed through social media and games, such as Fortnite and Minecraft, to lure or bully children sexually or attempt to try and have the adolescents commit suicide. Furthermore, social media and gaming platforms use characters that perform cyberbullying, which is not beneficial to adolescents (Navarro, Yubero, & Larranaga, 2016).

Due to the multiple ways a person can cyberbully an individual, public schools have seen an increase in cyberbullying cases. They subsequently investigate, reprimand, and work with law

enforcement to combat the behavior(s). Along with outside entities supporting school districts, the districts themselves have had to create and establish many expectations to protect students physically and socially-emotionally (Fisher & Tanner-Smith, 2015). With the increase in policies, news headlines, awareness, and advocacy against cyberbullying, more individuals are aware of the negative effects of bullying or cyberbullying on another individual; however, some students still engage in this behavior. Several researchers have documented statistics about the number of students who have suffered or have been subjected to cyberbullying.

In one study, at least 15% of the students in the United States indicated that they were bullied electronically through “texting, Instagram, Facebook, or other social media, during the 12 months before the survey” (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, para. 121, 2017). Patchin and Hinduja (2012a) indicated that up to 72% of individuals were involved in cyberbullying victimization from among 35 peer-reviewed published journals. Of the articles, Juvonen and Gross (2008) claimed that 72% of youth have been bullied via cyberbullying within a year. Since 2012, there have been other documented victims of cyberbullying in the literature. For example, about 15% of adolescents have experienced cyberbullying (Modecki, Minchin, Harbaugh, Guerra, & Runions, 2014).

Although much has been written about cyberbullying and the repercussions or effects (Donegan, 2014; Nixon, 2014; Patchin & Hinduja, 2006; Schneider, O’Donnell, Stueve, & Coulter, 2012; Slonje & Smith, 2008; Willard, 2007), researchers tend to report different frequencies of cyberbullying incidents. This could be a result of the different values of definitions of cyberbullying as well as how methodologies and samplings were comprised or how different data was retrieved. Nonetheless, there is still evidence that cyberbullying does exist and negatively affects adolescents (Tokunaga, 2010), yet the increased occurrence of

cyberbullying continues among adolescents due to the widespread use of so many social media platforms (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Florida Atlantic University (2017) analyzed the data from students, and provided further insight into what students and teens are experiencing electronically, online and/or on social media. Electronic accessibility for children has many positive benefits but also extremely harmful ones, such as cyberbullying (Li, 2005). As a result, cyberbullying has an effect on students academically, emotionally, socially and holistically, which in turn prevents them from functioning, working or excelling (Bauman, Toomey, & Walker, 2013). With the use of social networking or media alone having negative impacts on students, cyberbullying exacerbates the harmful effects (Ahn, 2011b). Through cyberbullying has come the phrase “catfishing” where predators entice victims into killing themselves after they have taken all of their money and/or are holding something against them, such as sexually explicit information or photos. With these types of situations, schools have a difficult time keeping students safe. Relationship problems and victimization are a few of the many negative effects of cyberbullying (Hoff & Mitchell, 2009).

Researchers have seen the relationship between cyberbullying and several negative outcomes. For example with social media platforms, such as Facebook, there can be a direct negative emotional and academic effect on individuals (Kalpidou, Costin, & Morris, 2011). Small social circles, aggression, and violence are some of the negative concerns from cyberbullying (Calvete, Orue, Estevez, Villardon, & Padilla, 2010). Unfortunate side effects also include drinking, depression, drug abuse, anxiety, eating disorders and psychosomatic symptoms. Similarly, when engaged in cyberbullying, many bullies and victims exhibit other behaviors such as violence, harassment, negative name calling, foul language, and negative

sexual connotations or behaviors (Cassidy, Jackson, & Brown, 2009). In addition, unsafe sexual behavior, violence and/or violent behaviors, and substance abuse have also been linked to cyberbullying (Litwiller & Brausch, 2013). These behaviors are prevalent among victims and bullies alike (Kaltiala-Heino, Rimpela, Rantanen, & Rimpela, 2000).

Bully. The act of bullying or being the perpetrator oftentimes is learned from the individual's environment and, in the case of cyberbullying, performed on technology. With cyberbullying one can bully anonymously or behind a screen where facial interactions and social or physical experiences do not exist. Intentionality and anonymity are key factors in regard to how students identify cyberbullies (Menesini et al., 2012). Doing something hurtful may or may not have any response from the other individual online but, due to shift changes in information and communication technology, bullies are no longer on the playground but have new weapons.

Gender, age, motives, personality, psychological factors, socioeconomic status and technology use, values and perceptions, and other maladaptive behaviors are personal factors while provocation and perceived support, parental involvement, school climate, and perceived anonymity are the situational factors that Kowalski, Giumetti, Schroeder, and Lattanner (2014) claim are reasons cyberbullying occurs. Wang et al. (2009) saw a correlation between socioeconomic status and cyberbullying. Perpetration occurs due to the high socioeconomic status of individuals who have more access to technology. Kowalski, Morgan, and Limber (2012) saw that a traditional bully and victim were more likely to be engaged in cyberbullying and victimization between over 4,000 secondary level students. Banks (1997) indicated that bullies need to be empowered or have a sense of power over another individual. Bullying can be caused by anger, depression/anxiety, deficits in social skills and may be the result of a lack of empathy instruction or teaching, peer group memberships or exclusions, dominant trait

characteristics, or attraction to a behavior or peers that exercise a behavior of dominance (Espelage & Swearer, 2008). Bullying happens as a social problem in the context of a group (Olweus, 2001; Rodkin & Hodges, 2003; Salmivalli, 2001). Characteristics, along with relationships among multiple individuals and spheres of influence, in addition to society and culture, attribute to why one may bully (Swearer & Hymel, 2005). When a group is accepting of the behavior, bullies tend to act more frequently harming the victims (Duffy & Nesdale, 2009).

Victim. An individual harmed by a bully or who has been bullied is called the victim. Victims have severe responses as well as experience trauma and/or harmful effects from cyberbullying. Some have gone to the unfortunate extreme of suicide. Juvonen and Gross (2008) found in their study that “mean things” and “anything that someone does that upsets or offends someone else” is bullying. Of the participants of 12-17 year olds, 72% had experienced cyberbullying (p. 499). Since cyberbullying exists when there is harmful communication or exchange of information over technology or on the internet/online platform, it is critical to review cyberbullying victimization (Devoe & Murphy, 2011). The power or negative effects from bullying lead some individuals to feel the need or desire to bully another individual. Then these once-victims become bullies themselves and experience bullying perpetration and cyber victimization (Kennedy, 2018).

Cyber Victimization. Cyber victimization occurs when an individual has been sent threats; a person uses another’s personal information without permission; another person displays private information unwillingly; someone shares a graphic and/or embarrassing video/photograph; rumors are spread; pictures are manipulated; and/or there is exclusion in social settings (Elipe, Mora-Merchán, Ortega-Ruiz, & Casas, 2015). Other factors to consider are the student’s environment, emotional state, relationship with parents, self-control, and essential

pieces of a student's life which may lead to bullying victimization (Hay & Meldrum, 2010).

Victimization can affect a student drastically in all areas, such as truancy, sleep, academics and other factors. Having individuals and processes in place can ensure that students have the support they need.

Evident throughout the literature are the negative effects of cyberbullying victimization, similar to bullying but much more extreme. Desmet et al. (2014) indicated "Obese cyber-victims were however more than five times as likely to have ever thought about committing suicide compared to obese non-victims of cyber aggression" (p. 6). Other research has looked at the plethora of negative effects of cyberbullying, and all highlight the detrimental effects that victimization has on the critical parts of a child's life (Bauman et al., 2013; Gamez-Guadix, Orue, Smith, & Calvete, 2013; Hinduja & Patchin, 2010; Mishna, Khoury-Kassabri, Gadalla, & Daciuk, 2012; Olweus, 2012; Ortega et al., 2012; Schneider, O'Donnell, Stueve, & Coulter, 2012; Tokunaga, 2010; Wang, Iannotti, & Luk, 2010).

Emotional and psychological effects of cyberbullying. Desmet et al. (2014) has delved into the specific concerns for overweight teens, something that is increasingly prevalent in adolescents. Psychosocial functioning is an effect of cyberbullying and creates suicidal thoughts from victimization. Bauman, Toomey, and Walker (2013) found that males and females differed in depression outcomes between victimization and suicide attempts. Depression was a key indicator for females in relation to cyberbullying victimization and suicide attempts.

As American society continues to remain frequently connected to technology and online platforms, cyberbullying will sustain. Unfortunately, the increase in device usage, social media engagement, and internet use, comes with a high price. Ahn (2011a) suggested that there is a relationship between internet use and psychological well-being. More specifically, prolonged

Internet use has been linked to depression, loneliness, and reduced social interaction. Valkenburg and Peter (2009) labeled this phenomenon the “reduction hypothesis.” Technology usage has created issues among individuals that have led to extreme self-esteem issues (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010). All of these negative side effects coupled with cyberbullying lead to devastating concerns among individuals today. As Mishna, Khoury-Kassabri, Gadalla, and Daciuk (2012) stated, “Students who were victims reported feeling significantly more unsafe than students not involved in cyber bullying” (p. 66).

Suicide and suicide ideation. One of the many effects of cyberbullying is self-harm, suicide, or suicide ideation. Bauman et al. (2013) and Hinduja and Patchin (2010) emphasize cyberbullying as being associated with suicide ideation. While their research indicates that traditional bullying is the stronger predictor of suicide ideation, Bauman et al. (2013) saw a direct correlation between males in regard to cyber bullying-based suicide attempts. They further emphasized that this may be due to the emotional distress of a bully’s unintended hurtful behavior, for example through a joke or something that was unintended. Suicide or suicidal ideation has been prevalent in youth, which correlates to the excessive use of the internet (Brailovskaia, Teismann, & Margraf, 2018). To combat suicide, many have found that positive mental health support has helped prevent and educate individuals regarding self-harm, suicide and suicide ideation (Siegmann et al., 2018; Teismann, Forkmann, Glaesmer, Egeri, & Margraf, 2016; Teismann, Brailovskaia et al., 2018; Teismann, Forkmann et al., 2018). Unfortunately, individuals with suicidal behavior have difficulty in managing negative moods (Rajappa, Gallagher, & Miranda, 2011). Inability to regulate moods creates a sometimes tragic scenario. Cyberbullying has and does lead to suicidal thoughts, ideation and/or self-harm. Along with these concerns, among teens primarily, is stress and suicide ideation. Aggression and moral

disengagement due to cyberbullying victimization and perpetration also exist (Kowalski, Giumetti, Schroeder, & Lattanner, 2014; Kowalski, Morgan, & Limber, 2012). These lead to deadly thoughts and sometimes harmful behaviors or actions for the victim(s).

Furthermore, cyberbullying has negative social-emotional outcomes, creates anxiety, suicidal thoughts, physical pain or harm, illicit drug use, alcohol abuse, physical aggression, and little to no self-esteem for bully-victims (Berkowitz & Benbenishty, 2012; Copeland, Wolke, Angold, & Costello, 2013; Kumpulainen, Räsänen, & Puura, 2001; Srabstein & Piazza, 2008). The research reports that cyberbullying is excessive in America and individuals are harming themselves and/or committing suicide due to the harmful behavior (Allen, 2012; Hinduja & Patchin, 2013; Kalpidou, Costin, & Morris, 2011; Li, 2010). It has been noted that cyberbullying leads to suicide more than traditional bullying. School leaders can use suicide and cyberbullying prevention and education to intervene in schools (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010). Desmet et al. (2014) stated, “Cybervictimization may heighten suicidal ideation in absence of an impact on quality of life by an acute reaction of embarrassment” (p. 10). While bullies and victims are the primary actors of cyberbullying, bystanders may also play a role in acknowledging and discussing the resulting harmful effects.

Bystanders. Individuals who are passive observers of bullying have been labeled as bystanders. Shultz, Heilman and Hart (2014) advocate that bystander behavior and motives are also something that must be considered. Allen (2012) indicated that situations deemed as drama leave individuals not wanting to be involved, yet a negative experience was observed. In a survey pertaining to cyberbullying in schools many students did not report the incidents or share their stories (Li, 2007). Some students say sharing about cyberbullying or other negative behaviors is snitching and many do not want to be involved in investigations. For cyberbullying,

in particular, involvement of bystanders can either squelch or assist bullying. Polanin et al. (2012) found in a meta-analysis of 11 studies, including over 12,000 children, that bystanders did intervene more frequently with intervention behaviors than participated in bullying prevention programs compared to children who did not participate in a bullying prevention program. With a wide variety of programs, ages of children, locations, and races, the study confirmed the effectiveness of bystanders in relation to bullies and their behaviors.

Frequently, supportive behaviors among bystanders exist due to an individual's need to help the victim or offer an empathic response about cyberbullying (Macháčková, Dedkova, Sevcikova, & Cerna, 2013). In addition, Macháčková et al. (2013) indicated that bystanders with a good relationship to the victim would be more supportive. These emotional connections were important within relationships. Watching the behavior and doing nothing about it is not acceptable; therefore, it is important for school leaders to educate all stakeholders, including bystanders, regarding what they should do when witnessing cyberbullying.

School Leaders

The growing problem of cyberbullying has led many researchers to focus on what school leaders can do to end cyberbullying (Cassidy, Jackson, & Brown, 2009). Responding to and investigating reports of cyberbullying is part of a school leader's job. Ensuring that students are safe and all acts of harm are investigated and/or reported to law enforcement is critical. May (2014) recommended that protecting schools starts with the positive relationships among campus and district leaders, teachers, and students in order to foster a positive climate and cultural safety.

Due to the ever-changing technological advancements, cyberbullying can and most likely will continue to evolve over time (Donegan, 2014). School leaders must constantly change to

meet the needs of students. School districts have implemented alternative disciplinary consequences and responsibilities in order to protect students. Policies and clear procedures must be in place to address and combat all types of bullying and cyberbullying (Modecki et al., 2014). The issues that school leaders address, and the role of a school leader as a result of societal fluidity, constantly changes (Kowalski, 1999). Public schools are responsible for upholding the laws and ensuring that all mandates are followed accordingly, to keep students safe. With society constantly changing, it is encouraged to use technology in and out of the classroom. However, it is important to recognize that technology use can lead to cyberbullying behaviors, which must be systematically addressed by school leaders in order to prevent wrongful behaviors. It is important for school leaders to help students work on positive behaviors such as kindness and empathy (Patchin & Hinduja, 2014).

Much of the research has focused on middle and high school campuses with insight from students and personnel (Castile & Harris, 2014; Juvonen & Gross, 2008; National Center for Educational Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, 2018; Sampasa-Kanyinga, Roumeliotis, & Xu, 2014). This research testifies to the importance of educating children to be responsible online users and provide youth and parents with tools to combat cyberbullying. Further, research also shows that the use of social media is a primary mode to cyberbullying and adolescents are negatively impacted by such activity. School leaders must step in to advocate, educate, and support students in order to end the war on cyberbullying. Additionally, in-service and pre-service teachers have been included in research pertaining to cyberbullying (Bran, 2018). For instance, Kowalski et al. (2014) considered all cases, campuses, and situations in their research highlighting variations:

These variations suggest that there will not likely be a one-size-fits-all model of prevention and intervention when it comes to bullying, whether traditional or virtual. Thus, parents, educators, and community members need to be flexible in designing their programs so these can be tailored to the needs of particular populations. (p. 1127)

Support. Supporting students with counseling and rehabilitation when school issues arise, or holding students responsible for inappropriate behaviors, is a critical component of a school leader's job. Macháčková, Dedkova, Sevcikova, and Cerna (2013) emphasized that relationships matter with victims because normally those connections will stick up for and/or advocate for the victim to get assistance if they're being cyberbullied. Also, school leaders can assist students, whether cyberbullying happens inside campus walls or after school hours, because it still impacts the school day for the individual (Hinduja & Patchin, 2007). Others suggest that stakeholders, such as administrators and counselors, must take action to help educate parents, work with students, create safe spaces for communication, and set forth clear expectations and policies for cyberbullying (Chibbaro, 2007).

As the number of students struggling with bullying, cyberbullying, and/or social-emotional needs has increased, school leaders have become more aware and proactive (Polanin et al., 2012). The measures they have taken include expanded education, rehabilitation, awareness, and suicide prevention programs. Additionally, the increase in loss of student lives has prompted laws to change, processes to be improved, and school districts to shift their focus on being more responsive, proactive, and responsible to cyberbullying.

Critical to preventing cyberbullying incidents from happening is perhaps the role school leaders play in the lives of their students, especially with social media and online platforms having high numbers of cyberbullying (Chibbaro, 2007; Fried & Fried, 1996; Shultz, Heilman, &

Hart, 2014). The negative effects of cyberbullying alone make it imperative for school leaders to be cognizant and stay abreast of new research and information in order to serve students well.

The roles that individuals play are essential to listening for, addressing, and combating the act of cyberbullying. This calls for support systems to be in place within our public schools in order to reinforce the positive impact of adults, such as social workers and school leaders, when addressing the social-emotional needs of the students who fall victim to cyberbullying, thus ensuring their safety (Astor, Meyer, Benbenishty, Marachi, & Rosemond, 2005). Support systems create a safe haven for cyberbullied victims and empower campuses to thrive and combat cyberbullying. Modecki, Minchin, Harbaugh, Guerra, and Runions (2014) state:

What we can infer from this heavy overlap is that focusing exclusively on cyber contexts may not be the optimal approach to reducing harmful behaviors among youth. Instead, interventions should target how youth treat each other to reduce cruelty and meanness and increase respectful and positive behaviors. (p. 608)

Meeting or addressing the increasing demands of a more diverse student population calls for school leaders to be aware of and implement protocols and processes that support students' physical and social-emotional needs. Litwiller and Brausch (2013) indicate, "Professionals who aid adolescent victims of bullying should encourage healthy coping behaviors and support interventions that diminish the probability of an adolescent engaging in substance use or violent behavior" (p. 683).

School districts and their leaders are responsible for many physical and social-emotional needs pertaining to the safety of their students. Districts are becoming more responsible for all components of a student's well being, from on campus to outside campus, such as during a student's academic or extracurricular activities. School leaders have a responsibility for

protecting students under various state laws and for meeting expectations of safety and security. Along with outside entities supporting school districts, the districts themselves have had to create and establish many expectations to protect students physically and socially-emotionally (Fisher & Tanner-Smith, 2015).

Creating support systems that help students foster positive emotional and mental health is critical, and further reduces suicidal thoughts, depression, and self-harm (Siegmann et al., 2018; Teismann, Forkmann, et al., 2018; Brailovskaia et al., 2018). Schools must be aware of the ways in which cyberbullying can hurt students, and assist in the rehabilitation and education of students. The negative effects of cyberbullying create concerns because bullying is most evident in middle school and beyond (Wang, Iannotti, & Nansel, 2009). But in order to assist, school leaders must first educate themselves on the various social media platforms, types of cyberbullying, and legal frameworks set up to protect students (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015). Listening to students and gaining insight on how to deal with and end cyberbullying, from a student's perspective, is crucial (Juvonen & Gross, 2008). One mechanism some school districts use is school-based resources, for example police officers who serve outside their roles as law enforcement duty officers, to further reduce cyberbullying, victimization, and other negative harmful behaviors among students (Patchin & Hinduja, 2012a). By establishing reporting strategies and processes to protect and prevent cyberbullying, schools will simultaneously be creating safe, positive cultures.

Reporting. According to the research, reporting of cyberbullying incidents is critical. There are many requirements to creating successful reporting procedures, such as ensuring that the processes of reporting are clear, establishing a bullying prevention program in the curriculum, and having an expectation of student-created advocacy mechanisms in the schools.

Creating a focus of prevention is perhaps more important than negative reprimands or disciplinary actions within the schools. It is crucial for school leaders to follow clear punishment protocol for bullying, and to adhere to them as a consequence for inappropriate behavior.

Keeping up with the fluidity of change in electronic and technological advancements is ever changing, in addition to the many other responsibilities school leaders have in protecting and educating students (Wiseman, 2011).

Accountability. Researchers suggest that all stakeholders, including school leaders, must be responsible for combating cyberbullying. As Donegan (2012) claims, “Along with recognizing the problem and being able to identify solutions, it is vital that cyberbullying be addressed in a consistent way” (p. 39). Therefore, school leaders are required to ensure that consistent repercussions, discipline, and rehabilitation are completed. Sustaining comprehensive programs, processes, and procedures that are created to report, identify, educate, collaborate, rehabilitate, counsel, discipline, and connect with the community may lead to a reduction in cyberbullying incidents. However, school leaders might have to play an instrumental role in protecting each campus and all students. Patchin and Hinduja (2016) indicated that students are quicker to avoid behaviors punishable by the school than by law enforcement. This highlights the powerful influence school leaders and others, including parents, have in helping to hold students accountable for their behavior, as well as working to combat cyberbullying.

Parents and Guardians

Other stakeholders, such as parents and guardians, may also contribute to reducing cyberbullying incidents. As Sampasa-Kanyinga, Roumeliotis, and Xu (2014) emphasize, parents must be open-eyed when their children are online. It is critical that parents and guardians provide support for their children if they fall victim to cyberbullying, which occurs to over 17% of

adolescents. Safety measures put into place at home, from apps that monitor usage to safeguards that limit access to specific material, will ensure boundaries and protection. The lack of supervision on electronic media has created a difficult environment for children to navigate and, with the ability to anonymously cyberbully, students' lives can be at stake (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015). Wang et al. (2009) said it best:

Consistent with previous studies, our results on parental support suggest that positive parental behaviors protect adolescents from not only bullying others but also being bullied. The protective effects were consistent for all four forms of bullying, with similar magnitudes of strength. (pp. 372-373)

Hinduja and Patchin (2013) discuss the impact of parents on students. They claim that positive relationships, even when not monitoring a child directly, is exceptionally beneficial. The bonds that are influential are those that support healthy emotional and mental behaviors and growth. They also emphasize the connection between parents and school and how powerful that relationship can be to support students. A powerful statement from their research, perhaps to highlight the significance of parents and guardians, is stated thusly:

It is clear that when parents or teachers at school explicitly convey to their children and students that bullying behaviors are not appropriate, the youth are less likely to participate in those behaviors. This was especially true for the respondents who did not associate with peers who bully others, but even true among those who did. (p. 717)

Parents can work with health care professionals and educators to help adolescents and parents “establish warm, nurturing relationships that include close adult monitoring” (Nixon, 2014, p. 151). Ensuring that cyberbullying behaviors do not exist and/or continue is particularly important. This can be done through conversation, positive rapport and valued time spent

together. Parental support and being a bully online have a direct correlation. The lack of support from parents increases the likelihood that a child will be a cyberbully. Hinduja and Patchin (2013) indicate that students are not as likely to cyberbully, or not at all, when there is parental punishment and discipline. Working to hold cyberbullies accountable for their behavior, advocate what is right for students, monitor online accessibility and behaviors, and build positive rapport are critical for parents and guardians to combat cyberbullying. However, it is relevant to also understand what the community at large can do.

Community Support

Communities also play a vital part in the fight against cyberbullying. Therefore, working with communities and having a collaborative, cohesive, and proactive plan with clear expectations, information, processes, and consequences is important for school leaders to ensure cyberbullies are held accountable (Hinduja & Patchin, 2011b). These in turn create expectations for school leaders to collaborate with the community in order to support online safety and to reduce cyberbullying (Patchin & Hinduja, 2012a). Working with entities outside of the educational building or organization can create strong efforts to combat cyberbullying. In order to have safe learning communities, school leaders must work with community stakeholders to protect the physical and social-emotional needs of students, ensuring the protection of the victim and consequences of the bully while following up and ensuring rehabilitation for both (Patchin & Hinduja, 2012b). Building communities of support, peer mentoring, and social norming can be effective ways of creating communities of support. Having data-driven action plans, campaigns for prevention and elimination, and a strategic plan around cyberbullying can create a community culture to combat cyberbullying. In addition, positive decisions build a positive

school culture and climate that indicate cyberbullying is not allowed or peer respected (Hinduja & Patchin, 2012).

Promoting relationships that are strong between public entities and throughout the community within a school district is critical. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (2018) advocates that individuals must collaborate, plan together, be well trained, and report incidents. As a community, adolescents can be protected and assisted to combat cyberbullying. One way is through wellness centers; an area that provides emotional support that establishes stability and rehabilitation after a trauma, as well as a safe haven. Educating the community to know the signs and be aware of possible cyberbullying, or any at-risk behavior, is important. Allowing the community to have input in solving societal and systemic problems is needed to combat cyberbullying. Having a community aware of the concerns and the ability to address and report them is valuable for the culture of the community as well (Paterson, 2018). Furthermore, creating a community culture where all individuals accept and denounce cyberbullying as an unacceptable behavior is necessary to end the harmful act (Hinduja and Patchin, 2012).

Summary

Review of the literature regarding cyberbullying in public schools revealed that previous research was organized into six strands, including safety and security in schools, bullying in schools, cyberbullying in schools, school leaders, parents and guardians, and community support.

Research on cyberbullying is extensive (Kowalski et al., 2014; Li, 2007; Miller, 2017; Patchin & Hinduja, 2012a; Sampasa-Kanyinga, Roumeliotis, & Xu, 2014). Previous researchers have identified and reported the effects of cyberbullying on students, particularly adolescents (Donegan, 2014; Sampasa-Kanyinga, Roumeliotis, & Xu, 2014; Hinduja & Patchin, 2013), as well as highlighted key players such as the bully, the victim, and the bystander (Polanin et al.,

2012; Kowalski et al., 2012). Furthermore, others have described the roles and responsibilities of school leaders, as well as what contributions parents, guardians and the community can make, to address the issue of cyberbullying and reduce the number of incidents.

For the most part, previous research illustrates that cyberbullying in schools affects students in a negative way which can lead to numerous harmful effects (Hinduja & Patchin, 2013; Tokunaga, 2010; Bauman et al., 2013; Brailovskaia et al., 2018). It is also evident that cyberbullying in schools must be addressed collaboratively by school leaders, parents and guardians, and the community at large. These key stakeholders can come together to combat the harmful act of cyberbullying. The literature heavily depicts the negative effects of cyberbullying and how individuals can help the victims. Furthermore, it is apparent that strong rapport between school leaders and students can help in many ways to combat cyberbullying.

Although there is clear evidence why cyberbullying exists, and the resulting negative effects, there is a lack of research pertaining to the implementation of cyberbullying laws and, perhaps, the interpretations of them to reduce cyberbullying. Specifically in Texas public schools, cyberbullying and school leaders' perceptions were not the focus of previous research. Therefore, given the increase in harmful effects from cyberbullying among students in public schools, there is a need to expand our understanding of how school leaders and others may address cyberbullying. School leaders' perspectives and insight are needed to expand research in this field, and further research pertaining to school leader rapport, as well as community support, is needed in regard to cyberbullying as well.

The implementation of new laws has not been studied at length due to their recent enactment. Much of the previous research over cyberbullying laws has been in the field of law and not education. Miller (2017) indicated that although cyberbullying is a critical concern in the

U.S., not much is happening at the federal level to prevent and combat the problem. States are expected to implement laws if they so choose. El Asam and Samara (2016) said it best:

Some current laws can be applied; however, greater clarity is needed as well as legal awareness among schools, parents and children. Empirical research is essential in demonstrating the impact of a legal intervention on cyberbullying. It is not known how much children are aware of the legal system and current laws. Future research should design and test bullying/cyberbullying interventions that involve legal education, and legal consequences. Only then can scientific evidence enhance opinion among policy makers as to whether or not a law is needed. (p. 138)

Therefore, the perceptions of school leaders regarding the implementation of cyberbullying laws, as well as how they are being interpreted, needs to be investigated. Suski (2014) stated, “The laws expand school authority in a majority of states so far beyond the traditional schoolhouse gates that anywhere and everywhere is arguably “in school”” (p. 119). Due to school leaders’ responsibilities in combating cyberbullying, examining cyberbullying laws, and the implementation of them within schools is critical.

In addition, due to constantly changing technology, clarification of the laws about cyberbullying prevention and expectations of school leaders is important to research (Hinduja & Patchin, 2011a). For example, researchers may explore legislative action designed to prevent and combat cyberbullying, such as David’s Law or SB 179 in Texas, which impacts public schools.

The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (2016) emphasizes:

As with all new law, there is typically a time lag from adoption to full implementation and subsequent population impact. Given that many of the state laws have been adopted relatively recently, evidence on implementation and impact is still emerging. (p. 266)

The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (2016) states, “There are few empirical studies of bullying-related litigation” (p. 267). They further claim, “Additional research is also needed to assess the impact of litigation, including the threat of litigation, on schools” (p. 269). Furthermore, research noted that the impact of cyberbullying laws has not been prevalent. Deschamps and McNutt (2016) indicate, “In addition, there is a dearth in the public policy and public administration literature on cyberbullying leaving analysts to integrate research insights from diverse disciplinary fields including psychology, education, criminology, law, and health studies” (p. 65).

Castile and Harris (2014) completed a qualitative phenomenological study in Louisiana pertaining to secondary school administrators and their experiences with cyberbullying incidents. They found that there were discrepancies between what school leaders perceived the law to be in Louisiana in relation to its effectiveness and the actual “effectiveness of the law” (p. 60). It was suggested that additional research is warranted in other states pertaining to cyberbullying and school leaders. To examine the lived experiences and insight of school leaders with respect to cyberbullying laws it was suggested to use what Moustakas (1994) describes as a phenomenological study.

In conclusion, it is relevant to remember, “there is limited investigation of the implementation of anti-bullying laws and policies” (The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2016, p. 283). It is clear from the literature that future research should be conducted to include an in depth analysis of school leaders’ perceptions in relation to the implementation of cyberbullying laws that uphold the safety of students.

Chapter III: Methodology and Procedures

This chapter includes a description of the methods and design used to conduct the research. It also presents the population and sample to be studied, the instruments for data collection, the data collection procedures, and the data analysis procedures.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to identify the perceptions of school leaders pertaining to David's Law in Texas public schools. David's Law went into effect in the state of Texas on September 1, 2017. The law describes cyberbullying and the expectations for school districts to combat cyberbullying. The research focuses on school leaders' perceptions of the law given its initial implementation. David's Law was enacted to protect students from harming or killing themselves due to cyberbullying. This qualitative study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How do school leaders interpret David's Law in their school district?
2. What do school leaders do to address David's Law requirements and guidelines?

Research Method and Design

The study is based on a constructivist epistemology. Maxwell (2013) indicates, "Our understanding of this world is inevitably our construction, rather than a purely objective perception of reality" (p.43). The theoretical perspective is symbolic interpretivism, which allows the observation of participants throughout the research. The theoretical rationale behind this research is based on the value of hearing the perceptions of the school leaders pertaining to David's Law.

The approach to inquiry used in this research is phenomenological. Creswell (2013) describes this type of research as one that focuses on "lived experiences" of the participants that they have in common through a phenomenon (p. 76). The phenomenon of this study is David's

Law in Texas public schools and school leaders' experiences and perceptions implementing the law. A narrative lens allows school leaders to describe their perceptions of David's Law in a Texas public school district. Maxwell (2013) emphasizes the use of the interpretivist viewpoint, which is based on the making of meaning and understanding (p. 30).

The method used is qualitative. This methodology and design allows school leaders to share their perceptions as well as their districts' experiences with David's Law. Ragin, Nagel, and White (2004) emphasized the importance of qualitative research for the power of observation due to it allowing "different kinds of evidence" (p. 11). Since this research focuses on school leaders' perceptions of David's Law, it lent itself to be addressed by qualitative research. Creswell (2013) indicates that, "We conduct qualitative research when we want to *empower individuals* to share their stories, hear their voices, and minimize the power relationships that often exist between a researcher and the participants in a study" (p. 48).

According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), qualitative research is "any type of research that produces findings not arrived at by statistical procedures or other means of quantification" (p. 10). Therefore, the findings of this research provide generalizations that are limited. Students, paraprofessionals or clerical staff did not participate in this research, so the data gathered was limited to the scope of school leaders and a parent who were interviewed.

Description of Participants

Purposeful and snowball sampling was used to select participants for this research (Creswell, 2013; Johnson & Christensen, 2012). Participants were purposefully selected to include school leaders and other key stakeholders from a major urban school district. Texas Education Agency (TEA) designates a major urban school district as the following:

A district is classified as major urban if: (a) it is located in a county with a population of at least 960,000; (b) its enrollment is the largest in the county or at least 70 percent of the largest district enrollment in the county; and (c) at least 35 percent of enrolled students are economically disadvantaged. A student is reported as economically disadvantaged if he or she is eligible for free or reduced-price meals under the National School Lunch and Child Nutrition Program. (Texas Education Agency, 2019)

For the purpose of this study, both the site (public school district within Texas) and the research participants met specific criteria following the purposeful sampling guidelines.

Three school leaders were purposefully selected based on:

- Experience with the implementation of David's Law.
- Their current position was an Assistant Principal, Principal and central office leader.
- Participants currently worked in a major urban public school district in the state of Texas.

Through snowball sampling, three additional participants were selected who had experience with the implementation of David's Law:

- A counselor, considered a school leader.
- A parent.
- A teacher, also considered a school leader for the purpose of this study.

To ensure participants were unidentifiable, they were labeled with pseudo names to secure their anonymity.

Data Collection Protocols

The researcher used a “phenomenological data analysis” (Creswell, 2013, p. 82). The following phenomenological methodologies were used: a semi-structured interview, document review, and reflexive journaling. Patton (1990) refers to interviewing as a way to see more than what we observe, their “inner thoughts,” which is why it was determined as the best form to collect data for this research (p. 278). After a pilot test with one school leader was conducted, the researcher interviewed participants using an interview protocol, including questions about the interviewee’s background, cyberbullying information, and interpretations of understanding David’s Law. Therefore, questions are focused on understanding school leaders’ perceptions of cyberbullying legislation in Texas.

A semi-structured interview protocol allows for multiple questions to be formulated ahead of time, as well as follow-up open-ended probing questions that gather in-depth information and provide a scaffold for the interviews (Gall, 2003). The process for creating the protocol for interviews followed Kvale and Brinkmann’s (2009) seven stages of an interview: decide on the questions, decide on the interviewees, determine the type of appropriate interview, use adequate recording procedures, design and use an interview protocol, review the interview questions and procedures and, lastly, determine the interview place. The protocol for the semi-structured interview was available for participants. Confidentiality and anonymity of the data collected from all avenues were assured to the participants.

In order to confirm information that surfaced from the interviews, data from documents was necessary. The specific documents were from within and outside of the school district. Documents reviewed were the website, reporting form, cyberbullying pamphlet, and district policies. David’s Law and Texas Education Agency public information was also reviewed.

While conducting the interviews and document reviews, the researcher used reflexive journaling to record emergent findings when interviewing and analyzing applicable documents.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher recognizes her own personal bias in that she experienced the impacts of David's Law in central Texas rural district as a High School Principal. She is experienced with the implementation of the law since 2017, in a Texas public school, and worked with school safety and security aspects as related to cyberbullying, placing her in a network with several individuals pertaining to combating cyberbullying. The researcher attempted to reduce her own personal bias through open-ended questions, as recognized in the interview protocol, and maintained a neutral stance by avoiding any assumption of a right or wrong answer throughout the study. The researcher interpreted the meaning of information and asked clarifying questions. Since the researcher experienced the phenomenon in the field, the researcher took on the participant as the observer role (Creswell, 2013).

Data Collection Procedures

After committee approval, the researcher applied for IRB approval to study human subjects. A pilot study was conducted to test the interview protocol for validity and accuracy. The researcher collected data from a major urban school district as well as by the six participants.

The researcher set up 60-minute semi-structured interviews with the participants. Consent was obtained for interviews and recorded for accuracy (Creswell, 2013). Each participant was interviewed once. The researcher collected data, audio recorded the interviews, and transcribed the recordings. Interviews served as the major data collection protocol to obtain "rich data" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 126).

The researcher followed Creswell's (2013) guide and therefore completed "data collection activities: locating site/individual, gaining access and making rapport, purposefully sampling, collecting data, recording information, resolving field issues, and storing data" (p. 146). Information was stored using transcriptions through computer files. Reflexive journaling was kept during the study. Through the data collection process, field notes were gathered during interviews with the participants through a reflexive journal.

Data Analysis Procedures

An analysis of all of the qualitative data was completed. Through inductive coding, themes surfaced from the transcripts. This required placing the raw data consisting of "significant statements, sentences, or quotes that provide an understanding of how the participants experienced the phenomenon" in a table to capture all of the pertinent information (Creswell, 2013, p. 82). Following Creswell's (2013) suggestions, the next steps were completed for data analysis:

- Reading through the written transcripts several times to obtain an overall feeling for them.
- Identifying significant phrases or sentences that pertained directly to the experience.
- Formulating meanings and clustering them into themes common to all of the participants' transcripts.
- Integrating the results into an in-depth, exhaustive description of the phenomenon.
- Validating the findings with the participants, and including participants' remarks in the final description (p. 115).

Themes, found through evident statements, provided insight into school leaders' perceptions of David's Law. The resulting tables represent "significant statements, meanings, and theme clusters" were highlighted, which provided themes from raw data included in the discussion section of the research (Creswell, 2013, p. 116).

In addition, documents were analyzed in order to corroborate the emerging themes. The analysis addressed both the district wide documents and online public resources. Most of the information supported participants' perceptions.

Trustworthiness. Using coding led to confirmability of the data. This consisted of writing reflective memos through journaling to ensure the data was interpreted consistently (Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2013). This also helped to document emotions and reactions from the participants. Along with ensuring confirmability, the researcher was able to validate her moral and ethical undertaking to see both inside and outside the school while conducting the research.

In addition, member checking was a strategy utilized to confirm the accuracy of the emerging data. This allowed the participants to verify their responses for accuracy and credibility (Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2013). Member checking and triangulation established trustworthiness for this research (Guba, 1981). Through theme identification of the interviews, documents, and reflexive journaling, data was analyzed. The researcher interpreted the meanings and asked clarifying questions through conversations with the participants when applicable.

Summary

Through the qualitative phenomenological study, the researcher examined school leaders' perceptions of David's Law. As Crotty (1998) stated, "to uncover meanings and perceptions on the part of the people participating in the research" is important to the work school leaders do (p. 7). Triangulation of the data highlighted school leaders' perceptions of cyberbullying laws in

Texas. This chapter included the methodology, participant selection information, data collection instruments, data collection procedures, data analysis and a summary of the information. The following chapter shares the researcher's findings from the data.

Chapter IV: Findings

Students all around the world are facing cyberbullying. In order to combat cyberbullying, laws have been put into place to reduce and/or eliminate the negative outcomes of cyberbullying such as self-harm and suicide. As cyberbullying incidents continue and/or increase, states are implementing laws to protect or ensure the safety of students. For instance, Texas has passed David's Law to address cyberbullying and increase the safety and security of students in public schools (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2018). This law was named after David Molak who committed suicide after being cyberbullied in San Antonio, Texas (David's Legacy, 2019). Prior to David's Law, there were no set of expectations for school leaders or consequences for being a cyberbully. Therefore, schools are now taking action to protect students against cyberbullying (Rivara & Le Menestrel, 2016). According to previous research, it is essential for schools to address and combat cyberbullying (Bauman et al., 2013; Brailovskaia et al., 2018; Hinduja & Patchin, 2013; Tokunaga, 2010).

The purpose of this study was to identify school leaders' perceptions pertaining to David's Law in Texas public schools. Enacted in September 2017, David's Law protects students from harming or killing themselves due to cyberbullying incidents. David's Law encourages mental health programs for students in public schools, allows the enactment of a criminal penalty if a person is found to be a cyberbully, provides civil remedy, and focuses on protecting school students or any minors from harassment, bullying, or cyberbullying (S. 179, 2017).

However, given the initial implementation of this law, it was important to examine what school districts are doing to implement this law. The following questions guided this study:

1. How do school leaders interpret David's Law in their school districts?

2. What do school leaders do to address David's Law requirements and guidelines?

This chapter presents the findings of that study. The phenomenological qualitative study uses a combination of semi-structured interviews, reflexive journaling, and document analysis. The study focuses on a major urban public school district in Texas, per Texas Education Agency's (TEA's) district classification system, which is represented by the pseudonym Major Urban ISD. Major Urban ISD was chosen as it fit the determined criteria of a major urban public school district in Texas, which experienced the initial implementation of David's Law. The participants as well as the high school that experienced a recent cyberbullying incident were selected purposefully. Before presenting the findings of the study, the six participants who served in different leadership capacities in the urban school district are described. Pseudonyms were applied to protect the identity of all participants and to promote trustworthiness. A description of the participants' profiles are followed by the findings and a summary of the chapter.

Description of District and Participants

A description of the district provides contextual information about the location of the study. A total of six participants were selected, and from these, three were selected through purposive sampling according to specific criteria, and the other three participants were selected through snowball sampling based on specific criteria as well.

Major Urban ISD. Major Urban ISD is a large, urban public school district located in Texas. Major Urban ISD serves over 80,000 students with 55 percent of the student population being Hispanic, 7 percent African-American, 29 percent White and 7 percent being other ethnicities/races. Twenty-seven percent of the students are English language learners, which means their native language is different than English. Fifty-two percent of the students are

considered economically disadvantaged. More than 90 different languages are spoken by student families in the district. In addition, 12 percent of Major Urban ISD's student population is enrolled in special education (About Us, 2018).

Major Urban ISD has 130 schools and more than 11,000 employees. From this, 5,712 of the district employees are classroom teachers, and 229 of the district's teachers are National Board certified, more than any other district in the state. Eighty-four of the schools serve elementary students, grades Pre-K to five; 19 schools serve middle school students, grades six to eight; and 17 schools serve high school students, grades nine through 12. The remaining schools are specialized campuses. Each campus has a head principal and a number of assistant principals and counselors. According to the district website, the vision of the district is to “reinvent the urban school experience,” and the mission is to provide a “comprehensive educational experience that is high quality, challenging, and inspires all students to make a positive contribution to society” (About Us, para. 1, 2018). The district's core beliefs are that “all students will graduate ready for college, career and life” (About Us, para. 1, 2018).

The district outperforms the state and nation when it comes to overall SAT and ACT scores, and students in grades four and eight outscore most districts across the nation on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). The district currently has a graduation rate of 90.7 percent, the highest the district has ever achieved. Major Urban ISD was rated above a “B” in TEA's recent A-F accountability rating with five of its campuses being noted as Improvement Required. Major Urban ISD implemented the David's Law starting 2017 when the law was enacted (About Us, 2018; Parker, 2017; Texas Education Agency, 2019).

Major Urban ISD implemented David's Law in 2017, the year of its enactment in Texas. Major Urban ISD completed several tasks after the law's enactment, one of which was

professional development that included the components of David’s Law and reviewed criteria of what is cyberbullying. It provided insight from legal counsel and the district discipline coordinator during Major Urban ISD’s professional development in August 2017. The professional development exercise examined David’s Law as understood from the 85th Legislature and allowed for discussion among the school leaders in Major Urban ISD. All school leaders in the district had collaboration time to delve into the new law and its implementation expectations in their school district. During the professional development at Major Urban ISD, school leaders reviewed the law directly, and each were given a copy of the law from the Texas Education Code (TEC). The administrative teams discussed David’s Law as a district and also within each campus leadership team during this opportunity.

Each campus implemented information received from the David’s Law professional development at their respective campuses, as they were required to educate and train their staff. However, each campus within Major Urban ISD provided their training differently. For example, the high school had their David’s Law training during their four-day leadership retreat in the summer of 2017, while others did not. Furthermore, this district followed a “trainer of trainers model” by which district leaders were appointed to train campus leaders, and campus leaders trained their staff and teachers (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, para. 1, 2019).

There are plans in Major Urban ISD for updated David’s Law professional development for all school leaders, which will provide a day to review the law. The expectations of David’s Law for Texas public schools will be reviewed in August of 2019 with school leaders as a refresher-training course as well as for all new employees at Major Urban ISD.

David’s Law has been in effect for almost two years, but the law has not been monitored, and data is not being collected systematically in Texas. There is no data about the number of

cyberbullying incidents before or after David’s Law was enacted because reporting was not required. Per the district discipline administrator and the 86th Legislation, TEA will start requiring that cyberbullying be reported as of fall of 2019 via the Public Education Information Management System, commonly known as PEIMS (House Bill 2642).

David’s Law was intended to support students by establishing the requirement that school districts had to create mental health plans for students of cyberbullying. Mental health plans comprise “grief-informed and trauma-informed practices” (SB 179, 2017) that help establish and/or build positive relations and encourage positive decision-making among students. At Major Urban ISD, school leaders delivered these practices through group-based lessons and with individual students according to one-on-one specific needs. The group-based lessons were weekly and peer based under the direction of counselors and administration. These were delivered in classroom group meetings each week during a time set aside specifically to focus on positive mental health.

David’s Law requires school districts to have an anonymous reporting system or process to address cyberbullying. The participating counselor provided a copy of the anonymous reporting document following David’s Law. The district informed parents about David’s Law in their annual update of school expectations, and individual campuses provided information about David’s Law at their parents’ meetings.

In addition, students were informed of David’s Law at the beginning of the year during their annual school-wide expectations meetings and via weekly positive mental health planning meetings in classrooms. Digital citizenship lessons also focused on cyberbullying at Major Urban ISD. The principal shared, “We do social-emotional learning lessons. When the kids get their laptops, there's an online course they take that addresses cyberbullying and going to

inappropriate sites and using your device in a negative way.” Per Major Urban ISD’s website, there is a Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) website specific to what David’s Law requires of districts to teach regarding mental health plans (About Us, 2018).

Major Urban ISD created a new Wellness Counselor position at the high school that was included as part of the selection criteria for this study. One of the counselors, who worked previously within the campus as a regular high school counselor, was moved into that position and a new counselor was hired to serve in the regular counseling role. The assistant principal shared, “We have one counselor that we took, changed her into a...wellness counselor now. So she doesn't have any kids at her immediate case load. All she is available for is kids coming in.”

Participants. The study sample included a total of six participants. Three participants were purposefully selected, including a principal, an assistant principal, and a counselor. Three additional participants were selected through snowball sampling to include a teacher, a central office leader, and a parent. The central office leader was the District Discipline Coordinator. His portfolio included Title IX and David’s Law concerns in Major Urban ISD.

For the purpose of this study, all participants except the parent were considered school leaders. As previously stated elsewhere, it is important to explain that a school leader is an educational professional with leadership responsibilities either at the high school or central office, which can include assistant principals, principals, counselors, educators, central office staff, assistant superintendents, deputy superintendents, and/or superintendents. A parent was also selected to provide insight and to corroborate the emerging data. Per David’s Law, all adults have responsibilities within Texas public schools to combat cyberbullying; therefore, it was important to include a parent.

All participants hold master's degrees from well-known universities. One participant was a male, while the other five were female. Of the selected participants, two were White, two were Hispanic, and two were African American. The following is a brief description of the participants.

Purposively Selected Participants. Three of the participants were purposively selected. All three have been working with Major Urban ISD for at least five years. They are all school leaders at the high school level except for one who serves at the central office.

High School Principal. The principal has served in Major Urban ISD for over 40 years. The principal also serves as teacher, instructional specialist, special education department chairperson, assistant principal, associate principal, and a middle and high school principal. She was promoted to a high school principal after working four years at a middle school. She earned a bachelor's degree in elementary education and a master's degree in educational leadership from a major university. She is certified as a special education, economics, and math teacher as well as mid-management administrator and superintendent.

High School Assistant Principal. The assistant principal has served at Major Urban ISD for 15 years. She taught elementary and middle school where she led the International Baccalaureate (IB) Program. She became the high school assistant principal and is currently looking at principal roles within the district. She earned a bachelor's degree in mathematics and a master's degree in school leadership from a major university. She is certified as a math teacher and principal.

Central Office Leader. The central office school leader selected is the district discipline coordinator who is responsible for overseeing the implementation of requirements and guidelines of David's Law in Major Urban ISD. He works closely with Major Urban ISD's legal counsel,

assistant superintendents, and campus leaders. He has served at Major Urban ISD for over 27 years as a bilingual educator and administrator. He works with school leaders to ensure that all students are being served equitably and that all laws are being followed correctly by the district. He graduated with a master's degree in educational administration from a major university and has a background in bilingual education. He is certified as a math, self-contained 1-8 educator, and bilingual/English Language Learner (ESL) teacher as well as a principal.

Snowball Selected Participants. Three participants were selected through snowball sampling. These included a counselor, a parent (who was a member of the parent teacher organization/association), and a teacher leader in one of Major Urban ISD's high schools.

High School Counselor. The counselor taught English at a middle school. She has a Bachelor of Arts and a Master in Arts in professional counseling. She is a Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC) for school districts and private care. She has served as a bilingual counselor in two different roles at her current campus. She was a counselor for students with specific alpha-based last names and now she serves as a wellness, crisis, and rehabilitation counselor for the entire high school campus. The counselor has experienced cyberbullying situations and events since David's Law was enacted. She is certified as an early childhood through 4th grade generalist teacher, English language arts, and ESL educator as well as a counselor. She graduated from a major university.

High School Teacher. The teacher has served at Major Urban ISD for over 15 years. She works with students who are at risk of dropping out of school and homebound students. She teaches math, credit recovery, and virtual school for Major Urban ISD. She graduated from a major university and earned a bachelor's degree in science and a master's degree in instructional leadership. She is certified to teach English, ESL, and math.

High School Parent. The parent is a graduate of her child’s current high school campus. The parent holds a master’s degree from a major university and is a single parent with three children. The parent is familiar with David’s Law as a result of a recent situation that occurred in her child’s life in Major Urban ISD. Her three children were enrolled in Major Urban ISD and her high school son experienced cyberbullying. She worked with school leaders on David’s Law in the 2018-2019 school year as an assistant principal. She is certified as a 1-6th grade, self-contained, English language arts and ESL educator as well as a principal.

The following table offers a summary of the participants’ background information. It includes gender, ethnicity, education, certification, and years of professional experience in education and in the district of study.

Table 1: Participants’ Demographic Information

Role	Gender	Ethnicity	Educational Background	Certifications	Years of Educational Experience	Years of Experience in Major Urban ISD
Principal	Female	White	B.S. M.Ed.	Special Education, Economics, Math, Mid-Management Administrator, Superintendent	43	43
Assistant Principal	Female	White	B.S. M.Ed.	Math, Principal	15	15
Central Office: District Discipline Administrator	Male	Hispanic	B.S. M.Ed.	Math, Self-Contained 1-8, Bilingual/ESL, Principal	27	27
Counselor	Female	Hispanic	B.A. LPC M.A.	EC-4 Generalist, ELAR, ESL, Counselor	14	4
Teacher Leader	Female	African American	B.S. M.Ed.	Math, ESL	19	16
Parent	Female	African American	B.S. M.Ed.	Self-Contained 1-6, ELAR, ESL, Principal	19	19

Results

The following sections present the findings within the context of each research question. Major themes emerged from the data, and each major theme was defined with supporting information.

Question One: How do school leaders interpret David's Law in their school districts?

An analysis of the data collected through the study reveal that all participants have an understanding of the David's Law guidelines for its implementation. This question focuses on how school leaders, participating in this study, explain the meaning of David's Law. The main purpose is to identify school leaders' interpretations of the newly implemented law. A total of two main themes emerge from the data. First, school leaders see the law as a set of expectations requiring specific and explicit actions related to the initial implementation of David's Law in order to help protect and support students. Second, the participants explain David's Law as an accountability mechanism to reduce cyberbullying.

David's Law: A Set of Expectations. According to the participants, David's Law refers to a set of expectations by the Texas legislature that school districts, school leaders, and others must fulfill in order to combat cyberbullying. For instance, school leaders must follow David's Law so that when and if cyberbullying is reported the expectation is that they will follow through based on three elements that qualify an event to be cyberbullying under David's Law. As the principal shared, "David's Law: It's three elements: the threatening to release or releasing a visually intimate material suggesting suicide and then inciting group violence." The assistant principal further elaborated the expectation of the law when she stated, "Now the definition could be one single event, so that kind of changed the game a little bit too, for us."

Similarly, referring to David's Law as a set of expectations, the high school principal shared:

Well, it's new to us, and we refer back to it off and on just trying to be familiar with the different criteria. I think most of the time ours has been the release of inappropriate or intimate information and the damaging after effects of that.

Further, it appears that the set of expectations are mostly focused on school leaders in Texas public schools to adhere to the guidelines of David's Law. School leaders are expected to decide if an incident is considered cyberbullying or not. School leaders must investigate reported cyberbullying cases and rule if it is in fact a cyberbullying act. The information within the law was referred to directly when school leaders were deciding if situations fell under David's Law. For example, explaining the expectations from the law, the discipline coordinator stated:

So it's giving us the definition; it tells us the frequency; it tells us what could be significant. It tells us all those things that we should be doing through the forefront of SEL (social emotional learning) and that type of piece, but David's Law is very specific about three specific types of behaviors, and that's really where I get the "Oh, so it's not every act of bullying." I'm like, "No, it's not every act of bullying."

Participants interpret David's Law as a set of expectations also related to the requirements of their job as school leaders, adding to the complexity of their jobs. The assistant principal shared, "I just feel more and more that we're being mentally expected by the community and parents to do more as a school and to address more as a school, but now legislation is saying that you have to do more and more." The principal indicated that David's Law is an "unfunded mandate" expected of school leaders in addition to their other duties.

Under David's Law, it is now the school's responsibility to combat and monitor cyberbullying on or off campus (David's Law, 2017). Per David's Law, providing social emotional learning (SEL) and social media education is another expectation of the school as well. All of the participants indicated that this set of expectations comes with no funding from the state to provide specialized training and, as a result, they struggle to perform their instructional leadership roles due to new functions they must fulfil. The assistant principal shared, "But it's like someone who is actually interacting with kids, because to be honest, sometimes through experience, all I do in schools is investigating, but I'm not trained as an investigator. I'm trained as an instructional leader, you know?"

According to these participants, investigating cyberbullying cases sometimes takes all day for multiple days, actually distracting them from instruction, and this becomes a concern. As the assistant principal added:

It's not just instruction, which we know that's not all of our part of it. We know that's the most important piece is instruction and learning. But it's like, "Should we be getting involved in the situation?" It's not *should* anymore. It's because we're mandated to. But just on a philosophical level, it's something that you just kind of think about, like, "What is the role of schools?" And in my perception, that has changed so much, and I don't take any of that lightly. It can be really difficult.

According to the participants, this new set of expectations is also referred to as the three "elements" that qualify an incident as cyberbullying under David's Law. The assistant principal shared:

It makes it so it goes from just kind of bullying; I hate to say just bullying because it's not that simple, but to this David's Law; it's the three elements: the threatening to release or

releasing a visually intimate material suggesting suicide and then inciting group violence. And again, I always have this lens of investigating because that's...in the world that we live in, right? This is applicable. Then, accountability is meeting one of those three standards, plus the bullying standard of it. And then the consequence and support for the targets.

The defining elements are included in David's Law explicitly:

The act means a single significant act or a pattern of acts by one or more students directed at another student that exploits a pattern of acts by one or more students directed at another student that exploits an imbalance of power and involves engaging in written or verbal expression, expression through electronic means...has the effect or will have the effect of physically harming a student, damaging a student's property, or placing a student in reasonable fear of harm of the student's person or of damage to the student's property is sufficiently severe, persistent, or (and) pervasive enough that the action or threat creates an intimidating, threatening, or abusive educational environment for a student. (S. 179, 2017)

In Major Urban ISD, school leaders interpret David's Law as a set of expectations related to investigation and reports that everyone must complete, highlighting that an incident can happen only once, and discipline can be applied. In addition, by definition of the law, frequency of occurrence is important as the discipline coordinator participant shared:

Cyberbullying has a legal definition with David's Law. It's now considered part of the bullying piece. In my opinion, bullying kind of changed its definition. It has to be pervasive. Now one single act can be considered significant and so with that, again, how we apply discipline and when we apply discipline really comes into question. So, it's

giving us the definition, and it tells us the frequency. It tells us what could be significant, tells us all those things that we should be doing through the forefront of SEL and that type of piece.

Participants also explained the law as an expectation to protect and support the students in order to prevent harm.

Protecting students. School leaders interpret David’s Law as a set of expectations aimed at protecting students. Protecting students means school leaders are expected to keep students from harm and safeguard them from the dangers of cyberbullying. As a result, school leaders, students, and families play a role in keeping students from harm and holding them to a set of expectations to act safely. For instance, the assistant principal shared, “So, firstly, we always want to protect our kids and do as much as we can to protect our kids.” She further explained, “And that’s when they made it a discipline issue. It’s like you’ve got due process, as well as, the intent was to protect the victim.” Therefore, all participants felt strongly that they have a stake in David’s Law as its intent was and continues to be to protect Texas school children from the harmful acts of cyberbullying.

School leaders interpret David’s Law as a specific way to safeguard students from being bullied and it also safeguards them from committing suicide. Participants indicated that David’s Law is a step in the right direction to protect students from harm. As the central office leader stated:

To me, I think it has a chance to help save lives, really. It is in place to prevent students from bullying, harassing other student’s social media. I don’t know how much is addressing them, stopping them from happening but at least [it gives] consequences to those who are doing it.

David's Law is a student protection mechanism. It protects potential victims and discourages acts of bullying by holding perpetrators accountable through civil, or even judicial, liability. As a result, school leaders are in a position to impose "stay away agreements" or removing cyberbullies to alternative discipline campuses. The district discipline coordinator shared, "It's punishing those who did wrong." The high school counselor further mentioned, "So, with David's Law, there are penalties for bullying online...I think that it's good to have some boundaries and structure." Furthermore, there is a civil and criminal protection under David's Law for individuals involved in a cyberbullying situation. As the assistant principal shared, "We always want to protect our kids and do as much as we can to protect our kids." The teacher also indicated that David's Law protects and "...is required. It prevents students from wanting to do whatever they want to do."

According to the high school counselor, protecting the students is critical because she sees concerns when it comes to online monitoring of our youth. She shared that by monitoring, or by requiring the monitoring, of students' actions on an ongoing basis, students can be protected from harm:

And so, children are doing things developmentally inappropriate for their age well before we're even aware of the concepts and the... Their brains are just not developed for these things. And so, I do think it's the parents' responsibility or whomever the stakeholder is that's taking care of that individual. There needs to be monitoring. And I do agree with the platform piece because kids have cellphones at four. I mean they're on their iPads and they know more about iPads and I mean even with the little joke thing that went around about that thing that was the Peppa the Pig. It's like there are evil, bad things out there. People are not here protecting our youth anymore.

According to the district discipline coordinator, David's Law outlines school leaders' responsibilities to protect students in almost the same way as Title IX, which protects students against harassment and harm. Emphasizing this responsibility, the assistant principal stated:

I feel like we've always been doing Title IX things because that was kind of the route we took before David's Law. That was Title IX. Now, I feel like is it David's Law. It's still Title IX, but is it David's Law? Because now the definition is it could be one single event. So, that kind of changes the game a little bit too for us.

In addition to protecting students, per the expectations of David's Law, schools must also support students. According to school leaders, David's Law is an effort to support all students.

Supporting students. David's Law is also interpreted as a means to support students. Providing support appears to include assistance to a student and/or allowing a student to function or act according to the law when and if confronted with a cyberbullying situation. The participants indicated that David's Law has empowered school districts and school resource officers (SROs) to have authority and decision making to act and discipline in order to help students understand the severity of cyberbullying. Ultimately, the law was designed to enable school leaders to ensure student safety and intervene before they do something drastic.

David's Law requires providing assistance to both, the victim and the cyberbully as well as creating alternative discipline actions for cyberbullies. School leaders offer support to students through various avenues, such as communication, prevention, intervention, and/or de-escalation during cyberbullying incidents. These forms of support appear to be multi-tiered and provide counseling, including group interventions and communication mechanisms. Counselors, teachers, parents, and administrators are several sources of support for students as well. For example, per the assistant principal, "If that person (victim) truly is a target and doesn't have any

ownership in it either, that they've come back...It's support. It's trying to figure out how well will this community support that student.” Therefore, participants see David’s Law as a way to assist individuals involved in cyberbullying cases through support mechanisms for both the victim and the cyberbully. For example, the assistant principal shared:

They can respond to you in your crisis mode and we can get support. And a lot of times it ends up with students being hospitalized or... So, it is some kind of responses, support. But then to say, if you need ongoing support, then we have this other option for you as well. And there is a counselor here in school. You don't have to miss school. You'd miss some class time, but it's not like a whole day.

According to the counselor, supporting students is a collective endeavor. As such, support may come from others including teachers and parents. It also requires both short term and long term assistance starting with an understanding of the behavior causing the cyberbullying. She shared, “I do coordinate and collaborate with the parents and our school counselors to provide long term support.” Further she shared:

We work with them on both ends. In my role as wellness counselor I'm more of a short-term person, so if it's something that they've been consistently doing, there's obviously underlying roots for their behavior. And so, trying to get them support in more of a long-term, and connected for a long-term type of support to a long-term counseling to help them deal with what it is that they're really struggling with.

It appears from the data that students in Major Urban ISD were supported by school leaders when cyberbullying occurred, and such support seems to come from a team. The parent indicated, “This team has been very supportive.” Further explaining the needed supports,

participants explained that the law actually requires providing support for both the perpetrator and the victim. As the assistant principal shared:

But the bigger piece of it is how do we then take that and support both the victim and the aggressor? The target and the aggressor because some kids are...you could say the same things to two different kids, and the one situation is bullying and one situation it's not because of how that impacts that kid. And so how do we take a kid who's been a target and help them and give them strategies and skills and coping skills to recover and move forward? Whether I can definitively call it that for these purposes or disciplinary purposes... So, in those situations where kids are targeted, certainly get them counseling, support, offer this additional counseling and support.”

The assistant principal also explained that the support is provided for the cyberbully. She indicated, “And I think for them, too, to kind of try to figure out why they're doing this too. Do you need some support? Do you need some help? Is there something going on with you, too, that we need to...because we don't want you to do it again to somebody else.”

All school leaders also provide assistance during crises through different mechanisms such as attendance, hospitalization, stay away agreements, and behavior management skills through counseling and guidance. The principal explained that after a cyberbullying incident occurs, staff supported all of the students involved. She stated,

If that person truly is a target and doesn't have any ownership in it either, that they've come back after they have done something; it's support. In crisis mode and we can get support. And a lot of times it ends up with students being hospitalized... But then to say, if you need ongoing support, then we have this other option for you as well here in school. You don't have to miss school. Get them counseling, support, offer this additional

counseling and support. And then we do a lot of stay-away agreements where we really formalize our expectations of behavior for students, and it's really clear about what that means.

The forms of support are multi-tiered and inclusive of counseling, group interventions, and communication, which are important to combating cyberbullying. As the assistant principal stated, "It's not just responding...it's designing supports and structures on campus to prevent (cyberbullying). You know? Our wellness counselor writes mindful lessons that we engage the kids in." The school district discipline coordinator also expanded:

We actually have a group of teachers who are part of the multi-tiered system support group that the associate groups can deploy out to a campus to do very specific targeted 10-day one-on-one intervention with students in that age group to teach them or try to work with them to build replacement behaviors versus the behaviors that are displaying.

David's Law: An Accountability Mechanism to Reduce Cyberbullying. According to the data, participants also interpreted David's Law as an accountability vehicle for all stakeholders who must be responsible for the safety and well-being of all students. As such, the law explicitly requires that all school staff fulfill their professional obligation, act responsibly, understand, and communicate the resulting consequences in regard to cyberbullying. It also appears from the data that the responsibility to protect the students from cyberbullying may include various roles, multiple levels, and different elements. In addition to the critical role that school leaders play in reducing cyberbullying, others also have some degree of responsibility. Per the law, school administrators are now responsible for designing alternative ways to reduce students' absences due to cyberbullying. By doing so, removing the cyberbully to a discipline

alternative center allows students to remain in school and stay connected to their peers, not losing instructional time. As the assistant principal noted:

We use...two different terms of removal...the alternative learning center...if it's a misdemeanor...versus a felony level kind of thing. So all the instances we've had have been removal to DAP. Rarely [is it a] felony level kind of thing. But it's removal, and we have the hearing and all of that for David's Law.

In addition, the school counselor noted, "We work with them on both ends of (cyberbullying). In my role, as wellness counselor...get them support...long-term counseling to help them deal with what it is that they're really struggling with." According to the participants, the high school counselor is also expected to be responsible for the design of forms or processes to safeguard students upon returning from disciplinary sanctions. As the counselor stated,

There are penalties for bullying online...We work with them on both ends...In my role as Wellness Counselor...Creating that safety net, creating a safety plan, how we can best support the student academically, personal, social, emotionally, as they transition back to school.

Further, parents are also expected to be responsible actors in understanding the consequences and reducing cyberbullying, because parents have the ability to influence the students and pursue civil actions in court, if applicable. As the principal explained, "The law explicitly says what's not allowed and also that parents of victims can civilly go after the student in their family for damages, which is, I think, a great deterrent."

In view of the parent, students who participate in cyberbullying behavior are also held responsible for their actions and must endure the inevitable and resulting consequences. The

parent stated, “So David’s Law is in place, and it’s kind of punishing those who did...It’s punishing those who did (wrong, the bully). David’s Law is more of a prevention.”

It is also apparent from the data that the responsibility to reduce cyberbullying is placed at three levels: the district, specific campuses, and the classroom. For example, the central office district discipline coordinator plays an important role in reducing cyberbullying incidents. His major responsibility is overseeing the implementation of the requirements and specific guidelines of David’s Law. Given his role, he is in a position to collaboratively work with the district legal counsel, assistant superintendents, and campus leaders. He is also responsible for information distribution to campuses pertaining to David’s Law and its investigative requirements. He shared, “I sent out an email to all administrators about updates on whatever, or reminders about what the law means and those types of things.” Additionally, he explained:

I train all the administrators on disciplinary process and laws, regulations, or policy that apply when we apply discipline. The majority of my job is compliance, is double checking that the administrators are putting things correctly, and it’s also on-the-spot training when they call me. So, it’s trying to make sure that we’re walking that tightrope. We’re doing everything that’s legal. And, so my day can be running huge spreadsheets with huge reports for the associate sups (superintendents) and the school board, data request from outside, to getting those things done in between all my phone calls from campus admin.

The principal further stated that the district level leaders give information to campuses when situations arise. By providing guidance and information to campus leaders throughout investigations, districts are more equipped to combat cyberbullying. The principal stated:

I will give our district credit to being able to provide us some guidance when we had the situation going on. We were to call our district discipline coordinator because this most recent one that we had with the posting of the video didn't happen on campus. It's helpful to have somebody who's seen multiple campuses and seen kind of how it's been applied at different levels and situations and, say, kind of help us understand those nuances to know that, okay, this needs it and so we are going to move forward with this.

In addition, school leaders have the responsibility to design and implement reporting mechanisms protecting the identity of the individual submitting the cyberbullying report (David's Law, 2017). These reports can be submitted online or in person. Per Major Urban ISD's website, they have an anonymous cyberbullying reporting mechanism in place that can be completed online. Further, the district discipline coordinator shared, "We have a reporting form that either the parent, the student or an administrator can fill out on behalf of the student or the parent, so we call it the complaint form."

At the campus level, the principal and assistant principal are responsible for preventing cyberbullying. According to the participants, David's Law requires campus leaders to follow explicit policies and procedures to investigate alleged cyberbullying incidents and then to discipline the perpetrator. In regard to what campus leaders must do to follow procedures, the district discipline coordinator explained, "There's a whole checklist that's in my discipline binder that says these are the things that you have to do prior to." A campus leader's responsibility for following policies includes acting as ultimate decision maker when identifying a cyberbully. For example, the principal noted, "I'm usually the one who has to decide if it meets the criteria. We sit down and talk about it." The school district discipline coordinator stated that

campus leaders have a key role in following policies and procedures pertaining to David's Law.

As he explained:

You have to look at it and analyze it. So, we at that point can assist and aid in getting that type of behavior resolved with the application discipline. The administrator addressed it, was able to get social services for the student, either on campus or off campus to help the child through what they were going through.

It is apparent from the data that campus leaders must investigate alleged cyberbullying incidents. According to the principal, "It's...the school's responsibility to investigate (cases)." He added, "You can legislate. We can do what we do, remove kids, do discipline, consequences. It's a continuous conversation." During the investigation, campus leaders do numerous activities. The Wellness Counselor mentioned, "So they write down what was happening, time, as many details as possible, any witnesses. They're quoting people. Whatever was being said." In addition, the Wellness Counselor stated, "The administrators investigate that, and they will complete the Title IX paperwork. If it is something that does fall into that category, they'll proceed with the next steps."

Investigating expectations for school leaders are included within the policies which school districts develop and school leaders must follow as a process to "investigating a reported incident of bullying, and determining whether the reported incident of bullying occurred" (David's Law, 2017). The school district discipline coordinator indicated that the investigations occur frequently, especially with newly added apps each day. He shared:

This is what's going on, and what can we do? And we get very few in elementary, but in middle school and high school, it's on a daily basis. It seems I get phone calls about this...I mean, the amount of time that it takes to investigate and question students, and to

really figure out what's going on, is just a huge time taken...takes away a lot of time from a lot of administrators.

In addition, the district discipline coordinator shared:

The investigation, first, is to determine whether or not cyberbullying or bullying has occurred. Again, parents will come in and I tell administrators, 'Look, I understand that you're calling it this, but I have to investigate to see what it really is. It may or may not be...We don't know.

Once investigation is complete, applying discipline to cyberbullies appears to be the next step. The parent participant stated, "The stay-away agreements, police involvement. David's Law is in place, and it's kind of punishing those who did the wrong. It's being used to give the consequences later."

Regarding discipline, the assistant principal noted:

So we use two different terms: Removal for us is to their alternative learning center and the difference...and I don't know if that's true everywhere, but if it's a misdemeanor, wouldn't be a misdemeanor level versus like a felony level kind of thing. So, all the instances we've had have been removed to DAEP. Rarely a felony level kind of thing. But yeah, it's a removal, and we have the hearing and all that for the David's Law.

As the assistant principal expanded, "It's a mandatory removal to the alternative learning to the DAP."

The responsibility to reduce cyberbullying is further placed at the classroom level. Since David's Law mandates that cyberbullying be reported, teachers are responsible for documenting a cyberbullying incident. It is also important that they be able to recognize the negative effects of this type of oppression. The assistant principal explained:

Basically we always encourage the kids to report it to somebody, sometimes it's the counselor, sometimes they come to teachers... We definitely have to report any instances. Or even if they [school staff] observe bullying. Something that they think is bullying that they should report it to us as well. I think that high schoolers seem to do a better job of self-reporting or friends will come report. That's usually where it comes from... It's happening in class and it's like hey, this isn't [okay].

Classroom teacher leaders are also tasked with teaching social-emotional learning components in order to combat cyberbullying. This echoes David's Law in that cyberbullying prevention can start by building positive relationships with students as shared by David's Legacy:

The new law adds the following to the areas that are to be covered by the list prepared and maintained by the Department of State Health Services of recommended best practice-based programs for implementation in public schools (from which school districts may select for implementation in the district): Early mental health intervention; Mental health promotion; Substance abuse prevention; Substance abuse intervention; Suicide prevention; Grief-informed and trauma-informed practices; Skills related to managing emotions, establishing and maintaining positive relationships, and responsible decision-making; Positive behavior interventions and supports and positive youth development; and Safe and supportive school climate. (2019)

Further, per David's Law, teachers must be informed about the specific guidelines and negative effects of cyberbullying. Per the law:

Continuing education requirements for a classroom teacher may include instruction regarding how grief and trauma affect student learning and behavior and how evidence-

based, grief-informed, and trauma-informed strategies support the academic success of students affected by grief and trauma. (David's Law, 2017)

According to the participants, teachers become the first direct contact for a student each day and can have a large impact on students. According to the assistant principal, many aspects of David's Law are taught at the classroom level. She explained:

Stay away agreement. SEL (social emotional learning). Teaching in their homeroom classes through SEL lessons. My pro messaging. We talk about that. Yeah, we just had this PD (professional development) here. And then my heavy-hitters. I'll keep this stuff if they're...like the one student I was talking about. All her reports. They're in the drawer in the office. I had a stay away agreement binder that I would take and share with my team when I would have team meetings just so they would know.

Furthermore, school leaders must fulfill their professional obligations or responsibilities in specific areas of the law included in the guidelines to prevent cyberbullying. Three areas that emerged from the data relate to documentation, investigation, and notification. Documentation appears to refer to a specific collection of evidence such as texts, messages, photos, and other electronically submitted information. According to the participants, they are responsible for collecting multiple documentations as required per the law. The wellness counselor indicated that documentation via "the incident form" provides pertinent information as well as any picture of "snaps" that show cyberbullying on "Snapchat." Documenting via reports is critical according to David's Law, "The principal of a public primary or secondary school may designate a school employee, other than a school counselor, who is under the supervision of the principal to make the report under this section" (David's Law, 2017).

For the wellness counselor, documentation of the social-emotional learning to combat cyberbullying is also critical. She explained, “We all work together as a team to develop what social-emotional learning is going to look like here on our campus. So for some people, it might look like a curriculum. For us, it’s encompassed on our campus.” Further, she stated, “So what I do, as far as counselors, we document.”

According to participants, another important area of the law is the investigation in order to reduce cyberbullying. As previously mentioned, the law allows a school leader to investigate when and if cyberbullying has been reported. Per the counselor, “There’s actually procedures that are in place in the school to be able to investigate.” The teacher also stated that the investigation helps address cyberbullying and follows through with policy, “I think that would put a lot of fear there. Rules are rules. We follow the rules.”

In addition, investigations require analyzing statements, videos (if applicable), and any information pertaining to an alleged cyberbullying case, as the assistant principal explained:

I was researching...and, we really try that when it comes to bullying things, investigations, you never talk. There’s never one person handling it by themselves because I think in any situation, especially because when you’re talking about something where you’re going to have to make a subjective decision on, I mean, as to how that person kind of processes through it, and ‘Are you seeing this the same way that I’m seeing this?’ And, so, we try to have where one person is kind of the lead in handling all of it [the investigation], but then, having that kind of second person in here with you when you’re talking to the kids.

According to the district discipline coordinator, “Interviews and the statements that they administered [to law enforcement], what they’re able to gather” are a part of cyberbullying investigations.

Notification is the third area of responsibility that emerged from the data. School leaders notify parents and the parties involved in a cyberbullying incident. If a situation arises where law enforcement is needed, school leaders also notify them about the alleged case. This area of responsibility is directly related to the law:

Authorizes school principals to report certain incidents of bullying to local law enforcement and provides protection from liability for doing so. David's Law requires the board of trustees of each school district to have the notice procedures under its bullying policy provide a notice of an incident of bullying: to a parent or guardian of the alleged victim on or before the third business day after the date the incident is reported (the specification of three business days being new); and a parent or guardian of the alleged bully within a reasonable amount of time after the incident (as under pre-existing law). (David’s Legacy, 2019)

The parent participant also noted that school leaders “contact the parents,” to combat cyberbullying and reduce harmful outcomes. In doing so, the school leaders fulfill their responsibility according to the law, which indicates that notification establishes a procedure for providing notice of an incident. It also obtains assistance and intervention in response to bullying; it sets out the available counseling options for a student who is a victim of or a witness to bullying or who engages in bullying (S. 179, 2017).

Question Two: What do school leaders do to address David's Law requirements and guidelines?

This question focused on what school leaders actually do to implement the law. The main purpose was to identify how they directly addressed the newly enacted law. A total of four main themes emerged from the data. These themes reflect strategies that school leaders enacted in order to address cyberbullying. These strategies include developing policies and procedures, David's Law-focused professional development, creating collaborative partnerships, and educating stakeholders in order to meet the requirements and guidelines of David's Law.

Development of Policies and Procedures. According to the participants, the school district developed policies and procedures to implement the law and address cyberbullying. Policies are deliberate systems of principles that guide decisions and actions to attain an outcome (Department of Information Resources, 2019). By all indications, most policies appear to be operational in nature at Major Urban ISD.

According to the participants, once the district cyberbullying policies and procedures were defined in September 2017, these were presented each year at Major Urban ISD. All updates were provided as well. The principal stated, "It [David's Law] was presented at the beginning of the year. They do discipline update for school administrators and it was presented there." The document analysis showed evidence of the district policies and procedures implemented in Major Urban ISD.

Policies and procedures were included in the District Improvement Plan (DIP), a required document per TEC for all school districts, to create and abide by throughout a school year. These are typically posted annually on school districts' websites. Major Urban ISD posted the DIP with information regarding their cyberbullying policies online. Of these policies, FFI (LEGAL) policy stated, "The policy and any necessary procedures must be included annually in the student and

employee handbooks and in the district improvement plan under Education Code 11.252” (Major Urban ISD, 2019, p. 2).

Cyberbullying policies in Major Urban ISD encompassed several components expanding from notification of incidents to social-emotional assistance and appointment of personnel. Cyberbullying notification policies created in Major Urban ISD address the requirements and guidelines of David’s Law. For example, the district discipline coordinator stated:

We have a school-wide policy that, again, outlaws cyberbullying but, with that, we also have to make sure that we do our timeline reporting any time we have cyberbullying. So, we have a process but then we have the disciplinary process that can be a part of that piece. Goes hand in hand. We have a reporting form that either the parent, the student, or an administrator fills out on behalf of the student or the parent, so we call it a complaint form. From there, they start the investigation. The investigation, first, is to determine whether or not cyberbullying or bullying has occurred. Again, parents will come in and I tell administrators, ‘Look, I understand that you’re calling it this, but I have to investigate to see what it really is. It may or may not be bullying. We don’t know.’

In addition, Major Urban ISD addresses David’s Law requirements and guidelines per their school district’s legal policies. The policy points out that a key component is notification of a cyberbullying incident. This can occur in many formats. For example, policy FFI (LEGAL) in Major Urban ISD indicates the following:

Establishes a procedure for providing notice of an incident of (cyber) bullying to: a. A parent or guardian of the alleged victim on or before the third business day after the date the incident is reported; and b. A parent or guardian of the alleged (cyber) bully within a reasonable amount of time after the incident. (Major Urban ISD, 2019, p. 2)

Furthermore, social-emotional assistance policies in Major Urban ISD were developed and enacted to address David's Law. Students received social-emotional support from school leaders and help when incidents occurred. Major Urban ISD has procedures that allow students to get interventions and counseling if they have been involved in cyberbullying. According to the counselor, social-emotional support and different types of counseling occurs when and if a student is involved in cyberbullying. To reinforce the importance of Major Urban ISD's social-emotional assistance for their students, the counselor stated, "These are our kids...So, really creating that safety net. Creating a safety plan (and) how we can best support the student academically, personal, (and) social emotionally." Furthermore, per FFI (LEGAL) policy in Major Urban ISD, the district "establishes the actions a student should take to obtain assistance and intervention in response to bullying" (Major Urban ISD, 2019, p. 2).

In addition to notification of incidents and social-emotional assistance, Major Urban ISD addressed the requirements and guidelines of David's Law by creating new positions and appointing new personnel. For instance, a wellness counselor position was added at the high school, as a focus of the study, in order to directly provide wellness, crisis support, and rehabilitation at the campus level.

The Wellness Counselor is trained to intervene as well as deal with cyberbullying crisis situations. As she stated, "I'll collaborate with them and the family to try to get long-term support...long-term counseling one-on-one. I'm collaborating with families...(so) that we can provide support." The teacher referred to the counselor as someone who talked with students about their struggles in regard to issues such as cyberbullying. For example, she shared, "It [David's Law] could prevent those type of things where the kids have enough to come to the

counselor and speak with him more often if something happens. That's the big issue. But for us, the policies.”

Further, according to the teacher leader, all school leaders are in a position to address the law per their school policy. When a student has an issue, school leaders are to protect students and help reduce cyberbullying. She further indicated that when school leaders “find out that a student has put something online...they address it. That’s one policy we have.” In addition, school leaders are trained to protect the victim and provide support, and offer disciplinary actions and sanctions to the cyberbully. For example, the district discipline coordinator stated, “The administrator addressed it [and] was able to get social services for the student, either on campus or off campus, to help the child through what they were going through.”

Participants’ perceptions associated with policies in Major Urban ISD are known as the FFI (LEGAL) guidelines. For example, it states that Major Urban ISD “sets out the available counseling options for a student who is a victim of or a witness to bullying or who engages in bullying” (Major Urban ISD, 2019, p. 2). As previously shared, Major Urban ISD created policies and procedures to address David’s Law requirements and guidelines. These policies and procedures were explicitly taught through professional development.

David’s Law-Focused Professional Development. According to the participants, school leaders address David’s Law requirements and guidelines by providing professional development to school personnel, including counselors, teacher leaders, etc. Professional development can be either formal or informal learning of policies and procedures that are put into practice to combat cyberbullying. The professional development in the district relates to expectations and all components of David’s Law as critical to its implementation. Cyberbullying professional development in Major Urban ISD included specific information regarding guidelines of the law

and forms of training. According to the participants, providing professional development was important, given David's Law recent implementation; it was one of the initial strategies to address the law. The district discipline coordinator emphasized that, "The training is the biggest piece." All school leaders learn specific content during professional development. According to the participants, the information covered included the amended Texas Education Code (TEC), definition of cyberbullying, reporting expectations, discipline requirements, specific cyberbullying policies and procedures, and mental health plans in Major Urban ISD. This information is available and or provided to all school personnel, including district discipline coordinators, principals, assistant principals, counselors, and teacher leaders.

According to participants, the amended TEC included in the professional development to combat cyberbullying better defines and clarifies cyberbullying and all that it encompasses. For example, the principal noted, "It's been the expansion of what the school can get involved in." The principal further indicated that the amendment of TEC was provided through professional development. She explained how she learned through professional development that "David's Law...makes us very deliberate and comprehensive to be sure that we're getting all the information." The principal further added, "But I do have a copy of it that I keep right here in my notebook and we refer to it all the time just to try to follow." Major Urban ISD's FFI (LEGAL) policy also states the definition of bullying to include cyberbullying and defines cyberbullying explicitly. This was provided, as previously mentioned, during professional development. The policy defines both terms.

"Bullying": 1. Means a single significant act or a pattern of acts by one or more students directed at another student that exploits an imbalance of power and involves engaging in written or verbal expression, expression through electronic means, or physical conduct

that satisfies the applicability requirements below and that: a. Has the effect or will have the effect of physically harming a student, damaging a student's property, or placing a student in reasonable fear of harm to the student's person or of damage to the student's property; b. Is sufficiently severe, persistent, or pervasive enough that the action or threat creates an intimidating, threatening, or abusive educational environment for a student; c. Materially and substantially disrupts the educational process or the orderly operation of a classroom or school; or d. Infringes on the rights of the victim at school; and 2. Includes cyberbullying. "Cyberbullying" means bullying that is done through the use of any electronic communication device, including through the use of a cellular or other type of telephone, a computer, a camera, electronic mail, instant messaging, text messaging, a social media application, an Internet website, or any other Internet-based communication tool.

Major Urban ISD addressed David's Law requirements and guidelines through a professional development session on cyberbullying, specifically the process school leaders must follow to report an incident to the district and what they need to do to handle such reports. Per the participants, they are required to contact the district discipline coordinator to report a cyberbullying incident. The assistant principal stated, "We [School leaders] definitely have to report any instances. Or even if they observe bullying. Something that they [anyone] think is bullying that they should report it to us as well...We were to call our district discipline coordinator."

The professional development session also included information on disciplinary requirements – an ongoing conversation – consequences for the cyberbully, early interventions, and cyberbullying behaviors. As the counselor shared regarding professional development,

“There’s consequences. There’s actually procedures that are put in place in the school to be able to investigate.” The district discipline coordinator further shared that school leaders address David’s Law by providing professional development regarding “specific” guidelines of the law. Professional development updates are also offered, according to the counselor, every “three years” for all school leaders while “the new employees get trained in David’s Law.” Further, the principal added:

It [professional development] was presented at the discipline update for school administrators and it was presented there. And then we also as an administrative team, we pulled it up and talked about it. We did a four day retreat in the summer. And those are the things - because we feel like it’s really important for us to all be on the same page for things like that so that we all kind of have the same gut-level response whenever stuff comes our way.

According to the participants, specific cyberbullying procedures and requirements also were covered during professional development. The counselor stated, “We did professional development...We were told what it was and then what procedures, and what role we played in that as far as counseling roles.” It appears from the data that professional development was ongoing in order to address all aspects of the law. The assistant principal noted, “We’re with the No Place for Hate School. We talk about bullying in general, but we probably ought to cycle back and specifically talk about David’s Law.” Further, professional development is also offered to teacher leaders in a “course” format. The “course” includes ways to deal with cyberbullying when and if it is witnessed. As the teacher leader observed, “When I see it, I completely jump in and stop it. I talk to students. We did a course.” The district discipline coordinator also stated, “I

will ask clarifying questions and through the questioning of what they have or what they don't have, a lot of times we can figure out what next steps are.”

In addition, mental health plans are included in professional development opportunities. According to the participants, Major Urban ISD expanded the district and campus expectations for mental health plans for cyberbullying incidents. The district discipline coordinator further shared that the effects of cyberbullying can be profound, so he helps “campuses with training” to enhance clarity and understanding of the mental health plans in place. The teacher leader also noted, “I can step in, especially if I have that relationship with the student.”

Furthermore, according to the participants, professional development was provided through multiple avenues. For instance, Major Urban ISD relies on various presentation formats, including, an online versus in-person learning platform, and lessons that can be extended to home. For example, the assistant principal stated:

When it first came out, PowerPoint presentations addressing teachers...to the parents...We have an online learning program...well, it's Canvas, but we call it something different with the district and everybody uses. We have our home lessons. Teachers use it in their classroom when they're projecting it for the students. And then the parents have access to it as well then.

In addition, according to the participants, professional development was also available on a case by case basis. These episodes of teaching and learning tend to occur during an alleged cyberbullying incident investigation. The case by case basis professional development was specific to the information and investigation in which school leaders were currently involved within their district or campus. This avenue of professional development was well received by

the participants because they were getting assistance during an actual investigation and guidance on decisions being made. For example, the district discipline coordinator stated:

It's also on-the-spot training when they call me. So, they'll call up with a situation. They state the situation. What am I missing? What should I be thinking about? It's just the ridge code or is this the code? And really teasing out the differences between someone the codes. It's also looking at those pieces that...well, this kind of happens in the community. Can we do that or not? So my day can be running huge spreadsheets with huge reports for the associate sues and the school board, data request from outside, to getting those things done in between all the phone calls from campus admin ...This is the way I describe myself. I am there to facilitate, to help...with whatever specific laws or policy/procedures that they have questions about. I provide a folder.

Inclusive Collaborative Partnerships. School leaders work together with other stakeholders to address David's Law. These collaborative partnerships entail agreements to work together and share knowledge and resources to reduce cyberbullying. Participants indicated that collaborative partnerships were important to help keep students safe and combat cyberbullying. For example, when the assistant principal worked with law enforcement, such as the police, a child predator was caught and put in prison. The collaborative partnership between school leaders and law enforcement aimed to protect students from further harm. Since the law establishes that cyberbullying is bullying online or with an electronic device, school leaders and law enforcement also work together to combat cyberbullying through various technology applications. For instance, the teacher shared:

They [The police] have a company that monitors because the Chromebooks use Google Cloud. And she was going to a chat room with an adult that they thought was a predator. And so they came to me and said, 'Here's the kid, we need a Chromebook.'

School leaders have created inclusive collaborative partnerships with law enforcement in order to reduce cyberbullying as well. According to the participants, law enforcement has legal access to information on students' technological devices as well as within their applications (apps). Therefore, they are able to share the information with school leaders in alleged cyberbullying incidents. As stated by David's Legacy, cyberbullying can happen through various technology devices. For example:

'Cyberbullying' as defined in David's Law means bullying arising from a pattern of acts or one significant act that is done through the use of any electronic communication device, including a cellular or other type of telephone, a computer, a camera, electronic mail, instant messaging, text messaging, a social media application, an Internet website, or any other Internet-based communication tool. (David's Legacy, 2019)

School leaders also work with law enforcement to provide assistance in situations involving high school students. According to the participants, collaboratively working together to combat cyberbullying with a consistent message to students from all partners was important. For instance, the principal shared:

I had an assistant principal and an officer talk to boys and say, 'This is not okay. Right? And this is and this could have been so much worse. It's still bad, but it could have been so much worse and these are the ways it could have been uglier for you.'

In addition, partnerships allow law enforcement and school leaders to stay abreast of cyberbullying issues. The principal indicated:

There's never one person handling it by him or herself because I think - in any situation, especially because when you're talking about something where you're going to have to make a subjective decision. I mean, as to how that person kind of processes through it, and are you seeing this the same way that I'm seeing that, and so we try to have where one person is kind of the lead in handling all of it, but then having that kind of second person in there with you where you're talking to the kids.

According to the participants, school leaders create inclusive collaborative partnerships for investigative purposes. During investigations, school leaders work together with other pertinent stakeholders, including police officers, SROs, parents, teacher leaders, and students in order to combat cyberbullying. Establishing working relationships require clarity regarding who is handling what during investigations of alleged cyberbullying incidents. School leaders indicated that during these situations the relationship needs to be clear and transparent for a collaborative partnership to be effective. For example, the principal noted:

With David's Law, they kind of start to get the feeling, 'Oh, hang on a second. This might meet the elements.' Then, it's going to be SRO....So the police, our school resource officers are involved. Sometimes, our working relationship is really clear with our SROs. Find a kid with THC or drugs, alcohol, whatever. Okay, I stop. You take over. You do your part. Now it's back to me, and now I've got my school discipline. It's really clear in who's doing what. But, what it comes to is this, because it's so new to all of us, that relationship has been a little bit trickier. Who's doing the investigating? Who's talking to whom? Because they could end up with charges. Right? I mean, the parents also have the civil avenue, and so especially with the visually intimate material, what else are we talking about here? If there are any other charges. We've not been down that road.

So the way we kind of work it here is a lot of times it'll be an administrator who's investigating it, consulting with the SRO. Sometimes, like what I can recall, we talk to the student together for the initial conversation. And then, they might talk to the parties involved together and then, from there, just kind of compare notes and say, 'Okay, Here's what we think. We think this is really going to be an administrative thing. You guys take it from here' or 'No, We really think this is...'

Collaborative partnerships at the school campus level also include other school staff, such as the security guard, who may also contribute to reducing cyberbullying by providing assistance when incidents arise. For example, the security guard had knowledge of the phone apps during an investigation and the school leader did not know anything about the app. According to the participants, other stakeholders, like the security officer, help to navigate apps, social media, and technological devices to combat or reduce cyberbullying. She shared:

It definitely gets tricky and, to be honest, I don't have my own Snapchat. I don't always understand the inner and outer workings of Snapchat and the nuances. Oh, I had to have one of our security guards who's like 22...show me how it works.

Further, the assistant principal indicated that collaborative partnerships between school leaders and parents is important to combat cyberbullying. For example, collaboratively working with parents during an investigation provided both the school leaders and parents an opportunity to protect one teen from further harm. The assistant principal explained:

So, I called her into my office, took the Chromebook. Give it to them and called her mom while they were all in here. And the mom said, 'That's not the first time we've had that problem. Take her phone too.' And so, the phone went to the officer as well. And it took

a little over a month for that to be investigated, but it was a child predator that she was talking to. It was in a chat room.”

According to the participants, engaging parents as partners requires contacting them quickly when a cyberbullying report is received and providing open communication to protect all students from being further cyberbullied. The wellness counselor indicated, “Everybody needs to be involved. See what they’re [the students] are sending out.” Collaborative partnerships rely on an continuous and open dialogue. The parent participant shared the importance of keeping parents in the loop to combat cyberbullying. She stated, “Take action. Contact the parents....go home suspended, if needed.” She further shared, “It’s a continuous conversation. We spent a lot of time together...I’ve talked to [the principal] about this.”

Per the participants, collaborative partnerships with parents tend to be proactive in order to reduce cyberbullying. To achieve this, the high school organized parent meetings where they were provided with information about cyberbullying and David’s Law. Major Urban ISD appears to be proactive with the collaborative partnerships they have established with their parents. School leaders have parents sign documents acknowledging their legal responsibilities should their child be labeled a cyberbully, thus meeting the requirements and guidelines of David’s Law. As the principal explained:

The parents have to sign that. When we implement one of those, the parents are always there to sign. I had a parent meeting. Collaborating with the school counselor. I’m collaborating with families: What are some ways we can provide support here? We collaborate as far as resources and to develop lessons and even working on trainings for how we can talk about bullying [and] how students talk about [cyber]bullying to other students.

Education of All Stakeholders. According to the participants, school leaders address David’s Law by educating students and parents in order to ensure that all stakeholders are informed and understand the law. Further, “Respect for All” at Major Urban ISD is the educational website platform addressing cyberbullying and other concerns that students may have (About Us, 2018). This website provides “students, educators, parents, upstanders, and bystanders” resources for review, and access to the anonymous reporting form (About Us, 2018).

The counselor indicated that she distributes a pamphlet about cyberbullying for a quick reference for both students and parents. It comprises technology-based information, such as “social media platforms, Snapchat, Facebook;” and examines how to prevent cyberbullying and how to report an incident. The document also offers cautionary information to anyone thinking about cyberbullying in any form, the effects of cyberbullying, sexting or having virtual friends, as well as cyber life and being cyber safe. The counselor also clarified by stating, “They’re rarely using Facebook anymore. But all those different social media pieces, they really need to get more involved as far as reporting that information, not allowing it, blocking it.” According to the document analysis, the pamphlet states:

Stop Cyber-Bullying: Texting, apps, social media and online games are a big part of life for most teens. Connecting online is cool, but it also has risks. One of these is cyberbullying. Get the deets on how to stay safe online and fight cyberbullying.

Furthermore, according to the participants, school leaders educate students about David’s Law and cyberbullying in multiple ways, such as courses, classroom lessons, and one-on-one conversations. The district discipline coordinator expanded, “I start off with what is bullying and where bullying can take place and what forms. So, I start really basic. And then, because David’s Law, really takes that and narrows it down. So it’s giving us the definition.” The district

discipline coordinator allows each campus to educate about David's Law in the best way they see fit. He explained:

Many of my high schools have taken it upon themselves to build PowerPoints or meetings where they talk to grade levels at a time about what David's Law is and what it outlaws. Those types of things. And, so it makes it clear to folks. It's very easy. Look, this is the law. And we can apply discipline to it if you get caught doing any of these things. And so it's helped make it a little more plain to folks.

Since each campus was able to implement their own student education, the counselor added, "We do social-emotional learning lessons. There's an online course they [the students] take."

Further, the assistant principal stated:

So we encourage, we always try to do education first. Start with if you have a lot of homework lessons that have to do with decision-making and adjusting cyberbullying exactly and positive uses of social media and things like that.

Furthermore, Major Urban ISD students and teacher leaders lead programs addressing cyberbullying via homeroom lessons. Social media and digital citizenship information is offered to educate students about their online responsibilities and how to speak up if someone is being cyberbullied or if they have been a victim of a harmful situation. In addition, there are other resources provided for crisis management via text messaging response systems, websites, and a wellness counselor at one specific high school in the Major Urban ISD. For example, per the Major Urban ISD's website, students were educated about David's Law at high schools for at least one week during the 2018-2019 school year:

October 2nd - David's Law and Bullying: Students discussed what it means to witness cyberbullying (or just negative messages on social media) and to have the choice to be a bystander or an upstander. Students learned about David's Law and explored the following sites/videos: <http://www.endcyberbullying.org/>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T0Un8657Soc>. (About Us, 2018)

In addition, per the principal:

We have social-emotional learning (SEL). I have two teachers that work with students and a counselor and the students really bring the topics to us. I know that they've done one on cyberbullying. And they talk about the detrimental effects and how awful that makes people feel usually. And they typically do that in a community circle where they meet. We have SEL at least once a week in a 25-minute session. But I think that's probably the most specific change is that the kids bring those topics to us. But we do still say, 'Hey, we still need to do a lesson on this.' Even if the kids don't bring it up, we say, 'We want a lesson on that.' But we try to let the kids guide it and kind of decide how best to approach kids. One of the things that we're trying to do is talk about... I have a theater group. We're going to try to do it for next year, have them put together a creative theater thing where they're talking about the destructive physiological part...and my hope is that then we can deliver that by grade level. I have about 550 to 570 in each grade level, so I don't have any place that will hold the whole school [so] I have to do by grade level. So we're hoping to do creative theater presentations next fall. They did a similar thing on bullying and dating violence, and they called them the bully plays, and they were super well received.

Similarly, according to Major Urban ISD’s CQ (LOCAL) policy, school leaders “educate students about cyberbullying awareness and response and about appropriate online behavior, including interacting with other individuals on social networking websites and in chat rooms” (Major Urban ISD, 2019, p. 2).

Further, school leaders addressed David’s Law requirements and guidelines by educating students through one-on-one conversations or meetings during investigations. For example, the counselor explained, “We talk about David's Law. With David's Law, if I'm in a meeting we're talking about David's Law and what it is.” Referring to the educational component for students, the discipline coordinator added, “maybe just the information sharing.” The parent participant also acknowledged that school leaders educate students one-on-one, which helps to provide “a safety net for the kids because something is going on with them. I need both of them to feel like they’re safe. She further elaborated stating that it was “important for the kids to know and understand it’s against the law to do this [cyberbullying].”

School leaders also addressed David’s Law by teaching students about reporting cyberbullying, suicide, and suicide prevention. The assistant principal stated, “We always encourage the kids to report it to somebody, sometimes it’s the counselor, sometimes they come to our teachers.” The counselor provided a document which indicated “How I can cope” and “Who I can talk to” when victims may need assistance.

Furthermore, according to the participants, school leaders addressed David’s Law requirements and guidelines through parent education. The principal shared, “PTA, too, has talked about David’s Law. They do a parent education.” Educating parents provides them with information about David’s Law and cyberbullying. For instance, the assistant principal stated:

When it first came out, we did a lot of parent education, and we did a lot of student education on David's Law specifically. So, we do try to do some parent education.

The teacher further shared:

I get the parents on board, incorporate it into the PTA. I would just incorporate it as much as I can and talk about it as much as I can with parents.

Participants also indicated that open dialogue among each other was important in order to address David's Law, so that procedures are clarified and details are explained. For example, the assistant principal said, "It's these complicated, nuanced questions that we have to kind of go over before we really come to a decision. Which is where we've been recently." Further emphasizing the importance of communication via ongoing discussions between central office and the campus level, the assistant principal explained:

I think that bullying, again, it just feels so complicated and so complex. It's complex. There are always certain layers and trying to really get to the root of it and figure out what's going on... I will give our district credit to being able to provide us some guidance when we had the situation going on. We were to call our district discipline coordinator because this most recent one that we had with the posting of the video didn't happen on campus. It was posted. Trying to navigate that a little bit, sometimes it's just really clear so there's nothing really. We feel pretty confident. Or a little less confident? We call them. And I think it's nice, well, not nice but it's helpful to have somebody who's seen multiple campuses and seen kind of how it's been applied at different levels and situations and say, kind of help us understand those nuances to know that okay...so, we are going to move forward with this.

Summary

This chapter includes findings from a phenomenological qualitative study conducted to identify the perceptions of school leaders regarding the initial implementation of David's Law. An analysis of the data collected throughout this study reveals major themes related to interpretations regarding the law. Supporting information and underlying processes identified through the research define each major theme.

The data reveals that school leaders interpret David's Law as a set of expectations, including protections and support for students when cyberbullying occurs. The data also reveals that school leaders interpret David's Law as an accountability mechanism to reduce cyberbullying. In addition, the major strategies that emerge from the data include policy development; David's Law-focused professional development; inclusive collaborative partnerships; and education for all stakeholders.

Chapter V provides a brief background of the study, summarizes the findings within the context of prior research, and provides implications for practice and further inquiry.

Chapter V: Findings, Implications, and Recommendations

The safety and security of students by public school leaders is broad in scope, and cyberbullying has become a part of that responsibility. School leaders are required to investigate and address incidents, and discipline students under Senate Bill 179 known as David's Law, in the state of Texas. This law was initially implemented in 2017, and clearly defines cyberbullying and what school leaders must do in a Texas public school district to combat the offense. With this new implementation of David's Law, it has become relevant to gain better knowledge and understanding of school leaders' perceptions of this law in schools.

This chapter presents a brief account of the study, including background of the study, summary of the findings with connections to the existing literature, and implications for practice and further inquiry.

Statement of the Problem

Texas public school leaders are expected to protect and ensure the safety of students in all aspects. In response to new legislation, school leaders must create processes and protocols that address the safety of students. For instance, David's Law places responsibility on Texas public schools to combat cyberbullying in order to prevent harmful effects on students. With David's Law focused on reducing cyberbullying, it is appropriate to review cyberbullying information for this study (David's Law, 2017).

Much has been written about cyberbullying and the repercussions and harmful effects of the action(s) (Donegan, 2014; Nixon, 2016; Patchin & Hinduja, 2006; Schneider, O'Donnell, Stueve, & Coulter, 2012; Slonje & Smith, 2008; Willard, 2007). Cyberbullying is defined in this research as an imbalance of power, intentional electronic harassment, or mistreatment on related constructs, such as social media bullying, online gaming bullying, Internet bullying, and any

harassment via a digital device or virtual world where the perpetrator has intentionality to harm another individual or where there is electronic aggression, whether the perpetrator is known or there is anonymity (Menesini et al., 2012; Nixon, 2014; Patchin & Hinduja, 2006). Prior research reports that cyberbullying is excessive in America and individuals are harming themselves and/or committing suicide due to the harmful behavior (Allen, 2012; Hinduja & Patchin, 2013; Kalpidou, Costin, & Morris, 2011; Li, 2010). There are cyberbullying laws and statutes throughout the United States; however, each state handles cyberbullying and school consequences or discipline differently (Woda, 2014). There have been several court cases in various states across America as a result of situations where individuals have experienced negative side effects due to cyberbullying (Bell v. Itawamba County School Board, Rosario v. Clark County School Dist., Tatro v. University of Minnesota, Moreno v. Hanford Sentinel, Inc., & Kowalski v. Berkeley County Schools).

David's Law was enacted in Texas public schools in 2017. Due to its new implementation, it is imperative to identify school leaders' perceptions of David's Law. Identifying how David's Law is being interpreted by Texas public school leaders provides implications for combating cyberbullying for all Texas public school children.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to identify the perceptions of school leaders pertaining to David's Law in one Texas public school district. The research focuses on school leaders' interpretations of David's Law since it has only been in effect for a little over a year. David's Law was enacted to protect students from harming or killing themselves due to cyberbullying. This qualitative study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How do school leaders interpret David's Law in their school district?

2. What do school leaders do to address David’s Law requirements and guidelines?

Overview of Methodology

This study was conducted following a phenomenological qualitative research method that allows the researcher to identify and analyze perceptions of school leaders in one Texas public school district in regard to David’s Law. Research was conducted according to Creswell (2013) as a narrative research approach, which allows the researcher to “interpret the larger meaning of the story” (p. 191).

Participants were selected via purposive and snowball sampling (Creswell, 2013). A total of six Major Urban ISD school leaders were chosen to be a part of the study. Three were selected from a purposeful sampling: an assistant principal, a principal at the high school level, and a central office administrator, who serves as the district discipline coordinator; and three from a snowball sampling: a counselor, a teacher, and a parent. All participants except the parent were considered school leaders. Data resources included interviews, document reviews, and a researcher’s journal. The data were collected, coded, and categorized following an inductive process (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003), which revealed themes related to the focus of the study. Tables were used to represent the “significant statements, meanings, and theme clusters” and provided insight from raw data (Creswell, 2013, p. 116). The researcher created and organized files for data, read through texts in journal data while making notes in the margins, formed codes for data collection, described the personal experiences, developed “significant statements,” grouped them into meanings, developed a description to interpret the data, and presented the essence of the data (Creswell, 2013).

Summary of Findings

This study reveals perceptions of school leaders regarding David's Law, and uncovers their interpretations of the law and how it was addressed within a single urban public school district. Two major themes emerge from the data regarding how school leaders interpret the law, namely a set of expectations and an accountability mechanism to reduce cyberbullying. The findings also reveal that school leaders address the requirements and guidelines of David's Law through four strategies: development of policies and procedures, David's Law-focused professional development, inclusive collaborative partnerships, and education of all stakeholders about David's Law to combat cyberbullying.

School Leaders' Interpretations of David's Law

David's Law: A Set of Expectations. Findings suggest that school leaders explain David's Law as necessary to combating cyberbullying; they see the law as a set of guidelines. School leaders appear to interpret David's Law as a set of expectations to protect and support students involved in cyberbullying; supports that have been put in place since the initial implementation of David's Law.

Although no prior research reports expectations, some online articles suggest that David's Law provides expectations. For instance, Katzowitz (2017) shares that cyberbullying must be included in bullying policies and discussions. Childress (2017) similarly indicates that rehabilitation for the victim is an expectation under David's Law. Wang (2017) notes that awareness of cyberbullying, along with suicide prevention programs, is a set of expectations for school districts, as per this study's findings.

David's Law: An Accountability Mechanism to Reduce Cyberbullying. Findings reveal that school leaders also interpret the law as an accountability vehicle to combat

cyberbullying. As such, the law requires that all school staff fulfill their professional obligation, act responsibly, and understand and communicate resulting consequences pertaining to cyberbullying. The findings also reveal that all of the stakeholders are responsible for protecting students from cyberbullying, including both central, campus, and classroom school leaders as well as parents.

School leaders appear to be responsible at three levels including district, campus, and classroom. In addition, areas of responsibility relate to documentation, investigation, and notification, which comprise three elements for combating cyberbullying. This finding supports Hinduja and Patchin's (2018) assertion that laws are an accountability mechanism to reduce cyberbullying.

It is important to note that according to the findings, school leaders attempt to follow the spirit of David's Law in an effort to protect students from cyberbullying and its harmful effects. However, school leaders concerns are also evident. These relate to the lack of funding to support the initial implementation of the law. Further, school leaders realized that the law requires additional duties and activities related to identifying, investigating, and reporting cyberbullying incidents, which extends their job responsibilities beyond their leadership duties. Particularly, they appear to be concerned that investigating cyberbullying incidents is time consuming and as a result distracts from their main responsibility as instructional school leaders.

Strategies School Leaders Employ to Address David's Law

Findings in this research suggest that school leaders employed specific district-wide strategies to address David's Law. They include developing policies and procedures, providing professional development, creating collaborative partnerships, and educating all stakeholders in order to reduce cyberbullying and its harmful effects.

Development of Policies and Procedures. By implementing and abiding by district policies and procedures, specifically developed to address David's Law, guidelines for notification of cyberbullying and social-emotional assistance for victims can be established. As Wiseman (2011) reported, guidelines are required in schools through policies and procedures to reduce cyberbullying. This is also congruent with Hinduja and Patchin (2018) who found that policies can and do assist in ending cyberbullying behaviors.

David's Law-Focused Professional Development. School leaders address David's Law through ongoing professional learning opportunities that are presented in different formats of learning, such as in person or virtually online. In addition, it includes the amended Texas Education Code, the definition of cyberbullying, reporting expectations, disciplinary requirements, specific cyberbullying policies and procedures, and mental health plans in Major Urban ISD. This echoes Li's (2010) assertion that professional development should include ways to address cyberbullying and that it needs to be ongoing in different formats for school staff and students as well as parents, such as constant communication with each other and other school stakeholders.

Inclusive Collaborative Partnerships. Engaging other professionals builds strong relationships with the stakeholders. To be effective, these relationships rely on each other to assist with combating cyberbullying. This aligns with Siderman (2010) who found that collaboration assists with specific strategies, such as gathering information and ways to combat cyberbullying.

Education of All Stakeholders. School leaders address the law with students, parents and each other through education via different formats and content. Students are educated through social-emotional lessons and one-on-one meetings during investigations, should they be

part of a cyberbullying incident. Reporting and suicide prevention are also areas in which students are educated. This supports Donegan's (2012) assertion that educating others about cyberbullying as well as its negative effects has a strong preventative influence. In addition, Patchin and Hinduja (2006) note that educating students and staff in schools is a powerful tool to combat cyberbullying.

Implications for Practice

The findings of this study contribute to the knowledge base of the new David's Law, preventing cyberbullying, and school leaders' perceptions pertaining to the initial implementation of the law. Specifically, the study uncovers information that might be useful at the district or campus level. School district and campus leaders might consider the findings of this study to effectively implement David's Law but, more importantly, to protect students and reduce cyberbullying. The following recommendations are offered:

1. Central office school leaders should provide explicit and detailed professional development to understand and better implement David's Law and combat cyberbullying.
2. School districts interested in cyberbullying documentation should develop a tracking system and report findings to the TEA.
3. Campus school leaders should collaborate with school district officials and other educational stakeholders, including parents, to reduce cyberbullying.
4. Parents should educate themselves on David's Law and stay abreast of technology evolution as well as social media concerns.

Implications for Further Inquiry

This study focuses on school leaders' perceptions of the initial implementation of David's Law. It includes school leaders in a single, major urban school district in the state of Texas, and was conducted as a phenomenological qualitative study. As such, it only includes six respondents. From these, five are considered as school leaders that include a district discipline coordinator, a principal, an assistant principal, a counselor, and a teacher leader. In addition, one parent participated. All participants are within a single Texas major urban public school district in one high school. Consequently, the findings of this study might not be representative of all districts or states. Therefore, additional inquiry pertaining to the implementation of David's Law may expand our understanding of its requirements, and contribute to illuminating other relevant areas. For instance, researchers may:

1. Expand the pool of participants to include interviews with community members, superintendents, assistant superintendents, board members, teacher leaders, and teachers.
2. Replicate this study in another district of a different size that serves a more diverse student population, or focus the study on a suburban or rural school district.
3. Conduct a study to include student voices to better understand their perceptions of David's Law, and their perspective for combating cyberbullying.
4. Expand parent participation to include diverse voices on reducing cyberbullying.
5. Focus on middle or elementary school leaders and stakeholders to document the effects of cyberbullying at their level.
6. Conduct a study to document evidence and results of how David's Law impacts student safety and security.

As school leaders continue to implement David's Law, this study expands our understanding of the requirements, responsibilities, and expectations to ultimately be intentional about protecting students. Schools are now expected to provide high levels of teaching and learning as well as be proactive in protecting students and having an awareness of the negative consequences of cyberbullying. Therefore, it is important for school leaders to have strong collaborative partnerships with multiple stakeholders so that everyone works together to help combat cyberbullying. As this study suggests, implementing David's Law is multifaceted and requires the involvement of all stakeholders to work collaboratively to ensure all students are safe and successful.

Appendix A

Requesting Participation Letter

Dear School Leader,

My name is Lindsie O'Neill Almquist and I am a director in Jarrell ISD, in Jarrell, Texas. In addition to my director duties, I am a doctoral candidate at The University of Texas at Austin. I am writing to ask you to be part of a qualitative research study titled School Leaders' Perceptions Of Cyberbullying Legislation In Texas: Understanding David's Law Initial Implementation.

This is a requirement for the doctoral degree in Educational Administration in the Cooperative Superintendency Program. I hope you will agree to participate.

Participating in this study will include a semi-structured interview that will last a total of approximately 60 minutes. Prior to this conversation, I will submit the interview questions to you at your request. This conversation will be recorded, and I will also be taking written notes. If needed, a follow up meeting may occur which will allow me to check for accuracy and to ask any follow up questions I may have after reviewing the transcript of our first interview. I may also ask for documents that show how David's Law has impacted your district. I may also use your website's information.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary and holds no penalty for not participating or for withdrawing from the study. If you agree to participate in this study, your identity will be kept strictly confidential. Your consent will be verbal prior to the research. Your name and school will not appear in the study. Your stories will be referenced by a pseudo name. All transcripts will be kept in a secure file in the researcher's computer.

Please contact me by email at lindsiealmquist@gmail.com. You may also contact me by phone at (512) 971-9320.

Sincerely,

Lindsie Almquist

Appendix B

Interview Protocol for School Leaders

I. Participant Background

1. Please tell me about yourself and your experiences in education.
2. How did you prepare to become a school leader?
3. Tell me about your affiliation with your ISD.
 - a) How long have you been here?
 - b) What role(s) do you currently perform?
4. Tell me why you wanted to become a school leader in this district.

II. Cyberbullying

1. What do you know about cyberbullying in schools?
2. How is cyberbullying manifested on your district/campus?
3. What processes or procedures are in place to address cyberbullying on your district/campus?

III. David's Law

1. What do you know about David's Law?
2. How did you learn about David's Law? What is your understanding of David's Law (S. B. 179)?
3. What do you think about David's Law?
4. What do you see as the most important implications of David's Law?
5. How is David's Law applied/used on your district/campus?
6. What is your role in the David's Law implementation at the district or campus level?
7. How do you explain the meaning of David's Law to school stakeholders?
8. What do you do, specifically, to implement David's Law?

9. Who are the others involved in the implementation of David's Law? How are they involved?
10. What are some of the changes you've seen in the district/campus since David's Law was enacted?
11. What are some strategies/initiatives in place since the enactment of David's Law?
12. What is your specific role in implementing those strategies?
13. How would you say those strategies/initiatives address cyberbullying in public schools?
14. How does the implementation of David's Law to address cyberbullying affect your job as a school leader?
15. What, if any, are some of the issues related to cyberbullying that still exist since the implementation of David's Law?
16. What would you recommend to properly implement David's Law in schools?

Conclusion: Is there anything I haven't asked that would be pertinent to this topic, or is there anything you'd like to add?

Thank you again. May I contact you if I have any follow up questions?

Appendix C

Interview Protocol for Other Stakeholders

I. Participant Background

1. Please tell me about yourself and your experiences with education.
2. How did you prepare for your role?
3. Tell me about your affiliation with your ISD.
 - a) How long have you been here?
 - b) What role(s) do you currently perform?
4. Tell me why you wanted to become a _____.

II. Cyberbullying

1. What do you know about cyberbullying in schools?
2. How is cyberbullying manifested on your district/campus?
3. What processes or procedures are in place to address cyberbullying on your district/campus?

III. David's Law

1. What do you know about David's Law?
2. How did you learn about David's Law? What is your understanding of David's Law (S. B. 179)?
3. What do you think about David's Law?
4. What do you see as the most important implication of David's Law?
5. How is David's Law applied/used on your district/campus?
6. What is your role in the David's Law implementation at the district or campus level?
7. Are you involved in the implementation of David's Law? If so, please expand.

8. What are some of the changes you've seen in the district/campus since David's Law was enacted?
9. What are some strategies/initiatives in place since the enactment of David's Law?
10. What role do you think school leaders have in implementing those strategies?
11. How would you say those strategies/initiatives address cyberbullying in public schools?
12. What, if any, are some of the issues related to cyberbullying that still exist after the implementation of David's Law?
13. What would you recommend to properly implement David's Law in schools?

Conclusion: Is there anything I haven't asked that would be pertinent to this topic, or is there anything you'd like to add?

Thank you again. May I contact you if I have any follow up questions?

Appendix D

IRB USE ONLY

Study Number: 2019-02-0103

Approval Date: March 27, 2019

Expires: March 27, 2022

Consent for Participation in Research

Title: School Leaders' Perceptions Of Cyberbullying Legislation In Texas: Understanding David's Law Initial Implementation

The purpose of this form is to provide you information that may affect your decision as to whether or not to participate in this research study. The person performing the research will answer any of your questions. Read the information below and ask any questions you might have before deciding whether or not to take part. If you decide to be involved in this study, this form will be used to record your consent.

Purpose of the Study

David's Law was enacted to protect students from harming or killing themselves due to cyberbullying. Given its recent application, it is imperative to determine school leaders' perspectives associated with its implications for schools. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to identify school leaders' perceptions regarding the initial implementation of David's Law.

What will you be asked to do?

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in a 60-minute semi-structured interview with the researcher. This study will take less than six months and will include up to nine study participants. Your participation will be audio recorded.

What are the risks involved in this study?

There are no risks to you. All information will be protected and be in complete confidentiality. Your name will not be used; only pseudonyms will be used.

Questions and responses will only be used for research purposes and will not be used or discussed in the job setting. The researcher will use confidentiality methods, such as pseudonyms, and remove any identifying information.

What are the possible benefits of this study?

You will receive no direct benefit from participating in this study; however, your participation will assist in further research on the topic of David's Law and combating cyberbullying.

Do you have to participate?

No, your participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate at all or, if you start the study, you may withdraw at any time. Withdrawal or refusing to participate will not affect your relationship with the researcher or The University of Texas at Austin in anyway.

If you would like to participate please verbally consent to the researcher.

Will there be any compensation?

You will not receive any type of payment participating in this study.

How will your privacy and confidentiality be protected if you participate in this research study?

Throughout the research project confidentiality will be maintained. The researcher will assign participants with pseudonym/pseudo names in the writing and the researcher will make every reasonable effort to exclude information that may allow readers to identify participants. The researcher will maintain this pseudonym in all aspects of the study, including interviews, observations, and notes. The researcher will also destroy the digital recording of the interviews after completion of the project as another way to protect participant privacy.

If it becomes necessary for the Institutional Review Board to review the study records, information that can be linked to you will be protected to the extent permitted by law.

Your research records will not be released without your consent unless required by law or a court order.

If you choose to participate in this study, you will be audio recorded. Any audio recordings will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to the recordings. Recordings will be kept for the duration of the study and then erased.

Whom to contact with questions about the study?

Prior, during or after your participation you can contact the researcher, Lindsie Almquist, at 512-971-9320 or email her at lindsiealmquist@gmail.com with any questions, or if you feel that you have been harmed.

This study will be reviewed and approved TBD by The University Institutional Review Board. The study number is: 2019-02-0103

Who to contact with questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant.

For questions about your rights or any dissatisfaction with any part of this study, you can contact, anonymously if you wish, the Institutional Review Board at (512) 471-8871 or email at orsc@uts.cc.utexas.edu.

You voluntarily agree to participate in this study. By verbally consenting to participate, you are not waiving any of your legal rights.

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Lindsie O’Neill Almquist

Mrs. Lindsie O’Neill Almquist has served public education for 10 years in the central Texas area. Most recently, she has served Jarrell ISD as a principal and director. She has led campuses in Lockhart and Buckholts ISD. Mrs. Almquist was named the Texas Association of Secondary School Principals (TASSP) Principal of the Year for Region 13 in 2018. She helps Raise Your Hand Texas (RYHT), a non-profit that supports principals with campus improvement work, as a Regional Director. Mrs. Almquist is a part of the Texas Association of Latino Administrators (TALAS) cohort 4. She has served TASSP as a Board Member and has been a part of the TASSP Senate Youth Scholarship Selection Committee & Instructional Leadership Committee. Mrs. Almquist has volunteered as an educational member of the Jarrell Coalition and the Zion Lutheran Church Summer Education Committee. She helped start the Central Texas Leadership Consortium (CTLC) where principals work together through a PLC model to grow and learn from each other. Mrs. Almquist has been featured as the Texas 4-H Alumni Spotlight & in the Advancing Educational Leadership (AEL) training videos for administrators in the state of Texas.

Mrs. Almquist graduated with her bachelors in science from Texas A&M University. She attended Texas State University for her masters in educational leadership. She attended The University of Texas at Austin for her doctorate of education through the Cooperative Superintendency Program (CSP) cohort 28 where she graduated Summer 2019 as Dr. Almquist.

Dr. Almquist adores and loves her husband, Mr. Cody Almquist. Together they have a daughter, Ellis (2 years old), and son, Briggs (1 year old). Dr. Almquist loves spending time with her family and traveling. She and her family are glad to be a part of #HippoNation! Dr. Almquist is honored to serve as Nadine Johnson Elementary School’s principal. Follow her on Twitter @servingkids or email her at lindsie.almquist@huttoisd.net to connect. This manuscript was typed by the author.