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# Perceptions of a Prescribed Intervention

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Perceptions of a Prescribed Intervention

Daniel J. Dooley

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Submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Education

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SETON HALL UNIVERSITY  
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN SERVICES  
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APPROVAL FOR SUCCESSFUL DEFENSE

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## **Abstract**

In response to New Jersey's Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act of 2011, districts and schools have been held responsible for strengthening the standards and procedures for preventing, reporting, investigating, and responding to incidents of harassment, intimidation, and/or bullying; consequently, the State has offered little guidance on how to be proactive in preventing instances of bullying in a way the law would support. In response to this legislative mandate, I have created a self-designed intervention, based upon the Five Core Competencies of Social and Emotional Learning, intended to negate at-risk social behaviors including bullying in a subpopulation of fifth through eighth grade students. This intervention focuses on meeting individual students' social and emotional needs by providing a mentor who interacts with each student using a Socratic approach blended with the principles of Carl Rogers' Client-Centered Therapy.

Prior to implementation of the intervention with actual students, I believed it to be within my due diligence to ensure that I was prepared to address the complexities of students' social and emotional needs with the very best tool possible. In order for me to ensure the appropriateness or potential benefit of this proposed intervention, I decided it would be advantageous to bring the intervention to my colleagues for their review, perceptions, recommendations, and attitudes towards the intervention. The purpose of this study was to determine to what extent Burlington County District Coordinators and School Specialists, as defined by the 2011 New Jersey Anti-Bullying Bill of Right Act, would deem a prescribed intervention, founded within the framework of social and

emotional learning (SEL), advantageous in their everyday duties to negate at-risk social behaviors, including bullying, in students from fifth to eighth grade

The research design used a cross sectional qualitative design, as it was completed within one year and from each focus group within one point of time. The study included twenty total participants from schools and districts in Burlington County. Of these participants, fifteen were identified as Anti-Bullying Specialists and five were identified as Anti-Bullying Coordinators.

As school districts in New Jersey, as governed by the ABRA 2011, continue to struggle to find ways to negate at-risk social behaviors such as bullying, it is the recommendation that this intervention, along with its recommendations, be given great consideration in meeting children's social and emotional needs in the days ahead.

## **Acknowledgments**

This, my ultimate educational accomplishment, was made possible only by the ongoing support, guidance, and encouragement of family, friends and colleagues. First, I remain humbled and thankful for the many educators of New Jersey and beyond who continue to put their own students' needs above all else; this selfless dedication to our profession was the common theme relayed from the School Specialists and District Coordinators who participated as the subjects of this study. In addition, I am especially grateful to my Co-Moderator, Mrs. Sara Trombly, for her support and interest in best practice as it relates to the world of social and emotional character development.

Having a strong and supportive committee is essential to this process. It is with the utmost admiration and gratitude that I acknowledge my mentor, Dr. Joseph Stetar, who provided the perfect balance of direction and autonomy that manifested into the blueprint that negotiated a lifetime dream into a reality; your professionalism, advocacy, and knowledge will never be forgotten. I also wish to acknowledge and thank my committee members. First, Dr. Martin Finkelstein, for offering the insight needed to challenge my thinking and to ensure all possible avenues had been considered and exhausted, which ultimately led to a stronger understanding of the process and a deeper understanding of my study as a whole. Finally, I would like to thank Dr. Maurice Elias, professor at Rutgers University, for the groundbreaking work he has done in the fields of social and emotional learning and social and emotional character development. Your work continues to influence many, benefit many, and inspire many; thank you for the world of knowledge and endless positivity you brought to this process. Your consistent effort to pay it forward continues to be your hallmark within our profession.

Furthermore, I would like to thank everyone associated with the Seton Hall Executive Ed.D. program; through this process I have learned a lot, laughed a lot, worked hard, and gained the confidence and the knowledge needed to make a difference in the communities I am entrusted to serve. I would like to especially thank my classmates from Cohort XV; your support and our comradery made tasks that sometimes seemed daunting, possible. I would also like to thank my good friends Trevyn St. Clair, Donna Snyder, and Mari Oresic for all of your advice, support, and love along the way.

In conclusion, I have been supported, cultivated, sustained, and blessed by an extraordinary family. Today, in completion of this process, my accomplishment is a direct result of your efforts, hard work, and commitment to my success; “It takes a village to raise a child.” It is with love and gratitude that I acknowledge Catherine O’Rourke, Paul Decker, John Lafferty, Charles Lafferty III, Edna Bond, Leo McNamara, Matthew Morris, Katie Decker, and Catherine Decker-McNamara. This one is for the PACK! Finally, I would like to thank my beautiful wife Stephanie, whose love and optimism showed me the way. My success would not have been possible without her as a partner in this endeavor; I look forward to our “post-doctoral life” together!



### **Dedication**

I dedicate this accomplishment to my mother, Catherine Decker-McNamara, who by example taught me that there is nothing that can't be overcome or accomplished with hard work and perseverance. Thank you, Mom, for being my moral compass and for never settling for anything less than my best. You are my hero; and thanks to your hard work and your "Heart of a Lion," we have made it! In addition, I dedicate this culmination of effort to my wife, Stephanie Dooley, who continues to inspire me to be a better person and who continues to show me the deeper meaning in life. I am truly blessed to have two such amazing women in my life!

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### Introduction

Once thought of as simply a rite of passage or relatively harmless behavior that helps build young people's character, bullying is now known to have long-lasting harmful effects for all members of the incident: victim, bully, and bystander. Bullying is defined by [stopbullying.gov](http://stopbullying.gov), a division of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, as unwanted, aggressive behavior among school-aged children that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. The behavior is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time. According to [stopbullying.gov](http://stopbullying.gov), in order for an incident to be considered bullying, the behavior must be aggressive and include any of the following:

- **An Imbalance of Power:** Children who bully use their power—such as physical strength, access to embarrassing information, or popularity—to control or harm others. Power imbalances can change over time and in different situations, even if it involves the same children.
- **Repetition:** Bullying behaviors happen more than once or have the potential to happen more than once ([stopbullying.gov](http://stopbullying.gov), 2016).

Furthermore, bullying includes actions such as making threats, spreading rumors, attacking someone physically or verbally, and excluding someone from a group on purpose. School bullying, which is nationally defined as a repeated negative action towards a peer who cannot easily defend himself or herself, has been a topic of public and scientific concern for some time (Salmivalli, Kaukiainen, & Voeten, 2005). Across the country, bullying is receiving increased attention in school board meetings, in the

media, and in state legislatures locally, including the Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act of 2011 in New Jersey, and the Dignity Act of 2012 implemented in New York. In fact, the White House has taken notice of the systemic and chronic concerns associated with bullying by hosting its first-ever Conference on Bullying Prevention in 2011, raising awareness about the topics by addressing in-school approaches, community based strategies, and the effects of bullying on achievement. All 50 states have anti-bullying laws, many of which include model anti-bullying policies (Ansary et al., 2015, p. 31). Despite the plethora of anti-bullying initiatives, it remains a concern for pupils, parents, and teachers as well (Bray & Lee, 2007). In fact, bullying has become a chronic and costly problem in American schools; it is perhaps the most common form of school violence (Batsche, 1997). The National School Safety Center (1995) called bullying the most enduring and underrated problem in the United States (Beale, 2001); and in a national survey, nearly 30% of students surveyed reported being involved in bullying as either a perpetrator or a victim (Nansel et al., 2001; Swearer & Espelage, 2004). In comparison, in 2009, The U.S. Departments of Justice and Education Study claimed that 32% of the students aged 12 through 18 were bullied in the previous year, and 25% of reporting schools indicated bullying was a daily or weekly problem. In the 2012–2013 School Crime Supplement (National Center for Education Statistics and Bureau of Justice Statistics) it is indicated that, nationwide, about 22% of students ages 12-18 experienced bullying. Even despite tireless efforts and increased awareness to mitigate bullying, in 2015, 21.5% or over five million students ages 12 to 18 that were surveyed by the U.S. Department of Education answered that they have been the victim in a bullying scenario within their school system.



Bullying, however, is not a new phenomenon. What is new is the growing awareness that bullying has serious consequences for both students and schools. According to Banks (2000), bullying behavior contributes to lower attendance rates, lower student achievement, low self-esteem and depression, as well as higher rates of both juvenile and adult crime. To support this claim, it is reported that 160,000 students miss school every day due to fear of attack or intimidation by a bully (Fried & Fried, 1996), and 7% of eighth graders stay home at least once a month because of bullies (Banks, 2000). Additionally, it has been stated that 20% of students are scared throughout much of the school day (Garrity et al., 1997), and 14% of eighth through twelfth graders, and 22% of fourth through eighth graders surveyed reported that “bullying diminished their ability to learn in school” (Hoover & Oliver, 1996). These numbers jump dramatically when solely considering the protected class of LGBTQ students. When considering only this group, the number jumps to nine out of every ten students report having been harassed due to their sexuality (Stomp Out Bullying, 2007-2015). These experiences have a snowball effect on students, and it has been found that one in every ten students who drop out of school do so because of bullying behaviors they have experienced while in school (Osanloo, 2012). In recent years bullying has been changing its form into web-based attacks. Thirty-five percent of all children have been threatened over the Internet. These acts are often due to the fact that students feel as though they are able to get away with their actions at home and therefore are not disciplined while at school (Bullying Rates and Statistics, 2014). Research on cyberbullying is growing; however, because children’s technology use changes rapidly, it is difficult to design

surveys that accurately capture trends and therefore the number of students affected by online attacks may be even higher than projected, (What Is Bullying, 2016).

In 2015, the lasting effects of bullying were further supported by the Center for Disease Control, Division of Violence Prevention by reporting bullying victimization can lead to a higher chance of depression, anxiety, loss of sleep, and school phobia. There are also severe side effects for students who are the bully in the bully-victim relationship. These students are found more often to become addicted to controlled substances as well to have an increase in violent behaviors compared to their peers.

In addition, bullying has long-term effects, as it has been estimated that 10% of students who drop out of school do so because of repeated bullying (Weinhold & Weinhold, 1998), and “bullies that have been identified by age eight are six times more likely to be convicted of a crime by age twenty-four, and five times more likely than non-bullies to end up with serious criminal records by the age of thirty” (Bullying Statistics-Facts, 2014, p. 5). As well, 60% of students characterized as bullies in Grades 6- 9 had at least one criminal conviction by age 24 (Banks, 2000). In another example of the long term effects of bullying, school shootings and violent retaliations to bullying remain rare, but these incidents have forced educators, parents, and legislators to take a more serious look at bullying behavior and the impact it has on both students and the school environment. Finally, the most extreme consequence found from bullying behaviors is the suicide rates that are linked with students who are victims in bullying situations. Cyberbullying has been found to cause 4,400 deaths by suicide each year. These rates make bullying-related suicide the third highest cause of death for young people in the United States (Bullying Rates and Statistics, 2014). In fact, bullying prevention laws

such as New Jersey's Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act of 2011 have mandated that training on bullying be infused with the already state-mandated annual suicide prevention training for all public schools.

Studies of the consequences of bullying in schools have concentrated on health outcomes of children persistently bullied by their peers. These studies have yielded conclusions from cross-sectional surveys that suggest being victimized by peers is significantly related to comparatively low levels of psychological well-being and social adjustment as well as high levels of psychological distress and adverse physical health symptoms (Rigby, 2003). Generally, bullied victims are known to be at high risk for later maladjustment (Schwartz, Dodge, & Coie, 1993). Furthermore, the effects of bullying on victims tend to manifest the following conditions: low self-esteem, low self-confidence, poor self-worth, higher rates of depression, anxiety, feeling more insecure, incompetence, hypersensitivity, feelings of being unsafe, panicky and nervous feelings at school, having recurrent memories of bullying affect their concentration, post-traumatic symptoms, rejection by their peers, social avoidance, introversion, having few friends or friends who are isolated or marginalized, and feeling lonely (Duncan, 1999; Gianluca & Pozzoli, 2013). Retrospective reports and studies such as Rigby's (2003) support these diagnoses and suggest that peer victimization may contribute to later difficulties with health and well-being. Longitudinal studies provide stronger support for the view that a peer is a significant factor in schoolchildren's lowered health and well-being and the effects can be long lasting. Further evidence from longitudinal studies indicates that the tendency to bully others at school significantly predicts subsequent antisocial and violent behavior (Rigby, 2003).

Even students who are not directly involved may be negatively affected by bullying, as bullying corrodes the moral fiber students need to succeed. Students who observed bullying, or bystanders, reported that witnessing bullying was unpleasant; and many reported being severely distressed by bullying (Hoover & Oliver, 1996; Zigler & Pepler, 1993). Witnesses of bullying are often intimidated and fearful that they may become the targets of bullies (Chandler, Nolin, & Davies, 1995); they may perform poorly in the classroom because their attention is focused on how they can avoid becoming the targets of bullying rather than on academic tasks (Chandler et al., 1995). Bullying negatively affects the entire school, creating an environment of fear and intimidation (Olweus, Limber, & Mihalic, 1999). The Department of Education and Science (1989) proclaims “bullying not only causes considerable suffering to individual students, but also has a damaging effect on school atmosphere.” (Department of Educational and Science, 1989, pp. 102-103). Such claims are currently supported by the American Society for Positive Care of Children, who have reported that not only does bullying negatively affect youth, it also can affect the school environment as a whole. For example, bullying can lead to truancy, reduced attendance, low staff morale, and poor perceptions of the school community by community members. In addition, when bullying makes the said victim feel alienated from school, his or her performance declines and feelings of safety within the school building drop (American Society for the Positive Care of Children, 2013).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to determine to what extent Burlington County District Coordinators and School Specialists, as defined by the 2011 New Jersey Anti-

Bullying Bill of Rights Act, deem a prescribed mentoring intervention, founded within the framework of social and emotional learning (SEL), advantageous in their everyday duties to negate at-risk social behaviors, including bullying, within student's from fifth to eighth grade.

### **Background**

In New Jersey, the aforementioned problems may even be slightly intensified, as the 2009 "Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance" by the U.S. Center for Disease Prevention and Control reported that the percentage of students bullied in New Jersey is one percent higher than the national median. How could this be, since New Jersey's first extensive legislative effort to address bullying and harassment in the public schools was in June 2002, when the Legislature passed a bill requiring public school districts to adopt policies prohibiting harassment, bullying, and intimidation in the public schools? The chronic persistence of bullying in New Jersey, compounded by the highly publicized suicide of a Rutgers University student, Tyler Clementi, precipitated the 2011 New Jersey Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights (ABRA) being immediately put into effect as of September 1, 2011.

The stated goals of the new law were to strengthen the standards and procedures for preventing, reporting, investigating, and responding to incidents of intimidation and bullying. As well, the intended purpose of the new Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights is to improve harassment, intimidation, and bullying (HIB) laws adopted in 2002 and amended in 2007 and 2008, by establishing clearer standards for the definition of HIB and using existing resources to increase school safety and reduce the risk of suicide. With new positions that were recommended and embedded in best practice throughout the state, the

law has mandated that each district have a District Anti-Bullying Coordinator whose primary responsibility is to work with schools to provide age-appropriate instruction focusing on preventing HIB, as defined in Section 2 of P.L. 2002, c. 83 (C. 18A37-14).

### **NJ ABRA 2011**

The Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act (ABRA) mandates that the District Anti-Bullying Coordinator should work with district schools to provide ongoing, age-appropriate instruction on preventing HIB, in accordance with the Core Curriculum Content Standards. Furthermore, it created the position of School Anti-Bullying Specialist. The Specialist is bound to chair a School Safety Team that is required to meet twice per year; lead all investigations of incidents of harassment, intimidation, and bullying; act as the primary school official responsible for preventing, identifying, and addressing incidents of HIB in the school; and work with the District Anti-Bullying Coordinator and School Safety Team to make certain the week beginning the first Monday in October is designated as a “Week of Respect” in New Jersey (C. 18A:37-12). Finally, the School Anti-Bullying Specialist, in collaboration with the District Anti-Bullying Coordinator, should work with school staff to provide age-appropriate instruction and interventions that focus on preventing harassment, intimidation, and bullying, as defined in Section 2 of P.L.2002, c83 (C.18A:37-14).

Last, under the parameters of the Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act of 2011 (ABRA), a School Safety Team has been mandated for each district. The School Safety Team, chaired by the Anti-Bullying Specialist, must consist of a teacher, a parent of a student in the building, and any other members as determined by the principal. The School Safety Team shall receive copies of any complaints of harassment, intimidation,

and bullying of students that have been reported by the principal; receive copies of any reports prepared after an investigation of an incident of harassment, intimidation, and bullying; and identify and address patterns of harassment, intimidation, and bullying of students in the school. This must all be done with the intent to review and strengthen school climate, policies, and interventions of the school in order to prevent and address harassment, intimidation, and bullying of students. Furthermore, the School Safety Team shall participate in the training required pursuant to the provisions of P.L. 2002, c. 83 (C. 18A: 37-13 et seq.) and other trainings that the principal or the District Anti-Bullying Coordinator may request. The School Safety Team shall also collaborate with the District Anti-Bullying Coordinator in the collection of district-wide data and in the development of district policies and programs that prevent and address harassment, intimidation, and bullying of students.

To fulfill the investigative requirements of the new law, specific steps must be followed each time harassment, intimidation, and bullying are identified or suspected by any member of the school community. It requires a verbal report to the school's principal, assurance of the student's safety, parental contact, a written report provided by the witness within two school days of verbal report, an investigation initiated by the principal to take place within one school day of the verbal report, a full investigation of the alleged incident by the Anti-Bullying Specialist in coordination with the school principal, and a written investigation report to be completed within ten school days of the written report by the School Specialist. In cases where the aggressor is deemed to be in violation of the New Jersey Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act, it is the duty of the School Specialist, Coordinator, School Safety Team, and even the superintendent to give recommendations

on how to negate such at-risk behaviors. As stated by the law, not all attempts to modify a student's behavior have to be punitive. In fact, it is known that punitive measures do rarely accomplish the desired remediation needed when dealing with at-risk social behaviors; interventions, however, have proven to be useful to identify the individual needs of each child in the role of the aggressor and provide him or her the tools, strategies, and self-awareness needed to change targeted behaviors.

After the original investigation is complete, the written report is sent to the superintendent, chief school administrator, within two days of the completed investigation. There, decisions and recommendations are made and results of the investigation get reported to the local board of education at the very next meeting preceding the conclusion of the investigation. Within five days of the board of education meeting, the board of education will provide any additional information and determinations. The parent then has the right, no later than 90 days after the meeting, to appeal the board of education's decision to the Commissioner of Education. Parents may appeal the Commissioner's decision to the Appellate Division of Superior Court, and finally, the parent may file a complaint with the Division of Civil Rights within 180 days of the occurrence of HIB, based on membership in a protected group.

Equally significant is the fact that the law has changed from its original form in 2002. It now reads as follows:

. . . any gesture, any written, verbal or physical act, or any electronic communication, whether it be a single act or a series of incidents, that is reasonably perceived as being motivated either by any actual or perceived characteristic, such as race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin,



gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, or a mental, physical or sensory disability, or any other distinguishing characteristic, that takes place on school property, at any school sponsored function, or on a school bus, or off school grounds . . . that substantially disrupts or interferes with orderly operation of the school or the rights of other students . . .

Once again, the purpose of the new law is to eliminate instances of harassment, intimidation, and bullying and, moreover, prevent the extreme emotional effects that bullying can have, including suicide. However, opponents of the law have stated, “You can’t legislate this type of behavior out of existence” (Tannenbaum, 2010). One must have a systematic plan to eliminate at-risk behaviors leading to bullying; the plan must address the needs of individual students at individual levels. The oversight in specificity and general practicality, as seen in the original law, may prove to be problematic in deterring future incidences of HIB as intended in the new ABRA.

Through the available research, there is no denying the fact that bullying is a serious problem throughout our state and country; coincidentally, there is also no arguing the fact that the previous anti-bullying legislation designed in June of 2002 was not effective at preventing instances of bullying as was anticipated. Therefore, with good reason, there have been changes to the pre-existing law to now strongly emphasize preventing, reporting, investigating, and responding to incidents of harassment, intimidation, and bullying. The problem arises, however, that the new law has the same pitfalls as the law of 2002, as there is no reasonable guidance, in evidence-based procedures, of how to accomplish the goal of lowering the instances of HIB throughout

our state. In fact, the national research is overwhelmingly inconclusive in its attempts to identify proven components of a successful anti-bullying program or intervention that will meet the intended outcomes of the law. A review of whole-school approaches in the United States and Europe found that success rates were modest (Ansary et al., 2015, p. 31).

Taking into consideration the aforementioned inconsistencies and potential shortcomings of the Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act as seen in its original 2002 counterpart, a deeper exploration of a potentially effective effort to negate bullying should be explored. This proposed effort should take into consideration the fact that resources are scarce amongst New Jersey schools, as evidenced when the Allamuchy School District in Warren County, New Jersey, fought the law on the basis that it imposed costs unjustly on school districts that were required to execute it (Anti-Bullying, n.d.). In an attempt to avoid the law being ruled unconstitutionally mandated without funding. On March 26, 2012, Governor Chris Christie signed legislation creating a one-million dollar fund to pay for anti-bullying training programs in (2400) New Jersey schools (Anti-Bullying, n.d.); consequently, the new appropriations offer individual districts a minuscule amount of revenue. In most cases, the funds are not enough to support the amount that typical programs need in order to be successful or significant. Also, as a result of the pressures of educational reform and high-stakes testing, in an attempt to reach the expectations of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), 2012 TEACHNJ Tenor Reform Law, and the PARCC and ASK Assessments, educators feel the need to abandon the tenets of the Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act for more teacher-centered instructional approaches (Faulkner & Cook, 2006).

### **Five Key Competencies of SEL**

However, within the framework of social and emotional learning (SEL), students are equipped with the capacity to recognize and manage emotions, solve problems effectively, and establish positive relationships with others, competencies which are clearly essential for all students (Zins & Elias, 2006). Thus, SEL targets a combination of behaviors, cognitions, and emotions. As described by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), SEL is the process for acquiring and effectively applying the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to recognize and manage emotions; establishing positive relationships; and handling challenging situations capably (Zins & Elias, 2006). There are five key competencies that are taught, practiced, and reinforced through SEL programming (CASEL, 2003; Weissberg & Cascarino 2013):

- Self-awareness: Identification and recognition of one's emotions, recognition of strengths in self and others, sense of self-efficacy, and self-confidence
- Social-awareness: Empathy, respect for others, and perspective-taking
- Responsible decision-making: Evaluation and reflection, and personal and ethical responsibility
- Self-management: Impulse control, stress management, persistence, goal-setting, and motivation
- Relationship skills: Cooperation, help seeking and providing, and communication.

Students who appraise themselves and their abilities realistically (self-awareness) regulate their feelings and behaviors appropriately (self-management), interpret social cues accurately (social awareness), resolve interpersonal conflicts effectively (relationship skills), and make good decisions about daily challenges (responsible decision-making) are headed on a pathway toward success in school and later in life (Payton et al., 2008, p. 6). SEL then offers a framework to meet the intended demands of the ABRA. Thus, the short-term goals of SEL programming are to promote students' social-emotional skills and positive attitudes, which in turn should lead to improved adjustment and academic performance as reflected in more positive social behaviors (including a reduction in bullying), fewer conduct problems, less emotional distress, and better grades and achievement test scores (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2005; Zins, Weissberg, Wang, & Walberg, 2004).

The implications of social and emotional learning help us understand what can be achieved, yet still offer no real explanation of how to achieve it. Empirical evidence demonstrates the benefits of a mentor for students, stating that without support from a concerned person, it is less likely that a socially at-risk child will mature into a responsible and successful adult (Matz, 2014). The purpose of the mentoring model in the context of this study is to form a rapport with students that guides them towards the competencies of social and emotional learning while employing the Socratic method of questioning, which focuses on moral education and how one ought to live (The Socratic method, 2003), as well as the principles of Carl Rogers' Client Centered Therapy, where the therapist creates an atmosphere in which clients can communicate their feelings with the certainty that they are being understood rather than judged (Carl Rogers' Client

Centered Therapy, 2006). Mentoring has been implemented in multiple arenas; and in its broadest sense, mentoring, or being a mentor, refers to a relationship between an individual with experience (mentor) and an individual with less experience (mentee) manifested through advisement, sponsorship, or friendship (Levinson, 1980; O'Neil, 1981). Mentees benefit by learning and practicing the expected norms of the environment. Regardless of the logistics of specific mentoring programs, the common goal is to foster a meaningful relationship between a mentor and a child that promotes growth (Jackson, 2002; Rhodes, Reddy, Grossman, & Lee, 2002). Relaying the message that someone cares and is there to offer support goes a long way.

However, scholars report both praise for mentoring and criticism for its shortcomings (Royse, 1998). Furthermore, it has been found that it is not so simple as to give a needy child a mentor and he or she will succeed. In fact, the most significant part of how productive a mentor/mentee pairing is, is directly linked to the type of relationship that forms between the two parties involved. It depends on the quality of the relationship and the feelings of closeness the child has toward the mentor (Bayer et al., 2013). There has been little research done to study the benefits of combining a mentoring model with the characteristics of social and emotional learning; in fact, previous empirical studies convey mixed findings on whether mentoring is associated with improvements in children's social, emotional, or cognitive development (Schmidt, McVaugh, & Jacobi, 2007), evidently aligned within the anticipated results of SEL. Several studies that examined children paired with mentors through the Big Brothers/Big Sisters program found that, unlike non-mentored children, those with mentors showed improvements in their peer relationships (Schmidt, McVaugh, & Jacobi, 2007), also a

fundamental principle within the framework of SEL. Much like the desired results of SEL, it is also discovered and supported by research (King, Vidourek, Davis, & McClellan, 2002) that mentoring significantly improved fifth graders' sense of worth.

Also, mentoring has been found to be an effective intervention in cases of remediation as well as in prevention for students at risk. These gains are not limited to a specific age group, but mentoring has been found effective in children from early childhood to adolescence. In addition, there have also been positive results when an older peer served as a mentor or when mentors were used in group formats. In the past, however, results from mentoring programs have seen tepid results with only a nine-percentile difference from non-mentored students from similar backgrounds (DuBois, Portillo, et al., 2011). The research outlined above suggests mentoring has the potential to enhance positive youth development, showing improvements in self-concept, peer relations, and social behavior at school. This, infused with the fundamental principles of SEL, may prove to be extremely advantageous to District Coordinators' and School Specialists' efforts in negating bullying and other at-risk-behaviors amongst students in fifth through eighth grades.

Understanding that there is evidence of bullying in Grades kindergarten through 12th, the benefit of selecting fifth through eighth grade students is that research suggests prevention services for at-risk youth should be implemented before or during the transition from elementary school to middle school (Srebnik & Elias, 1993); and early intervention may help with the transition itself, which can also be stressful (Schmidt, McVaugh, & Jacobi, 2007). Therefore, mentoring programs designed for at-risk youth that begin prior to middle school may be most effective in promoting positive youth

development (Schmidt, McVaugh, & Jacobi, 2007); also, the understanding that bullying tends to increase through the elementary grades, peak in middle school, and drop off by Grades 11 and 12 (Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 2001; Olweus, 1993) gives ample explanation as to the potential benefit of an intervention. This design aims to negate at-risk social behaviors during the upper elementary years and continues support through the most crucial developmental time, the middle school years. Focusing on these grades will assist in negating the most common form of bullying: verbal abuse and harassment, followed by social isolation and derogatory comments about physical appearance (Shellard, 2002). Additionally, *Time* magazine reports that students are more likely to be bullied in fifth grade and rejected more widely by peers in sixth grade due to their previously identified emotional improprieties (Szalavitz, 2012).

### **Research Questions**

1. What are the pros and cons of the prescribed intervention as indicated by the Burlington County District Coordinators and School Specialists?
2. To what extent do Burlington County District Coordinators and School Specialists find the intervention developmentally appropriate for general education students in Grades 5 through 8?
3. How does the prescribed intervention align with current initiatives that have been adopted by individual schools and districts since the introduction of the Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act (ABRA)?
4. To what extent, if any, would District Coordinators and School Specialists consider using the prescribed intervention as a way to remediate at-risk behaviors, including bullying, within their own schools or districts?

### **Significance of the Study**

In response to New Jersey's Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act (2011), which has designated District Coordinators and School Specialists responsible for strengthening the standards and procedures for preventing, reporting, investigating, and responding to incidents of intimidation and bullying, the state has offered little guidance on how to be proactive in preventing instances of bullying in a way the law would support. Furthermore, and perhaps even more challenging, there is little-to-no research-based evidence to support or dismiss the effectiveness of programs to prevent violence or to reduce other kinds of behavior problems, such as bullying (Peterson & Skiba, 2001, p.171). In fact, in a meta-analysis of 16 top bullying-prevention studies conducted by Merrell et al. (2008), none were shown to produce a reduction in observed incidents of bullying, although most did note a shift in perception. Moreover, some well-intentioned programs may actually produce adverse effects on students. This may be the case when interventions cluster deviant peers in treatment groups; the inadvertent result is that students teach each other bullying behaviors (Dishion, McCord, & Poulin, 1999); however, it is noted that guidance counselors or other skilled school personnel can provide students with activities that will enhance their self-esteem, academic success, and peer relationship skills (Shellard, 2002) if done on a one-to-one basis. Coincidentally, the ABRA calls for the role of District Coordinators and School Specialists to be fulfilled by school psychologists and/or school counselors when possible.

Taking into consideration that the implementation of any program can be costly and time-consuming, accompanied with the realization of the lack of resources New Jersey public schools currently have available and how preoccupied teachers are with



preparing students for high-stakes tests, it is the purpose of this study to introduce a process embedded in the methodologies of social and emotional learning and delivered through student mentoring to meet the legislative demands of negating bullying within the context of ABRA. It is also an extrinsic goal to offer districts and educators guidance in reaching the demands of bullying prevention in a way that is easily implemented, cost effective, and time effective.

### **Definitions**

**Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act:** Signed into legislation as P.L. 2010, Chapter 122 (P.L. 2010, c. 122) on January 5, 2011; the intent of the Act is to strengthen the state's previous existing anti-bullying legislation (Anti-Bullying, n.d.).

**Bullying:** As defined by Olweus (1994), bullying is aggressive behavior that is intentional and that involves an imbalance of power. Most often, it is repeated over time.

**Bullying as defined by the New Jersey Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act:** Any gesture, any written, verbal or physical act, or any electronic communication, whether it be a single act or a series of incidents, that is reasonably perceived as being motivated either by any actual or perceived characteristic, such as race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, or a mental, physical or sensory disability, or any other distinguishing characteristic that takes place on school property, at any school-sponsored function, or on a school bus, or off school grounds, and that substantially disrupts or interferes with orderly operation of the school or the rights of other students.

**Differentiation:** Teachers reacting responsively to a learner's needs; differentiation is simply attending to the learning needs of a particular student rather than the more typical

pattern of teaching the class as though all individuals in it were basically alike (Tomlinson, 2000).

**Intervention:** A specific program or set of steps to help a child improve in an area of need. Kids can have many needs.

**Mentoring:** Mentoring, or being a mentor, refers to a relationship between an individual with experience (mentor) and an individual with less experience (mentee) manifested through advisement, sponsorship, or friendship (Levinson, 1980; O'Neil, 1981). The purpose of the mentoring model is to form a rapport with students that guides them towards the competencies of social and emotional learning while employing the Socratic method of questioning, which focuses on moral education on how one ought to live (The Socratic method, 2003), and the principles of Carl Rogers' Client Centered Therapy, where the therapist creates an atmosphere in which clients can communicate their feelings with the certainty that they are being understood rather than judged (Carl Rogers' Client Centered Therapy, 2006).

**Programs:** A plan or system under which action may be taken toward a goal.

**Process:** A natural phenomenon marked by gradual changes that lead toward a particular result; a continuing natural or biological activity or function.

**Student Voice:** Describes the distinct perspectives and actions of young people throughout schools focused on education. "Student voice is giving students the ability to influence learning to include policies, programs, contexts, and principles."

**Social-Emotional Learning (SEL):** As described by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), SEL is the process for acquiring and effectively applying the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to recognize and

manage emotions, establishing positive relationships and handling challenging situations capably (Zins & Elias, 2006). There are five key competencies that are taught, practiced, and reinforced through SEL programming (CASEL, 2003):

- Self-awareness: Identification and recognition of one's emotions, recognition of strengths in self and others, sense of self-efficacy, and self-confidence.
- Social-awareness: Empathy, respect for others, and perspective-taking.
- Responsible decision-making: Evaluation and reflection, and personal and ethical responsibility.
- Self-management: Impulse control, stress management, persistence, goal setting, and motivation.
- *Relationship skills*: Cooperation, help seeking and providing, and communication.

**Social and Emotional Character Development (SECD) as defined by The New Jersey Department of Education:** Social emotional and character development (SECD) encompasses the enhancement of schoolwide climate, infusion of core ethical values into the curriculum, and teaching strategies that are designed to assist young people in developing positive character traits, relationships, and behaviors that result in a nurturing environment for students. SECD is designed to create a climate where youth feel safe and are ready to learn. Successful infusion of SECD results in positive behaviors, increased academic success, and caring communities.

**Functionality as related to the intervention or the implementation thereof:**

Construct of the intervention, within its intended design, as it pertains to duration, scope, sequence, simplicity, comprehensiveness, and scripting.

**Response to Intervention:** Response to Intervention (RTI) is a multi-tier approach to the early identification and support of students with learning and behavior needs. The RTI process begins with high-quality instruction and universal screening of all children in the general education classroom. Struggling learners are provided with interventions at increasing levels of intensity to accelerate their rate of learning. These services may be provided by a variety of personnel, including general education teachers, special educators, and specialists. Progress is closely monitored to assess both the learning rate and level of performance of individual students. Educational decisions about the intensity and duration of interventions are based on individual student response to instruction. RTI is designed for use when making decisions in both general education and special education, creating a well-integrated system of instruction and intervention guided by child outcome data (National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2016).

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

#### Aggression and Violence

Aggression and violence can pollute the school environment, diminish personal goals, and limit both teaching and learning. The most commonly found form of school violence is bullying, which has become alarmingly common. More than 16% of U.S. schoolchildren said they had recently been bullied, according to a 2001 survey by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (Wood, n.d.); some estimates are higher. In a 1999 survey of nearly 4,500 third graders in Maine by the Maine Project Against Bullying, 23% said they'd been threatened, 40% called hurtful names, and 38% were actually hit, kicked, or pushed (Wood, n.d.). Furthermore, a recent 2011 study identified a correlation between bullying in elementary school and problem behavior in young adulthood: a study of bullying from age 11 to age 21 concluded that childhood bullying accounted for significant variance in behavioral problems 10 years later (Kim, Catalano, Haggerty, & Abbott, 2011).

However, recognizing the problem seems to be an easy task in comparison to addressing the real concern of negating it. Negating bullying and creating a positive school culture can be like finding a needle in a haystack. There are a multitude of variables to contemplate when organizing efforts to stop bullying, many of which go unconsidered. It appears that many people believe the most effective approach for preventing bullying in schools is to involve a comprehensive, multilevel strategy that targets bullies, victims, bystanders, families, and communities (Atlas & Pepler, 1998; Garrity et al., 1997; Larson, Smith, & Furlong, 2002; Whitted & Dupper, 2005). However, reaching all

facets of the learning community to negate instances of bullying can sometimes feel like trying to hit a moving target. For instance, because bullying differs from other kinds of violence, it does not lend itself to the same interventions that may be effective in addressing other types of conflict among children (Limber & Nation, 1998). Conflict resolution, peer mediation strategies, and group therapies that focus on increasing self-esteem have been shown to be relatively ineffective with bullies (Sampson, n.d.) because bullying behavior results from a power imbalance rather than deficits in social skills. For example, bullies plan and anticipate the reaction of their victim and proceed in a manner that does not result in adult detection; this type of manipulation requires highly developed social skills (Coivin, Tobin, Beard, Hadan, & Sprague, 1998; Limber & Nation, 1998).

#### **Motivations of Bullying Identified by Gender and Identity**

It also must be recognized that bullying is often maintained by tangible reinforcement, such as stolen lunch money, and social reinforcement, such as entertaining peers (Coivin et al., 1998). As a result, it is important that these factors be taken into account when developing and implementing interventions with bullies. That being said, it is also important to understand that there is no hard evidence to show that children who are targeted by bullies share certain physical characteristics, such as wearing glasses or being overweight. "It is not clear . . . that chronic scapegoats are objectively different from students not victimized" (NRCSS, 1999, p. 17). In reference to family involvement, there has been a positive correlation has been found that children who were maltreated by caregivers are more likely to bully others and to be at-risk for victimization by peers.

Bullying by girls also tends to be more subtle and harder to detect than bullying by boys (NRCSS, 1999), as girls are more likely to bully in a group (Kreidler, 1996). In

addition, a number of factors may influence one's perception of the term *bullying*. For example, there is some evidence of potential ethnic differences in the interpretation of the word *bullying*. One study found that the African-American youth who were frequently victimized by peers were less likely than their White counterparts to report that they had been "bullied" (Sawyer, Bradshaw, & O'Brennan, 2008). This could be attributed to the belief of the saying "snitches get stitches," referred to by many African-American and inner city sub-populations, some influenced by pop-culture.

From a cross-cultural perspective, one reason for the inconsistency in defining bullying stems from non-universal vocabulary (Craig, Henderson, & Murphy, 2000; Kalliotis, 2000). For example, North Americans tend to relate the term *victimization* to bullying, whereas Scandinavians associate the term with *mobbing* (Craig et al., 2000). In contrast, most Mediterranean languages do not have a specific word for bullying and must use an overlapping term; such can be seen in Modern Greek, where the definition "someone who has no discipline and order" has been used in research projects (Kalliotis, 2000). In addition, people still tend to associate bullying with physically aggressive acts rather than the broader set of relationally socially aggressive behaviors. As a result, relational or social forms of bullying may be underestimated on surveys of bullying, especially among girls who may be more inclined to use relational rather than physical forms of bullying. These perceptual issues are also relevant to the assessment of climate, as research indicates that both minority youth and boys tend to rate the climate less favorably than their peers (Koth, Bradshaw, & Leaf, 2008).

### **Social Cognitive Theory**

Social Cognitive Theory further suggests that a child's perception of the school climate likely varies as a function of his or her own behavior or involvement in bullying (Kunda, 1999). Therefore, the climate that programs attempt to address may, instead, act as a red herring and keep us from addressing the core of the problem: student bullying. In examining community research, William Julius Wilson (1997) posited that when 20% or more of the residents within a given neighborhood are economically disadvantaged, there is a negative shift in the organizational structure and relationship among the people within the neighborhood. Additionally, when the rate reaches 40%, as it is in many communities during today's economic climate, there is considerable "social deterioration." Furthermore, bullying is a systemic problem; it may reflect the entrenched attitudes and beliefs about the way people can treat one another. For example, the way adults treat one another within a school community can have significant impact.

### **Character Education Programs**

There is little-to-no research-based evidence for or against the effectiveness of programs to prevent violence or to reduce other kinds of behavior problems, such as bullying (Peterson & Skiba, 2001, p. 171), as the new mandates for the New Jersey Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act may suggest. Part of the difficulty arises because these programs are derived from principles of character education; however, character education is a general philosophy and does not prescribe specific practices, nor does it take into consideration the many variables and influences that may support instances of bullying. Unfortunately, little guidance is offered aside from the recommendation to explore the problem of bullying in a conference day (Olweus, 1993). Although some



interventions have shown promising results, the overall outcome of bullying prevention efforts have been mixed (Merrell, Gueldner, Ross, Schneider, Smith, & Ananiadou, 2008). The U.S. Surgeon General's report on youth violence (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001) identified 29 best practices in youth violence prevention; however, the only program to make the list was Olweus' Bergen Anti-Bullying Prevention program (Olweus, Limber, & Mihalic, 1999), and it was listed as a "promising" rather than a "model" program. A more recent listing of 32 effective programs produced the same result; only the Olweus program made the best practices list (Osher & Dwyer, 2006). In a meta-analysis of 16 bullying-prevention studies conducted by Merrell et al. (2008), none of the 16 anti-bullying programs were shown to produce a reduction in observed incidents of bullying, although most did note a shift in perception. In fact, some well-intentioned programs may actually produce adverse effects on students. This may be the case when interventions cluster deviant peers in treatment groups; the inadvertent result is that students teach one another bullying behaviors (Dishion, McCord, & Poulin, 1999). To this extent, unfortunately a study published in the *Journal of Criminology* found that anti-bullying programs sometimes cause the opposite effect than their purpose. In a study done throughout all 50 states by the University of Texas, students at schools who completed anti-bullying initiatives may be more likely to become a victim of bullying. It is proposed that the cause of the programs' failures have to do with the fact that the program does not address the schools' entire climate but instead focus on a select group of students. Instead, the authors suggest focusing on the leadership and climate within the school in order to change bullying behaviors (Trowbridge, 2013).

### **Reactive Classroom Management Strategies**

Another mandate of the law includes stronger consequences and a complex, multi-stepped investigation process. A recent study found that reactive classroom management strategies, such as using office discipline referrals and few positive behavior supports, were associated with poorer perceptions of the school climate, even after controlling for the level of student disruption in the classroom (Mitchell, Bradshaw & Leaf, in press). This suggests that different mandates of the new law, in and of themselves, may send a negative message to students about the overall climate and level of disorder within the school. As stated, one cannot legislate bullying out of existence (Tannenbaum, 2010). The new law calls for programs, defined as a plan or system under which action may be taken towards a goal. It is being proposed, however, that a process, defined as a natural phenomenon marked by gradual changes that lead towards a particular result, is a more comprehensive alternative. Trying to find a program that identifies the specific needs of a school culture and climate is next to impossible. Instead, the focus should be on a process that identifies specific deficiencies in school culture and climate and offer direct tools to individual students to help negate the predisposition for at-risk behaviors. There is no magic cure, no one-size-fits-all program, to negate instances of bullying.

### **Behavioral Science**

Through the research, it seems very clear that if the idea of a program is eliminated, a process with validity can be put into place. Bullying prevention strategies must be developmentally appropriate and be both meaningful and enjoyable for all students (CHEF, 1994, p. 31). Schools should select preventions and processes that are

culturally sensitive, provide training, and be cost efficient (CHEF, 1994). A key component of the process should be the understanding that much of human behavior is learned, comes under the environmental factors, and can be changed through environmental factors and a better understanding of social norms and expectations. The strength of behavioral science is that problem behaviors become more understandable, and as our understanding grows, so too does our ability to teach more socially appropriate and functional behavior (Sugai et al., 2000, p. 135). Many experts have called for schools to be more active in teaching the moral and civic values that are an essential part of our social fabric and sense of community. These calls are not new, and they reach back to philosophers such as Kant and Buber and to educators such as Dewey, who published his book *Moral Principles in Education* in 1909 (Henley, Ramsey, & Algozzine, 1999). A successful school, like a successful business, is a cohesive community of shared values, beliefs, rituals, and ceremonies.

### **Effective Interventions**

It is evident that much of today's practice in New Jersey public schools is based upon evidence of little validity to anti-bullying initiatives; however, it must also be considered that the foundation that supports the lack of validity for modern day approach to intervention is built upon studies completed a decade or more ago. Within the context of newly emerging research, there is evidence that supports the belief that effective interventions that negate at-risk social behaviors within our schools and communities are within grasp. More recent data support the legitimacy and effectiveness of bullying interventions and programs when infused with Core Tenets of Universal Bullying Prevention Approaches which include (Ansary et al., 2014, pp. 3-4):

- Theoretical foundation
- Whole-school approach
- Positive school climate
- Leadership involvement
- Teacher and staff training on prevention of bullying
- Emphasis on SECD
- Promote Upstanders
- Systematic evaluation
- Developmentally appropriate
- Coordination of anti-bullying efforts
- Sustainability

Four model anti-bullying program examples that incorporate these core tenets are Olweus Bullying Prevention Program, The Seville Study Model (SAVE Model), DFE Sheffield Anti Bullying Project, and KiVa (Ansary et al., 2014, pp. 3-4)

Table 1

*Summary of Effective Programs*

Core Tenets	Olweus Bullying Prevention Program	The Seville Study (SAVE Model)	DFE Sheffield Anti Bullying Project	KiVa
Theoretical foundation	X	X	X	X
Whole-school approach	X	X	X	X
Positive school climate	X	X	X	X
Leadership involvement	X	I	X	X
Teacher and staff training on prevention of bullying	X	X	X	X

Emphasis on SECD	I	X	X	X
Promote Upstanders	X	X	X	X
Systematic evaluation	X	X	X	X
Developmentally appropriate	I	I	X	X
Coordination of anti-bullying efforts	X			X
Sustainability	X	I	X	X

(Ansary et al., 2014, p. 3)

### Summary of Effective Programs

#### Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (OBPP)

OBPP was created by Dan Olweus in the mid-1980s in Norway (Olweus & Limber, 2010). Briefly, the program employs strategies at the universal and selected/indicated levels in the prevention of bullying by addressing the whole-school, classroom, individual, and community levels (Limber, 2012). To illustrate, a strategy addressing universal prevention is OBPP's requirement of schools to introduce—on a schoolwide basis—antibullying rules. Additionally, rules related to bullying are also displayed at the classroom level (Olweus & Limber, 2010). With regard to an example of strategies at the selected/indicated level, the OBPP outlines a clear protocol for educators to follow once bullying occurs. This entails a separate meeting with each of the students involved in the bullying incident, a conference with parents of involved students, and creation of an individual intervention plan (as needed) for youth who engaged in the incident (Olweus & Limber, 2010). Though the program has demonstrated effectiveness in its widespread implementation in Norway, the evidence of its effectiveness in the United States is limited at best, in large part due to challenges in program implementation. Nevertheless, as Ttofi and Farrington (2011) assert, many programs built

on the seminal work of Dan Olweus have been found to be among the most effective anti-bullying approaches. A detailed description of the OBPP program as well as a review of the mixed evidence regarding program effectiveness can be found in Limber (2012) (Ansary et al., 2014, p. 3).

### **The Seville Anti-Bullying in School Project (SAVE)**

The SAVE project adopts a whole-school approach with a strong theoretical foundation in an ecological perspective that emphasizes interactions between the microsystems encompassing students, teachers, and families (Ortega & Lera, 2000). Moreover, this program stresses the importance of SECD and attempts to foster this through curricular changes as well as cooperative group work. The program relies heavily on teacher training and requires that teachers develop their own antibullying materials on a yearly basis (Ortega et al., 2004). Though not explicitly stated in the publications by Ortega and colleagues (2004), Ortega & Lera (2000), two conclusions may be implicitly drawn due to the requirement of this time-consuming task: (a) Leadership support is necessary to provide teachers with the time and resources necessary to prepare their anti-bullying materials, and (b) since materials are created or refined on a yearly basis, the work is more likely to be developmentally appropriate. Specific program strategies and evidence of effectiveness can be found in Ortega and Lera (2000) and Ortega, Del-Ray, & Mora-Mercan (2004) (Ansary et al., 2014, p. 3).

### **The DFE Sheffield Anti-Bullying Project**

The DFE Sheffield project is generally based on the OBPP but differs from that program in the following ways: (a) It provides the ability for schools to tailor the program to meet their specific needs, (b) emphasizes peer support, and (c) endorses use of the

Pikas (2002) method, in which students meet in groups to share concerns and suggest solutions regarding bullying situations (Smith & Ananiadou, 2003). The Sheffield project underwent implementation in 23 schools in Sheffield, England, from 1991 to 1993 (Smith & Ananiadou, 2003). The theoretical foundation of the program is an emphasis on the whole school, and like the others, this program recognizes the salience of students, staff, families, and the community in addressing bullying. Staff training, a school curriculum that explicitly addresses bullying, and an emphasis on social-emotional learning are all strategies this program employs to reduce bullying. The evidence regarding program effectiveness is generally positive, although some results (particularly in schools with poor implementation fidelity) suggest that certain schools found slight increases in bullying behaviors (Eslea & Smith, 1998). This program has led to the “Bullying: Don’t Suffer in Silence” pack created by Peter Smith available free at <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20050302035856/dfes.gov.uk/bullying>, (Ansary et al., 2014, p 3).

### **The KiVa Anti-bullying Program**

Three fundamental principles form the backbone of this program (Kärnä et al., 2013): (a) a participant-role approach in which the focus is on the peer network in contrast to an exclusive focus on the dyadic relationship between the student who bullies and the student who is targeted, (b) recognition of the network of social status and power within a school or classroom, and (c) an ecological approach encompassing the various contexts in the child’s life. As Kärnä and colleagues (2013) note, KiVa incorporates both universal prevention approaches (e.g., through curriculum, a focus on increasing empathy and defending behaviors, etc.) as well as selected/indicated levels of prevention (e.g.,

separate meetings for the target and each child involved in the bullying incident, etc.).

The KiVa program has undergone widespread implementation, with 90% of Finnish schools participating as of 2011 (Salmivalli, Poskiparta, Ahtola, & Haataja, 2013).

Randomized controlled trials as well as the broad rollout revealed significant reductions in bullying (20% and 15%, respectively). Furthermore, the findings of Salmivalli and colleagues (2013) suggest a strong dosage–response relationship, indicating greater effects for schools implementing program strategies more faithfully. Stronger effects have also been documented for younger than for older children involved in the program (see Smith, Salmivalli, & Cowie, 2012) (Ansary et al., 2014, p. 3).

It is noteworthy to acknowledge that although empirical evidence has been found supporting successful outcomes of Bullying Prevention Approaches when associated with the Core Tenets of different approaches, none of the successful programs outlined act as an intervention meant to negate instances of bullying that are unique to individual students in a differentiated way that is unique to the more systemic cause of the at-risk behavior found within the child. Furthermore, none of the aforementioned programs would meet the requirements of Response to Intervention’s third tier, which calls for individual attention in a small group or one-to-one setting as most widely expected throughout the state and country in addressing deficiencies within students. This differentiated approach infused with a comprehensive, school-based, program targeting cultural concerns such as leadership and climate in order to change bullying behaviors (Trowbridge, 2013), proves to address the systemic needs of students in a holistic way to drive lasting change in negating at-risk social behaviors, including bullying.



### **Social and Emotional Learning**

In 1994, the Fetzer Institute hosted a conference to address concerns about the various disjointed school-based efforts that had surfaced over the years. In attendance were a range of researchers, educators, and advocates with diverse interests related to meeting the developmental, psychological, educational, and general health needs of children. These issues were discussed, and the term *social and emotional learning* (SEL) was introduced (Elbertson, Brackett, & Weissberg, 2010). Elias et al. (1997) defined SEL as the process of acquiring core competencies to recognize and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, appreciate the perspectives of others, establish and maintain positive relationships, make responsible decisions, and handle interpersonal situations constructively (Durlak, Dymnicki, Taylor, Weissberg, & Schellinger, 2011). This framework is based in research; the first section of Dan Goleman's book *Emotional Intelligence* (1995) summarizes the essential interrelationships among our emotions, our thinking, and our actions, and also can be found in Gardner's Multiple-Intelligences Theory (1983), which is based on the same premise that we are, biologically speaking, social and emotional beings (Elias, Bruene-Butler, Blum, & Schuyler, 1997). Moreover, underlying SEL programming is a theoretical foundation based on the ideas that essential learning takes place in the context of relationships and that similar risk factors are responsible for various maladaptive outcomes (Payton et al., 2000). More than ever, educators and parents alike are recognizing the social and emotional influences on academics and are holding schools responsible for preparing students for life, not just for standardized tests or high school graduation. In 1999, the U.S. Department of Labor issued two reports to identify various skills and traits necessary for a successful

workforce. In these reports, many of the skills identified related to SEL, including interpersonal and communication skills, decision-making and problem-solving skills, the ability to influence and negotiate, personal responsibility, self-esteem, listening, self-management, and integrity (Devaney, O'Brien, Resnik, Keister, & Weissberg 2006; Stuart & Dahm, 1999; U.S. Department of Labor, 1999).

In a December 2008 study entitled *The Positive Impact of Social and Emotional Learning for Kindergarten to Eighth-Grade Students* examined a heterogeneous population of 324,303 students from urban, rural, and suburban settings. The purpose of this study was to determine if SEL programs improved students' social-emotional skills, attitudes about self and others, connection to school, positive social behavior, student conduct problems, and emotional distress. The main findings concluded that students in SEL programs demonstrated improvement in multiple areas of their personal and social lives, and SEL programs also fostered positive effects on: students' social emotional skills, attitudes toward self, school, and others; social behaviors; conduct problems; emotional distress; and academic performance. Data also indicated that SEL programs were effective when conducted by school staff, suggesting that these interventions can be incorporated into routine educational practice and were equally beneficial when completed by the researcher (Payton et al., 2008). Comparing results from the findings obtained in this study, as congruent with other substantial literature (Catalano et al., 2002; Greenberg et al., 2003; Zins et al., 2004), suggests that SEL programs are among the most successful youth-development programs offered to school-age children (Payton et al., 2008).

Research conducted during the past few decades indicates that social and emotional learning (SEL) programming for elementary and middle-school students is a very promising approach to reducing problem behaviors, promoting positive adjustment, and enhancing academic performance (Payton et al., 2008). Of all of the students who were studied, those provided with interventions that identified and worked with students who were displaying early signs of behavioral or emotional problems offered the most supporting evidence (Payton et al., 2008). It is the premise of social and emotional learning (SEL) that students who appraise themselves and their abilities realistically (self-awareness), regulate their feelings and behaviors appropriately (self-management), interpret social cues accurately (social awareness), resolve interpersonal conflicts effectively (relationship skills), and make good decisions about daily challenges (responsible decision-making) are headed on a pathway toward success in school and later life (Payton et al., 2008). Thus, the short-term goals of SEL programming are to promote students' social-emotional skills and positive attitudes which, in turn, should lead to improved adjustments, as reflected in more positive social behaviors, fewer conduct problems, and less emotional distress. Another study, entitled *The Impact of Enhancing Students' Social and Emotional Learning: A Meta-Analysis of School-Based Universal Interventions*, documents that SEL programs of at least a two-year duration yielded significant positive effects on targeted social-emotional competencies and attitudes about self, others, and school. They also enhanced students' behavioral adjustment in the form of increased pro-social behaviors and a reduction in conduct and internalizing problems (Durlak, Dymnicki, Taylor, Weissberg, & Schellinger, 2011). Collectively, these results build on positive results reported by other research teams that

have conducted related reviews, examining the promotion of youth development or prevention of negative behaviors (Catalano et al., 2002; Greenberg et al., 2001; Hahn et al., 2007; Wilson & Lipsey, 2007; Wilson et al., 2001).

In an attempt to negate at-risk behaviors identified with student bullying, social and emotional learning has provided a proven framework but does not recommend or suggest “how” to deliver such a process. What we do know, according to the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), is that effective SEL programs are those that lead indirectly and directly, through education of social and emotional competencies, to achieve positive development (CASEL, 2003). It is recommended that schools select SEL programs that they believe are appropriate culturally, socially, and economically for their students and families; these issues are not always easily identified, but program selection should depend largely on these factors (Zins, Weissberg, Wang, & Walberg, 2004).

Furthermore, neuroscience research, for example, has demonstrated that because of the plasticity of the brain, experience across the lifespan changes it. This finding suggests that schoolchildren’s participation in SEL programming will lay a strong neurocognitive foundation for their future learning, social functioning, and ability to emotionally self-regulate (Payton et al., 2008). Studies on SEL find great success across the board, regardless of which program is being selected. A study by Yale University, testing for program training, dosage, and implementation quality in regard to SEL, determined there were no main effects of training, dosage, or implementation quality on student outcome variables at the end of the year-long process; however, all students showed gains from being introduced or exposed to the framework of SEL (Reyes,

Brackett, Rivers, Elbertson, & Salovey, 2012). One simple way to implement an SEL process may be in the form of a school-based elementary mentoring program. Over the past 15 years, mentoring has been acclaimed as a solution to an array of educational needs (Ryan, Whittaker, & Pinkney, 2002). Although testimonials such as the ones offered from the Big Brother and Big Sister Program exemplify the national enthusiasm for mentor programs for children and adolescents, only recently have researchers begun to delineate those characteristics that predict successful program outcomes. Furthermore, while descriptions and evaluations of mentoring programs for adolescents are available in the literature, relatively little is known about school-based elementary school mentoring programs (daCosta, Klak, & Schinke, 2000; Herrera, 1999; Lee & Cramond, 1999; Sipe & Roder, 1999).

### **CHAPTER III**

#### **METHODS**

##### **Introduction**

In September of 2011 the expectation to the way New Jersey Public Schools responded to incidents of harassment, intimidation, and bullying (HIB) had drastically changed in response to the Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act. The mandates of the new law were intended to strengthen the standards and procedures for preventing, reporting, investigating, and responding to incidents of HIB. Prior to the Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act (ABRA) of 2011, many districts and schools were very familiar with investigating and implementing punitive consequences in an effort to remediate at-risk social behaviors; however, little to no association was made to the actual systemic problem of harassment, intimidation, and bullying and, as a result, little resolution was provided in a non-punitive way to negate such instances. As a result, fundamental deterrents of bullying were not being addressed as the original law had intended. Consequently, investigating and responding was usually driven by districts' policies and schools' codes of conduct, which were traditionally punitive in nature. Under the parameters of the new law, school programs, school culture, and prevention became the focal point to fulfilling the requirements of the Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act (ABRA).

In 2011 I served in the capacity of assistant principal in a fourth through eighth grade school located in Burlington County, New Jersey; and as governed by the ABRA 2011, I was designated as the district's Anti-Bullying Coordinator by my then superintendent. As the assistant principal and sole disciplinarian for over 750 students, I soon realized that reporting, investigating, and responding to incidents of bullying within the context of

the ABRA was not effective in my efforts to prevent at-risk social behaviors such as bullying from recurring.

The approach of punitive consequences and punishing students to make them treat each other with kindness and respect was simply counterproductive. In fact, I was witness to students who were already angry and only become angrier as different sanctions were placed upon them. At that time, it appeared that the majority of students experiencing bullying either as the aggressor, bystander, or victim within my school were from Grades 5 through 8.

Therefore, in response to my observations, I created a self-designed intervention that was intended to mesh with the research-proven theoretical framework of social and emotional learning, as delivered through a unique and scripted mentoring process, including the Socratic method of questioning, which focuses on moral education on how one ought to live. The Socratic method is used to determine what it (SEL) is and how to use it in the classroom (2003). In the principles of Carl Rogers' Client Centered Therapy, the therapist creates an atmosphere in which clients, or in this case students, can communicate their feelings with the certainty that they are being understood rather than judged (Carl Rogers' Client Centered Therapy, 2006). The intended attributes of the intervention were to be practical, cost-effective, easy to implement, time effective, and most of all beneficial to negating at-risk social behaviors including bullying by offering a beneficial alternative to strictly punitive consequences. Through my extensive investigations of social and emotional interventions, it has been determined that no other intervention follows this arrangement specifically; however, the design is intended to

model the best practices of social and emotional learning as outlined in the five core competencies.

Prior to the actual implementation of the intervention with my students, it was a priority to determine how to make the self-created intervention the most advantageous resource for all students in Grades 5 through 8, the ages identified through research in the prior chapters as the grade levels most affected by bullying, who were exhibiting at-risk social behaviors including bullying. It was deemed imperative to consider the feedback of my former colleagues, as in July of 2013 I became a principal in Spotswood, Middlesex County, where I also served as the District Coordinator; and in 2015 I became superintendent in Commercial Township, Cumberland County, where I continue to serve as a District Coordinator. The intended design of this study, in an attempt to maximize the potential of the proposed intervention and before implementing the intervention with students, to gather information from District Coordinators and School Specialists from a region with consistent parallels reflective of New Jersey as a whole (Burlington County), especially within the context of demographics. To this end, the intent of this study was not to embark in a traditional “outcome-oriented” evaluation of a program that had been previously implemented but rather to act as an assessment by participant-experts (School Specialists and District Coordinators) of the potential content validity of an intervention that is being proposed and asked to be considered, but is not yet implemented. It is the intent of the study to gather insightful data from participants in regard to the conceptual framework underlying the intervention as well as realistic assessment of the functionality and construct of the intervention and how it operationalizes the intended framework.



### **Participants**

Socioeconomic status (SES) has been proven to have a significant impact on students, specifically within a learning environment. Although much of the early research that implicates SES to challenges in student achievement was developed around academic success, there is a large body of evidence that has surfaced, making a connection to SES and the detriments associated with social and emotional learning. The book *Teaching with Poverty in Mind* by Eric Jensen (2009) states the following:

The school socialization process typically pressures students to be like their peers or risk social rejection, whereas the quest for high social status drives students to attempt to differentiate themselves in some areas—sports, personal style, sense of humor, or street skills, for example. Socioeconomic status forms a huge part of this equation. Children raised in poverty rarely choose to behave differently, but they are faced daily with overwhelming challenges that affluent children never have to confront, and their brains have adapted to suboptimal conditions in ways that undermine good school performance. Let's revisit the most significant risk factors affecting children raised in poverty:

- **Emotional and Social Challenges**
- **Acute and Chronic Stressors**
- **Cognitive Lags**
- **Health and Safety Issues**

In determining the potential relevance of a self-created intervention designed to negate at-risk social behaviors, it became prevalent that the validity of such an effort would be in establishing a sample that mirrored the socioeconomic status of New Jersey

as a whole. If student behaviors are influenced by SEL, then in order to obtain the most insightful feedback pertaining to the relevance of future implementation of a self-created intervention targeted to negate at-risk social behaviors including bullying, feedback must be gathered from participants representing the same demographic profile as that of the state. In further consideration of counties as a whole, it was discovered that a former county of affiliation, Burlington County, had many similarities regarding Socio-Economic Status as New Jersey as a whole.

New Jersey has accounted for individual districts' socioeconomic status by using what they call District Factor Groups (DFG). In 2013, New Jersey coded these groupings in the following alpha designations: A, B, CD, DE, FG, GH, I, and J. A community or district designated as an "A" district is at the lowest end of the socioeconomic status, and those identified as a "J" are at the highest end of the spectrum.

Table 2

*Range of District Factor Groups as Assigned by New Jersey in 2013*

<b>District Factor Group</b>	<b>Socioeconomic Status</b>
A and B	Low
CD, DE	Low-Middle
FG, GH	Middle-High
I and J	High

In 2013 DFGs were determined by six variables:

1. Percent of adults with no high school diploma
2. Percent of adults with some college education

3. Occupation Status
4. Unemployment rate
5. Percent of individuals in poverty
6. Median family income

Although the sample included within this study does not take into consideration all 573 districts outlined in the New Jersey Department of Education's website in 2012, it does demonstrate that Burlington County is very comparable to the same demographics that are exhibited throughout New Jersey. Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that since Burlington County is so aligned with the state's compiled DFGs that the sample received may also mirror similar needs as associated with the state. See Table 2 for a more comprehensive breakdown of New Jersey and Burlington Counties disaggregation into District Factor Groups and a depiction of the demographics associated with districts and schools as identified by participants of the study. It is the intent of the study to mirror the makeup of the state as a whole and to identify individual district needs pertaining to the prescribed intervention that may be influenced by economic status. The rationale behind sampling only from Burlington County, identified in Table 2, is that Burlington County closely reflects the state of New Jersey within the context of District Factor Groupings (DFG), as defined below. Therefore, the districts and schools of Burlington County may represent the same obstacles found statewide and may be considered an accurate representation of the state as a whole.

Table 3

*Analysis of DFGs in New Jersey and Burlington County with Consideration to Actual Participants*

<b>District Factor Groups (DFGs)</b>					
	<b>New Jersey</b>		<b>Burlington County</b>		<b>Participant s</b>
A	35	6 %	1	2.5 %	0
B	78	17 %	6	15 %	3
CD	75	13 %	4	10 %	1
DE	100	17 %	10	25 %	5
FG	87	15 %	8	20 %	3
GH	78	14 %	6	15 %	3
I	105	18 %	5	12.5 %	2
J	15	3 %	0	0	0
Total	573		40		17*

\*One participant from Special Services School

\*Four participants represent two districts

Table 4

*Comparing State and County Demographics*

<b>Comparing State and County Demographics</b>				
	<b>New Jersey</b>	<b>Burlington County</b>	<b>New Jersey</b>	<b>Burlington County</b>
A	6 %	2.5 %	53 %	52.5 %
B	17 %	15 %		
CD	13 %	10 %		

PERCEPTIONS OF A PRESCRIBED INTERVENTION

DE	17 %	25 %		
FG	15 %	20 %	47 %	47.5 %
GH	14 %	15 %		
I	18 %	12.5 %		
J	3 %	0 %		

In an effort to accumulate relevant data pertaining to a prescribed intervention, 40 Coordinators and 64 Specialists from Burlington County were contacted by way of a letter of solicitation, requesting their participation in a focus group intended to examine a self-created intervention and solicit feedback in regard to what degree the participants believed the intervention to be advantageous in their everyday duties to negate at-risk social behaviors, including bullying, in students from fifth to eighth grade. Below is a list of all potential School Specialists from Burlington County that serviced students in Grades 5 through 8 during the 2013-2014 academic year.

Table 5

*Potential Number of School Specialists as Determined by Schools that House One or More of the Intended Grades of the Intervention*

**Burlington County Schools Configurations Servicing Grades 5-8**

Elementary School only: Pre-Kindergarten to Fifth Grade		
<b>Configuration</b>	<b>Total</b>	

P-5	(1)	Total (22)
K-5	(13)	
3-5	(5)	
4-5	(2)	
5	(1)	

<b>Both Elementary School (Grades Pre-K-5) and Middle School (Grades 6-8) within the Same School</b>		
<b>Configuration</b>	<b>Total</b>	
P-6	(1)	Total (23)
P-8	(1)	
K-6	(3)	
K-8	(5)	
3-6	(2)	
3-8	(1)	
4-6	(1)	
4-8	(1)	
5-6	(5)	
5-8	(3)	

<b>Just Middle School Aged Students, Grades 6-8</b>		
<b>Configuration</b>	<b>Total</b>	
6	(1)	Total (16)
6-8	(11)	
7-8	(4)	

**Middle School (6-8) and High School (9-12) in Same Building**

Configuration	Total	
7-12	(3)	Total (3)

**Total # of School Specialists: 64**

After review of the proposed study and approval from the Seton Hall University’s International Review Board, the letter of solicitation was sent via email and invited all District Coordinators (40), although only 38 have been assigned District Factor Group ratings: one vocational, one special services school identified, and Specialists (64) as identified by the New Jersey Department of Education website, with a combined total of 104 potential participants. All emails were followed by a personal phone call by the moderator; emails and phone numbers were accumulated from the State of New Jersey’s Department of Education website, as cross-referenced by individual district’s homepages, as it is a mandate of the ABRA 2011 that all District Coordinators and School Specialists be found on the front page of district and school websites. In addition to repeated solicitations including three rounds of emails and two rounds of phone calls, there was additional solicitation through the New Jersey School Counselors Association (NJSCA.org) website, where information from the letter of solicitation was shared with the contact number and email address of the co-moderator, as approved by the Seton Hall University’s International Review Board process, who was then a member of the NJSCA.

In total, there were 24 confirmed participants for the study; however, only 20 total participants from schools and districts in Burlington County, New Jersey, actually attended one of the four scheduled focus groups. Of these 20 participants, 15 were identified as Anti-Bullying Specialists and five were identified as Anti-Bullying

Coordinators. Within those identified as School Anti-Bullying Specialists, there were three administrators, eight school counselors, one social worker, one elementary school teacher, one behaviorist, and one school psychologist. Within those identified as District Anti-Bullying Coordinators, there were four administrators, and one school counselor. It was a conscious decision to have both District Coordinators and School Specialists participate within the same focus groups with the intended goal for the heterogeneous mix to hear one another's responses, and provide opportunities to trigger different realizations and perspectives.

This approach allows the researcher to detect commonalities among heterogeneous settings (Patton, 2002). It is further noted by Patton that "any common patterns that emerge from great variation are of particular interest and value in capturing the core experience and central, shared dimensions of a setting or phenomenon" (p. 235). Although the function of each position is slightly different, the overall objective remains the same in creating a positive school culture and climate conducive for every child to learn; the goal for this heterogeneous grouping was to obtain feedback pertaining to a proposed self-created intervention as it related to the everyday duties and responsibilities of preventing and responding to incidences of bullying as mandated by the Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act 2011. It is a conscious decision to have both Coordinators and School Specialists within the same focus group. Although the functions of each position are different, the content matter is related.

### **Site**

In a confirmation request, via email or during individual phone calls, or in response to a posted letter of solicitation demonstrated on the New Jersey School



Counselors Association website (NJSCA.org), participants were asked to select the time and destination that was most convenient for them. The times and locations selected for each focus group were Tuesday, October 22, 2013, with a session “A” starting at 9:00 a.m. and a session “B” starting at 12:00 noon, at the Chatsworth Elementary School media center in Chatsworth, New Jersey, and Thursday, October 24, 2013, with a session “C” starting at 9:00 a.m. and a session “D” starting at 12:00 noon, at the Florence Township Memorial High School conference room in Florence, New Jersey. The two locations were selected to accommodate all participants in regard to travel time, as both locations are on opposite sides of the county, and supported participation with the convenience of proximity no matter what district or school the participants were traveling from. During confirmation, either via email or within the context of individual phone calls, participants were asked to select the destination and session that was most convenient for them.

### **Focus Groups Procedure**

The construct of the focus groups allowed for the sessions to be tape-recorded using an Olympus digital voice recorder, Model VN-7200, and tape recorded using a Sony Handycam, Model CX405, which utilized Sony DVD-RW 1.4GB discs, as approved by the Seton Hall International Review Board in June of 2013. Going into the focus groups, I had 24 potential participants that had confirmed participation in one of the four focus groups. Each focus group was scheduled to have no more than eight participants assigned to any one of the four focus groups, as outlined by Richard Krueger’s model (Krueger, 2002). It was also previously arranged to have no fewer than five participants per focus group. During the confirmation process, five to eight

participants were scheduled for all four sessions; however, on the day of each assigned focus group, some participants did not show (total of four) or were unable to make the originally agreed upon focus group and came to another announced. See Table 6 for the actual makeup of the focus groups held on October 22 and October 24 of 2013.

Pseudonyms have been used to ensure anonymity of participants.

Table 6

*Participants per Focus Group*

<b>Chatsworth "A"</b>	<b>Chatsworth "B"</b>	<b>Florence "C"</b>	<b>Florence "D"</b>
<b>Tuesday, October 22<sup>nd</sup>, 9:00</b>	<b>Tuesday, October 22<sup>nd</sup>, 12:00</b>	<b>Thursday, October 24<sup>th</sup>, 9:00</b>	<b>Thursday, October 24<sup>th</sup>, 12:00</b>
Aaron (Beverly)	Barbara (Springfield)	Candice (Burlington Special Services)	Daniel (Chesterfield)
Adam (Shamong)	Beth (Riverside)	Charles (Westampton)	Danielle (Florence)
Amanda (Burlington City)	Brooke (Evesham)	Chloe (Northern Burlington)	Dana (Willingboro)
Ashley (Burlington City)	Becky (Evesham)	Courtney (Mansfield)	Diane (Medford)
	Britney (Edgewater Park)		Dakota (Burlington Township)
			David (Hainesport)
			Denise (Delanco)

Focus groups consisted of a total of 20 participants from schools and districts in Burlington County, New Jersey. Of these 20 participants, 15 were identified as Anti-Bullying Specialists and five were identified as Anti-Bullying Coordinators. Within those identified as School Anti-Bullying Specialist there were three administrators, eight school counselors, one social worker, one elementary school teacher, one behaviorist, and one school psychologist. Within those identified as District Anti-Bullying Coordinators there were four administrators and one school counselor.

Focus group procedures as identified in Appendix B were as follows: “The purpose for our focus group is to gather your thoughts and perceptions on a self-created prescribed intervention that focuses on general education students from fifth through eighth grade that are exhibiting at-risk social behaviors such as bullying, harassment, and intimidation. The results of the data you provide for us today will be used for the sole purpose of completing my doctoral studies at Seton Hall University and to modify and improve upon the current intervention, which you have been provided upon entry and which were emailed to you by Mrs. Trombly (Co-Moderator as approved and certified through the Seton Hall IRB Process) two weeks prior to today’s gathering. We will read through and become familiar with this intervention together for those who have not had a chance to review prior to today’s focus group. I encourage that, as Mrs. Trombly reads through the intervention aloud, you follow along (I requested that Mrs. Trombly read the intervention so the participants in the study did not affiliate too close a connection with me, as the author of the study, which may soften the intended feedback needed). Since there will be no questions permitted at this time, it may prove beneficial for you to make notes that you can reflect upon during the questions portion of our morning/afternoon.

In further review, it was a conscious decision not to review the theoretical framework of social and emotional learning prior to, during, or after. The justification for this intended omission was twofold. First, most School Specialists who tend to be school counselors, behaviorists, social workers, school psychologists, school coordinators and school administrators tend to have an extensive background in the core competencies of social and emotional learning; even if each of the participants in the study had no formal exposure to the core competencies, many of the participants, due to their position

had an entry level and fundamental base of the theoretical framework as evident in the plethora of mandated programs and processes they were charged with implementing within their school or district communities. Secondly, it was a judgment that a formal presentation on the five core competencies of social and emotional learning could potentially skew the currently formed opinions of the participants and, as a result, alter the data collection process, as the intent was to gather the common understanding and levels of implementation amongst participants.

### **Data Collection**

This dissertation sought to uncover to what extent Burlington County District Coordinators and School Specialists, as defined by the 2011 New Jersey Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act, deem a self-created prescribed mentoring intervention founded within the theoretical framework of social and emotional learning (SEL) advantageous in their everyday duties to negate at-risk social behaviors, including bullying, in students from fifth to eighth grade? The purpose of this study was to assist with the first objective of the Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act, to prevent instances of harassment, intimidation, and bullying by receiving specific feedback from District Coordinators and individual School Specialists. Furthermore, the objectives of the study were to unveil Coordinators' and Specialists' perceptions of an intervention in regard to the pros and cons of the intervention, the intervention's developmental appropriateness for general education students from fifth to eighth grade, to determine how the prescribed intervention aligns with current district or school initiatives, and to what extent the participants would consider using the intervention in their daily efforts to negate at-risk social behaviors including bullying? The aforementioned research questions, in support of the problem

statement, were designed not only to obtain a better understanding of the pros and cons of the intervention but to further explore with equal validity the language and complexity in relation to fifth through eighth grade students pertaining to the experiences of School Specialists and District Coordinators, what programs were currently being adopted by each school or district to meet the mandates of ABRA to negate instances of harassment, intimidation, or bullying, and identify how likely the Specialist and Coordinator would be to use the intervention, not in perspective of perceived and identified pros and cons, but rather as congruent to the programs and processes already being utilized within each school or district community. It is noteworthy to depict that the intent of this study was not to embark on a traditional “outcome-oriented” evaluation of a program that has been previously implemented, but rather to act as an assessment by participant-experts (School Specialists and District Coordinators) of the potential content validity of an intervention that is being proposed and asked to be considered but not yet implemented.

The construct of the focus groups allowed for the sessions to be audio recorded and videotaped as previously approved by the Seton Hall International Review Board in June 2015. The most common method of tape recording offers a database for analysis (Merriam, 2009, p. 110). All of the responses were transcribed and coded; during the focus groups additional data were collected in the form of written field notes provided by the moderator and assistant moderator. Identifying information was noted as to when, where, and with whom the focus groups were conducted (Merriam, 2009, p. 110). The focus groups were conducted in a mutually convenient location in order to ensure that participants were at ease to speak honestly. Only Danielle participated in a focus group that was held within the district with which she was affiliated, by her own choice as

motivated by convenience. In order to gather the relevant data to support potential use of the proposed intervention, it was imperative to understand the current approach to implementations and processes associated with individual districts and schools, which would lead to discussion pertaining to all facets of the learning community. Due to the attempt to solicit an honest critique needed to acquire relevant data regarding each individual's experiences and perspectives pertaining to his or her district or school, it was agreed that pseudonyms would be used to ensure the anonymity of each participant.

The design of this study is a cross-sectional qualitative design, as it was completed within one year and from each focus group within one point in time. The questioning process within the focus groups was semi-structured, which was specific enough to guide the focus group towards pertinent areas of discovery, yet flexible enough to allow participants to build off other participants' responses and offer related insight that may not have been accounted for within a specific question. Thus the questioning guide contained 17 specific questions that were asked within the context of an approximate two-hour focus group (Appendix C). The construct of this process included open-ended questions that were to be followed up by probes as well as additional requests for information by the researcher in order to meet the requirements and support the validity of the study.

The semi-structured focus groups were asked specific questions in regards to the thoughts, feelings, and perceptions of the Burlington County School Specialists and District Coordinators in regard to an introduced intervention, but room was left for additional information to be added that the participants might feel to be relevant to the

topic at hand or to support a key thought or idea which was previously shared by other participating members.

In order to develop inferences and models, all transcripts were coded, and categories were established through their relevance to the problem statement and research questions that had been developed. Codes were exhaustive and complete, mutually exclusive, desensitizing so as to help the reader understand the data (Marriam, 2009, pp. 183-187). As many codes as were necessary were utilized to answer the research questions and to gain a comprehensive understanding of the concept or phenomenon that was being portrayed. In this fashion, some categories stood out in their uniqueness and revealed areas of inquiry otherwise not recognized or considered. Coding in this manner provided a unique leverage to the researcher in order to understand the relationship between the focus group outcomes and participant input.

When coding and reporting data, efforts were made to determine what findings were most relevant to report; the need for the researcher to recognize patterns or themes drove the data that was reported. The researcher searched the transcript text for recurring words or phrases. This required analysis of a volume of qualitative materials as transcribed within the context of field notes and individual focus groups and identification of core consistencies and meanings (Merriam, 2009, pp. 189-191) in order to address the research questions as illustrated in Appendix D.

The research questions sought to uncover data relevant to the perceptions of Burlington County District Coordinators and School Specialists in response to a proposed self-created intervention founded in the theoretical framework of social and emotional learning as relevant to general education students from fifth to eighth grade and as

viewed within the context of their individual initiatives and efforts within their districts or schools.

### **Data Analysis**

One of the major challenges to conducting qualitative research is the understanding that not one method is entirely congruent with each individual study; therefore, the process of gathering essential data from determined focus groups did not follow one specific approach, but rather was informed by multiple approaches. This hybrid of data collection and organization of data allowed the researcher to consider all pertinent information as relevant to each research question, while remaining consistent with proven methodologies and sound direction as outlined in best practice as described below. To this end, thematic analysis, the most common form of qualitative research analysis, was used. This process emphasized pinpointing, examining, and recording patterns or themes within data (Miles, 1994). Themes are patterns across data sets that are important to the description of a phenomenon (the potential effectiveness of the prescribed intervention as considered in Burlington County Districts and Schools as founded by Coordinators and Specialists) and are associated with specific research question (the questions that support the gathering of data). The themes become the categories for analysis. Thematic analysis is performed through the process of coding in six phases to create established, meaningful patterns. These phases are familiarization with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes among codes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report (Miles, 1994).

During further exploration, it was also relevant to consider that thematic analysis is also related to phenomenology in that it focuses on the human experience subjectively,



as perceptions of Coordinators and Specialists of the intervention were in direct relation to each individual participant's experience and may vary from district to district, school to school. In contrast, it became apparent that deductive approaches are theory-driven and should also be considered. Marshall and Rossman (2006, p. 159) visualize these categories as "buckets or baskets into which segments are placed," as cited in Merriam (2009, p. 182). Establishing code categories followed guidance offered by Merriam (2009) in order to establish an accurate reflection of the input of study participants within the focus groups.

These guidelines included that code categories were responsive to the purpose of the research and helped answer the research questions. They were exhaustive of all the data that related to each topic and then comprised the contents of each category. The codes were mutually exclusive, a piece of data fitting into only one category. It was noteworthy that codes were sensitized so an outsider could read the categories and gain some sense of their nature. Furthermore, the categories were conceptually congruent: the same level of abstraction characterized all categories at the same level (Merriam, 2009, pp. 185-186).

Further considerations during the process of data analysis included making inferences, developing models, and generating theory as it relates to the areas of examining a proposed intervention and developing perceptions of the content in relation to individual experiences. Theorizing is a step toward developing a theory that explains some aspect of practice and allows a researcher to draw inferences about future activity (Merriam, 2009, p. 188) such as consideration of the proposed intervention. Theorizing

is defined as “the cognitive process of discovering or manipulating abstract categories and the relationship among those categories (Lecompte, Preissle, & Tesch, 1993, p. 239).

### **Coding**

As stated, through the consent of Seton Hall’s International Review Board in June of 2013, the construct of the focus groups allowed for the sessions to be audio and video recorded. The most common method of tape recording offers a database for analysis (Merriam, 2009, p. 110). Ultimately, data collection resulted in 112 typed pages of transcribed text that recapped verbatim the four two-hour focus groups as well as the extensive field notes taken by the moderator and co-moderator during each session. The original data collected from the focus groups, including the extensive notes taken during each four-hour session, were sent out to a transcriptionist in the capacity of the original audio recording and in the form of hand-written notes. Upon the return of a completely transcribed rendition of each of the focus groups, there were five statements from participants that were identified by the transcriptionist as “inaudible.” The portions of the transcripts identified as “inaudible” were cross-referenced with the video recordings of each of the four focus groups; as a result, each of the five areas of discrepancies were identified verbatim as verified by the video recordings.

After all discrepancies had been satisfied, the coding process began with the initial phase of open coding. I reviewed the four focus groups’ transcripts line by line, extracting and documenting the participants’ statements, including all thoughts, ideas, and comments presented during the focus group. Each statement was designated a category, developed from the underlying concept described in each individual statement. Originally, the participant’s name and focus group remained linked to each statement in

order to view the assortment of focus groups and participants after coding, and to determine which themes were found as relevant across multiple focus groups. Through this process I paid particular attention to repetitions, similarities, differences, and transitions that were evident in the focus group transcripts (Ryan & Bernard, 2007). Once each statement was assigned an appropriate category, the relationships and similarities between each individual concept were evident, and I consolidated over 50 categories into 12 coded themes: CASEL, logistics, advantages, mentoring, identifying, parent involvement, recommendations, implementation, concerns, grade level, SECD, and punitive philosophy. After further review, it became evident that several statements contained concepts within multiple codes; therefore, I further disaggregated the data with the intent to dissect each statement further into its simplest form by identifying the essence or its original meaning. Identifying the core concept depicted allowed me to redistribute each selection of data into a more applicable code. This process involved several rounds of modifications, separating, and reassigning the data by code, ensuring the best results for code assignments. My aim in the second pass was to “chunk” the data using “descriptive codes” with very little interpretation so that I could reach more manageable subsets of data for interpretative analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Once all related statements were grouped by code, I still found commonalities across concepts and further reduced the twelve identified codes to nine, which included CASEL, logistics, mentoring, identifying, recommendations, concerns, grade level, SECD, and punitive philosophy. This qualitative data reproduction and sense-making effort analyzed a volume of qualitative materials and attempted to identify core consistencies and meanings (Merriam, 2009, pp. 189-191) in order to address the research questions.

In further analysis of the codes and concepts within each, I aligned each coded group with the corresponding Research Question in which the statements were linked. Since the focus group questions were developed to substantiate discussions as aligned with the four research questions, I referred to the auditory tapes in order to confirm the authenticity of each statement and to ensure the statements were congruent within the intended diction of each participant. The coded themes best identified with Research Question 1 were CASEL, logistics, and mentoring, as they depicted several pros to the intervention, while concerns and recommendations included several cons to the intervention. Research Question 2 aligned with the codes of grade level and identifying participants. Research Question 3 aligned with codes SECD and punitive philosophy. Last, Research Question 4 aligned with several concepts across codes but primarily in recommendations and mentoring. Once the concepts and codes were aligned by Research Question, the data continued to evolve into further descriptive themes and subcategories. The final themes and sub themes are depicted by the research questions in Chapter IV and outlined in Appendix E.

### **Validity**

Prior to conducting the actual study, a mock focus group was conducted during my last District Specialist meeting in Florence, New Jersey, on Wednesday, March 20, 2013, which included myself as the moderator and the three District Specialists in preparation for the actual focus groups and to ensure congruent future validity of the selected questions in regard to relevancy, cohesiveness, and fluency. Furthermore, as a way to continue to prepare for the actual study, I held a second mock focus group September 20, 2013, in Spotswood, Middlesex County, New Jersey, during my first

meeting with School Specialists as the newly appointed District Coordinator. Included in the mock focus group in Spotswood were the superintendent of schools, Specialists from all three district buildings, and the former 2012-2013 District Coordinator. The purpose of the second mock focus group was to assist with a better alignment on the predetermined questions as related to the research questions and to establish a comfortable environment in asking additional questions of clarification, which was not done to a level of expertise during the first mock focus group. To that extent, Merriam (2009) reported that although qualitative researchers can never capture an objective truth or reality, there are a number of strategies that will guide the qualitative research to increase the credibility of findings (p. 215).

From the conception of the study, it was a conscious effort to avoid threats to validity as I gathered, analyzed, and interpreted data in ways consistent with trying to understand the actual perceptions of the participants as derived from the proposed intervention with as little interference from my own biases and perceptions, specifically as the creator of the intervention, as possible. To this end, I believe I was successful through implementing a process that focused on research design and execution, such as early and ongoing data analysis, dynamic coding, and testing plausibility of data display inferences while keeping in mind the purpose of the study as relevant to the larger data set; this process allowed me to stay focused on understanding the perceptions (etic), rather than implementing potential bias to the study by connecting the data in a way that supported my own conclusions and understandings (emic).

Through this method I worked to achieve a high level of both descriptive and interpretative validity within the data as provided by District Coordinators and School

Specialists (Maxwell, 1992). Therefore, by ensuring the accuracy of the participants' perceptions and preserving the context in which their perceptions were shaped, I am confident that my interpretations of the data, derived from participants' responses, accurately depict their perception of the proposed intervention in a reasonably accurate manner. Still, in my efforts to "make conceptual/theoretical coherence," as Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest, I am ultimately aware the findings presented in the following two chapters (Chapter IV & Chapter V) have a "conceptual analogue," and therefore the interpretations of the data are the product of my rational interpretations based upon my own experiences with students from Grades 5 through 8 and are merged with my own understandings of what is most effective in regard to social and emotional learning and the intended purpose and desired effectiveness of the intervention. Therefore, it is reasonable to consider that from a postmodernist perspective (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Charmaz, 2006, Creswell, 2009; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Guba and Lincoln, 1994) I, like my research participants, interpret context and perceptions of others "from a certain position" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 21).

When exploring reliability, Merriam (2009, p. 222) explains as follows:

Because what is being studied in the social world is assumed to be in flux, multifaceted, and highly contextual, because information gathered is a function of who gives it and how skilled the researcher is at getting it, and because the emergent design of qualitative study precludes a priori controls, achieving reliability in the traditional sense is not only fanciful but impossible.

Based on the aforementioned statement, it can be inferred that replication of a qualitative study is impossible and will not produce the same findings. Although all

qualitative research may lack reliability in its purest form, the study if replicated, would demonstrate the validity of my efforts as supported by the study design and is believed to produce outcomes that can be applied and will demonstrate relevance in the form of overlapping themes as prevalent in the essence of District Coordinator's and School Specialist's daily efforts in providing a positive school culture and climate and meeting the social and emotional needs of at-risk students. To ensure further validity, questions within the focus groups were constructed to be aligned with and in support of the research questions that supported the study (see Appendix D).

### **Delimitations**

In considering the 104 potential participants throughout Burlington County, this study was limited to only the 20 Coordinators and Specialists who were willing to participate. Also, despite the intended design to construct the focus groups based upon the participation of both District Coordinators and School Specialists, the participants represented a disproportionate representation of School Specialists with a total of 15 in comparison to only five Coordinators. Since there are 64 total Specialists in Burlington County in comparison to only 40 Coordinators, the total number of actual participants is disproportionate in regard to the county's ratio. Furthermore, the intention of the study was to examine the proposed intervention through the lenses of District Coordinators and School Specialists to improve upon the intervention for further consideration to implementation. Therefore, the results of the study are based upon the perceptions of Coordinators and Specialists and may not have any real influence on the future effectiveness of the intervention on students. Last, the focus groups, for the sake of information collection, were heterogeneous in design to include both School Specialists

and Anti-Bullying Coordinators, and did not consider if perceptions of the two unique positions would be congruent or if there would be obvious distinctions observed through the data.

### **Summary**

The purpose of Chapter III was to identify the components of the research methodologies in which the study was founded. This discovery depicted descriptors of the research design, the population being examined, the limitations and delimitations associated with the study, and the process of data collection and how it led to a more in-depth analysis than explored in the preceding chapter.



## **CHAPTER IV**

### **DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS**

#### **Introduction**

Prior to the actual implementation of a self-created intervention intended to negate at-risk social behaviors with students who fell under my domain, it was a priority to determine how to make the self-created intervention the most advantageous resource for all students in Grades 5 through 8, who were not responding to traditional programs or whole school initiatives meant to negate incidences of harassment, intimidation, and bullying. As I became principal in Middlesex County, it was deemed imperative and beneficial to consider the feedback of my former colleagues to ensure all elements of the intervention were being considered for effectiveness through the perspective and experiences of those who shared in the same burden of addressing similar concerns with students. The intended design of this study was to maximize the potential of the proposed intervention (Appendix B) prior to implementation with students. To accomplish this task, it was the intent of this study to gather information from District Coordinators and School Specialists from a region with consistent parallels reflective of New Jersey as a whole (Burlington County) in regard to demographics.

The analysis in this chapter focuses on the data obtained within four independent focus groups, and from 20 total participants from schools and districts found in Burlington County, New Jersey. Of these 20 participants, 15 were identified as Anti-Bullying Specialists and five were identified as Anti-Bullying Coordinators. Within those identified as School Anti-Bullying Specialist there were three administrators, eight school counselors, one social worker, one elementary school teacher, one behaviorist, and one school psychologist. Within those identified as District Anti-Bullying Coordinators, there were four administrators and one school counselor. It was a conscious decision to have both District Coordinators and School Specialists participate within the same focus groups. Although the function of each position is slightly different, the overall objective remains the same in creating a positive school culture and climate conducive for every child to learn; the goal for this heterogeneous grouping was to obtain feedback pertaining to a proposed self-created intervention as it related to the everyday duties and responsibilities of preventing and responding to incidences of bullying as mandated by the Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act of 2011.

With the new state mandate many demands were placed on prevention, through a systematic and measurable approach, addressing incidents of bullying. District Coordinators and School Specialists around New Jersey have been scrambling to try to find a process that addresses the individual needs of repeat harassment, intimidation, and bullying (HIB) offenders, while being limited by time, resources, and continued demands of standardized testing and other mandates. These factors, along with limited experience and exposure to social and emotional character development implementation, has stagnated the ideological premise of the Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act of 2011.

The design and practicality of the proposed self-designed intervention was intended to mesh with the research-proven theoretical framework of social and emotional learning as delivered through a unique and scripted mentoring process. The intended attributes of the intervention were to be practical, cost-effective, easy to implement, time effective, and most of all beneficial to negating at-risk social behaviors, including bullying. Prior to the actual implementation of the intervention to students, it was a priority to determine how to make the self-created intervention the most advantageous resource for students in Grades 5 through 8, the ages identified through research as the most affected by bullying, who were exhibiting at-risk social behaviors, including bullying. It was deemed imperative to consider the feedback of my colleagues. It was the intended design of this study, in an attempt to maximize the potential of the proposed and self-designed intervention in the days ahead and before implementing the intervention with students, to gather information from District Coordinators and School Specialists outside of my district and from a region with consistent parallels reflective of New Jersey as a whole, especially within in the context of demographics.

**Research Question 1:** What are the pros and cons of the prescribed interventions as indicated by the Burlington County District Coordinators and School Specialists?

### **Data Analysis**

Common themes identified by the Burlington County District Coordinators and School Specialists regarding the pros of the prescribed intervention were categorized by the social and emotional learning core competencies, the benefits of mentoring, and the functionality of the intervention. Social and emotional learning core competencies is

defined by CASEL as five interrelated sets of cognitive, effective, and behavioral competencies:

- **Self-awareness:** The ability to accurately recognize one's emotions and thoughts and their influence on behavior. This includes accurately assessing one's strengths and limitations and possessing a well-grounded sense of confidence and optimism.
- **Self-management:** The ability to regulate one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations. This includes managing stress, controlling impulses, motivating one-self, and setting and working toward achieving personal and academic goals.
- **Social awareness:** The ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others from diverse backgrounds and cultures, to understand social and ethical norms for behavior, and to recognize family, school, and community resources and supports.
- **Relationship skills:** The ability to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships with diverse individuals and groups. This includes communicating clearly, listening actively, cooperating, resisting inappropriate social pressure, negotiating conflict constructively, and seeking and offering help when needed.
- **Responsible decision-making:** The ability to make constructive and respectful choices about personal behavior and social interactions based on consideration of ethical standards, safety concerns, social norms, the realistic

evaluation of consequences of various actions, and the well-being of self and others.

### **The Social and Emotional Learning Core Competencies**

The social and emotional learning core competencies served as the theoretical framework to the design of the intervention being considered. The desired goal of the intervention was to introduce the social and emotional learning core competencies in a manner in which students with at-risk social behaviors, including acts of harassment, intimidation, and bullying, can understand, internalize, and put to action in an examination of past and future scenarios as related to success as determined by more desirable outcomes. Each part of the intervention is intended to assist children to reach a point of self-actualization within the five aforementioned competencies. The theme of social and emotional learning core competencies represents each response indicating a positive attitude towards one or more of the competencies including self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making; all five core competencies are identified together, as they represent the foundation and concept of social and emotional learning. However, for the purpose of reporting the findings and further data analysis, each of the five categories that collectively make up social and emotional learning are reported out individually (see Figure 1).



*Figure 1.* Social and emotional learning core competencies (Image from CASEL, 2016).

### **Pros - Social and Emotional Learning Core Competencies**

The themes identified by participating Burlington County District Coordinators and School Specialists relating to the pros of the social and emotional learning core competencies, as identified as the theoretical framework of the intervention and as indicated in Figure 1, were supported across all four focus groups, by 17 of 20 participants, within the context of 37 statements. Starting with self-awareness, the data included 11 statements, across all four focus groups, as represented by eight of the 20 participants. Participants of the study spoke to the benefit of students becoming more self-aware. Amanda stated, “I think that is very instrumental in helping students become more aware of themselves.” David added, “I think a lot of times students do not understand; they are not self-aware,” supported by Denise who stated, “But definitely I like that part of your intervention because it’s a big part, knowing how you feel.” Other

subjects within the study also emphasized the importance of providing students an opportunity to explore their emotions. Under further disaggregation of the data, there seemed to be a close association made by the subjects of the study from self-awareness to self-management, where it was noted to be four statements that were found across two of the four focus groups by four of the 20 participants.

The idea is that students need to progress within self-management as it is related to an individual's response to a situation in relationship to one's feelings and actions. Data supporting this claim were derived from Amanda who stated, "I think that it would help them go further in life, developing those basic skills socially and emotionally," supported further by Danielle who stated, "I think it would be helpful for some of these kids because they just are so impulsive that they don't stop and think enough." Social awareness was also seen as a positive attribute of the intervention as depicted by the subjects within six statements, across all four focus groups, by five of the 20 participants; a common theme derived during the exploration of social awareness was the necessity of students to realize how their individual actions affect not only themselves but those around them. Amanda supported this notion by noting, "learning how to relate to others, being sensitive to the needs of others—I think all of that is a great foundation that can be established for helping them become better people." Chloe also supported the need for students to be accountable for actions towards others by stating, ". . . and then there's going to be some that are—a light bulb flips on and you're like wow, I really hurt someone's feelings."

In regard to relationship skills, District Coordinators and School Specialists of Burlington County identified five statements across three of the four focus groups as communicated by four of the 20 participants. Within in the context of the data it was recognized that participants did not focus on how the proposed intervention could instill relationship skills into potential participating students, but rather how the true benefit of instilling relationship skills was developed from the modeling and connection that the process provided through a proposed mentor; therefore, it was suggested that the true benefit of instilling relationship skills to potential participants of the intervention did not come from the intervention itself, but instead through the actual implementation of the intervention through a positive role model fulfilling the position of a mentor. We see this concept revealed by Beth, who stated, “I think that sometimes that makes working through a process that [much] easier for a child when they see you as another human being and not as someone who is in a position of power or frightening to be around.” This concept was also supported by David who stated, “So I think having this conversation educates them and helps them.” Also, it is important to consider that students who lack relationship skills are the ones who may benefit the most. Candice stated, “It’s that personal relationship that needier students do jump on,” and “. . . a nice way to say let me help you not do this anymore instead of you’re a problem and how are we going to deal with it?”

Finally, the participants of this study identified a positive focus of the intervention as responsible decision-making; this was made evident within 11 statements across three of the four focus groups as made by six of the 20 participants. Participants identified the process within the proposed intervention that allowed students to identify what decision



or thought process transpired within a particular incident leading to negative outcomes and how, through more responsible decision-making, future results within a similar situation could lead to a more desirable outcome. The essence of this notion was captured by Becky who stated, “But for our purpose it’s just looking at what happened and what can we do next time to make it better?” and “. . . Assists with the idea of I think you’ll be happier when you find a better approach.” Danielle added, “I like responsible decision-making; how do I decide to do this or not do that?” Daniel added, “I think most can [understand] when you prompt them and walk them through that they eventually realize whatever their actions were it probably wasn’t the best choice.” Finally, Candice captured the essence of the Socratic design of the intervention when she stated, “Guiding them on ‘What do you think?’”

### **Pros - Benefits of Mentoring**

Another theme reported as a pro of the intervention by participating School Specialists and District Coordinators was coded as *benefits of mentoring*. For the purpose of this study, mentoring, or being a mentor, refers to a relationship between an individual with experience (mentor) and an individual with less experience (mentee) manifested through advisement, sponsorship, or friendship (Levinson, 1980; O’Neil, 1981). The purpose of the mentoring model within the design of the intervention is to form a rapport with students that guides them towards the competencies of social and emotional learning, the theoretical framework and objective of the intervention, while implying the Socratic method of questioning, which focuses on moral education on how one ought to

live (The Socratic method, 2003), and the principles of Carl Rogers' Client Centered Therapy, where the therapist creates an atmosphere in which clients, or in this case children, can communicate their feelings with the certainty that they are being understood rather than judged ("Carl Rogers' Client Centered Therapy, 2006).

The findings that support the benefits of mentoring were communicated across all four focus groups, addressed by 13 of 20 participants, within the context of 53 responses. In a further analysis of these 53 responses, it became apparent that there were four major themes that collectively supported the benefits of mentoring. The first theme consists of the benefits of a trusting relationship with a mentor as depicted within four statements from one focus group and from three different participants. The essence of the trust that must exist between mentor and mentee is captured within Beth's response, "A lot of children that need this want to talk, and once you break that barrier, they want to and can get through the heart of the problem . . . you're making sure that the line of communication is open and it's a trusting line but it's also an honest line of communication." This is also supported by Barbara, who stated, "The most important is communication and the relationship and the trust. I think those are the important things."

The next theme supporting the benefits of mentoring was having an unbiased person that a student could turn to for assistance; this notion was found in five statements, by four people, across three of the four focus groups. In support of the importance of having an unbiased person to turn to, Candice stated, "I think that one-to-one person that recognized something about them and is there to help them and not judge them." While Diane added, "A third party, who's completely objective and the child knows is completely objective they're going to listen to." Becky truly captured the deliberate

incorporation of Carl Rogers' Client Centered Therapy, where the therapist creates an atmosphere in which clients, or in this case children, can communicate their feelings with the certainty that they are being understood rather than judged (Carl Rogers' Client Centered Therapy, 2006) which cultivated the value of not being judged by clearly stating, "There's no judgment here."

The third theme in support of the benefits of mentoring is the significance of building a rapport with students, which was identified in 19 statements, across all four focus groups, as stated by eight participants. Demonstrating the importance of building a strong rapport with students in the context of mentoring is found within Ashley's statement, "I would say a rapport with a student stands out to me the most." In addition, Adam states, "I think it's the best way to connect with a kid who's having social emotional problems."

Finally, the largest body of evidence that supports the benefits of mentoring is the fourth theme, students knowing that someone cares about them at school, and sometimes in the absence of a parent(s)/guardian(s). This is found evident within 25 statements, across all four focus groups, by nine of the 20 participants. Amanda stated, "[The mentoring process] can supplement parental support that is not there." This was also supported by Aaron's statement, "Mentoring sends the message, 'I know somebody at this school cares about me.'" And Chloe stated, "I think it is so important for these kids to know that they do have somebody in their corner." All 25 of the statements found to support the importance that someone cares as a benefit of the mentoring process were very similar in nature. Britany stated, "I agree at-risk students need that special person

who cares about how they feel,” and David stated, “It shows that one, you care about them.”

Last, we can identify Candice and Dana’s feelings towards the importance of having students know they have someone that cares about them and how mentoring acts as a vehicle to transport this message to students in their statements. Candice stated, “A great thing to do, because again you are, you know, when you work one-on-one with the student, it gives them the feeling that someone cares about them; and whatever’s happening, you want to help them.” Dana confirmed, “I care because someone may not be caring at home.”

### **Pros - The Functionality of the Intervention**

The final theme identified within the study to support the pros of the prescribed intervention as indicated by the Burlington County District Coordinators and School Specialists was coded as *the functionality of the intervention* and identified across all four focus groups, by 13 of the 20 total participants, within the context of 40 statements. The findings within the functionality of the intervention included support of the intervention being time-effective, logical and sequential, consistent, simple enough for children to understand, comprehensive, and relevant to the script. In regard to time-effectiveness, Aaron states, “I like each meeting’s not supposed to take an hour. It’s supposed to be like a check-in.” In regard to the intervention being logical and sequential, Barbara stated, “[the intervention] Step by step by step,” and Brooke stated, “There were different steps to it, and that way at least you don’t have to fix everything in one day, but that it’s over time, from the beginning to the end.” In regard to consistency, Beth stated, “I liked that all the expectations were laid out from the start and that day one, the introduction, the

student that you were working with knew from the start everything that was going to be expected of him or her from the time this intervention started. I agree also, I think it flows very well.” And Ashley stated, “[I like how] It recaps on previous sessions.”

When dealing with Grade 5 and even up to Grade 8, the simpler something remains, the more likely educators are to have the student internalize and utilize the more meaningful message. Charles stated, “Simplicity of intervention stands out as most important. It is a very simple down to earth reasonable thing that a school can try to implement and [can] work well.” David supported the comprehensiveness of the intervention when he stated, “I like it, I think it’s [the intervention] very comprehensive. The intervention peels layers back to dig deep, builds upon each day.” In regard to the younger students, Dakota stated, “I am in a third to fifth grade building, and I like the overall tone and the flow and how you sequenced different activities for different days.” And in regard to the relevance of the script found within the intervention, Daniel said, “One thing I can say right off the bat is the benefit of a consistent script for all the players in the district.”

In contrast to the pros acknowledged by the participants of each focus group, there were also common themes identified by the Burlington County District Coordinators and School Specialists regarding the cons of the prescribed intervention. The cons of the intervention are categorized as *projected obstacles of implementation and identified shortcomings of the intervention*.

### **Cons - Projected Obstacles of Implementation**

The findings of the focus groups depicted projected concerns of District Coordinators and School Specialists regarding the *projected obstacles of implementation*

within the context of the learning community as defined as students, staff, and parents. Obstacles of implementation are described as “projected” because the School Specialists or District Coordinators can only use their experiences to predict problems or concerns of implementation regarding parents and students.

The data supporting projected obstacles of implementation were captured across all four focus groups, as identified by 18 of 20 participants, as represented in 111 statements. Of these 111 statements, 33 statements articulated students’ projected obstacles of implementation, 60 statements supported the staffs’ projected obstacles of implementation, and 18 projected the parents’ projected obstacles of implementation. Although findings for students, staff, and parents were considered as one finding (learning community), to support the cons of the intervention they were reported out separately to continue to foster further analysis and consideration in soliciting feedback towards an intervention that is intended to appease all members of the learning community.

Projected student obstacles were captured within the context of 33 statements, found within three of the four focus groups, as spoken by ten of the 20 total participants. The prominent concerns our District Coordinators and School Specialists provided for projected student obstacles were non-compliance, sometimes in the form of resistance or even lying, the lack of trust or the innate reaction to shy away, and the inability for a student to be rehabilitated. The concern of non-compliance or resistance is mentioned by seven of the 20 volunteers including Barbara who stated, “Wondering if any student would just shut down and kind of refuse to even give you a little bit to work with.” Similarly, Candice stated, “Children don’t talk. Middle school years; you’re lucky if you

get two sentences out of the kid,” “I think there’s going to be some that will say ‘I didn’t do anything wrong,’” in regard to students lying; and Candice stated, “Children do lie.”

Secondly, the lack of trust or the innate reaction to shy away was seen within eight statements, across three of the four focus groups, as represented by four of the 20 participants. Evidence to support projected student obstacles in regards to lack of trust or the innate reaction to shy away was identified by Britany who stated, “There’s some kids that have had a lot of hardships in their life and I think that they’ve kind of learned not to trust people or not to trust their feelings because maybe they’ve gotten in trouble if they’re impulsive. They second-guess themselves and may shy away from it [the intervention]”; Britany also suggested, “It depends on the hardship in their lives, trust issues, to see how students would respond.” Also pertaining to trust, Barbara stated, “Ultimately [it] depends on the student. Some are very willing to talk and build that trust and that relationship and some are not.”

Last, there is evidence that supports a projected student obstacle would be the inability to be rehabilitated, as seen in eight statements, across two of the four focus groups, spoken by four of 20 participants. Evidence of such considerations derive from Courtney who stated, “There is a certain percentage of students who may not be remediated in intervention.” Also, Becky proposed, “You would encounter students who would not respond to the intervention.” Candice stated, “At home this is what they see; this is what’s reinforced; especially in bullying, it comes down to the parents and how these children are raised.”

Within the context of projected staff obstacles pertaining to implementation of the prescribed intervention, there are 58 statements, found across all four focus groups, as

indicated by 16 of the 20 participants. Within the context of projected staff obstacles, the participants touched upon their concerns of confidentiality, the need for staff training, time restrictions, and staff resistance. Confidentiality was represented in four statements, from three different individuals. Britany, Charles, and Barbara, with Britany and Barbara being from the same focus group, provided convincing data that emphasized the common theme of confidentiality when allowing parents to serve as mentors. Britany stated, “The law of confidentiality could be an obstacle that would need to be further addressed. Charles stated, “Confidentiality is a big issue,” and Barbara noted, “I think there might be question of legalities and confidentiality.”

Secondly, there are five statements that allude to the need of training or additional training for staff members, represented in three of the four focus groups, by four different participants. Aaron stated, “[A potential concern could be that teachers express] that they don’t feel like I’m trained to deal with this.” Diane stated, “[Without training on how to implement the intervention] I think sometimes we get lost in words and concepts and we lose sight of the child.” The third and most prevalent projected concern amongst participants is time, as 24 of the 60 comments alluded to restrictions on time or the perceived inability to fit the intervention into the demands of the workday. The concern of time was seen across all four focus groups and was expressed by 12 of the 20 participants, including Charles, who stated, “I think one of the challenges of this is finding the ten-day window to meet for 15-20 minutes on consecutive days.” Similarly, Dana stated, “Time to fit in the intervention could be an obstacle.” Additionally, Dakota stated, “They [teachers] would say they didn’t have time.” In support of time to



implement during the contractual hours Barbara stated, “Time might be a problem,” and Becky stated, “Scheduling could be a difficult challenge.”

Last, several participants provided projected examples to staff resistance or staff’s inability to be effective within the constraints of the intervention in the form of 25 statements, across all four focus groups, as identified by 11 of the 20 participants. Beth stated that there may be pushback from teachers whose students are pulled from their class to receive the intervention, “Resistance from the teachers, sometimes the consistently pulling a child out, even though it’s for his or her best interest, sometimes some people are not as open and as welcoming to have the disruption in their day.” Charles stated that at least 20% of his teachers would have concerns with implementation. “Those other 10% may not have anything to do with it, and another 10% would want some kind of compensation for it.” Dakota demonstrated the teachers’ concerns of fulfilling the mandates of standardized testing, which is now reflected in their evaluation and other mandates when she stated, “My teachers wouldn’t use this, they would say they have to teach.” Danielle stated, “Off the top of my head I would say maybe 30% of the teachers in my school would go along with it,” and Denise stated, “I don’t think they would do it because this is not something they’re comfortable with.”

Within the context of projected parental obstacles pertaining to implementation of the prescribed intervention, there are 18 statements, found in all four focus groups, from 11 of 20 participants. However, it is vital to understand that there are two projected parental concerns revealed by the data, and they are very different in subject and function. First, six of the 18 comments are directed towards the discussion of the potential concerns of allowing parents to act as volunteers and implement the proposed

intervention. In two of the four focus groups this was a concern as stated by five of the 20 total participants. Britany stated, “I also have some concerns about boundaries and people, their lack of boundaries, getting involved with kids and staff.” Beth stated, “Outside of the school setting, I think there are also unfortunately some people who would take advantage of the situation and maybe not use or commit to the confidentiality,” and Dana stated, “Parent volunteers may have a conflict of interest.” In contrast, the other 12 statements pertaining to parental obstacles are directly linked to the obstacles that may occur when identifying their children as individuals who would benefit from the intervention; these data can be found in three of the four focus groups as presented by six of the 20 participants. Ashley stated, “The type of students I was thinking would benefit from this program might be—you’re going to encounter parents that would be ‘my child doesn’t do anything wrong.’” Candice stated, “[parents would say] my child is not responsible; you are, or parents that come in—I’m not doing that.”

### **Cons - Identified Shortcomings of the Intervention**

Another con to the intervention identified by the Anti-Bullying Coordinators and School Specialists was *identified shortcomings of the intervention*, or concerns that may impede the intended outcome of the intervention. The shortcomings of the intervention depicted by the participants of the study were identified as the lack of follow-up with students after the prescribed ten-day intervention, and the language or verbiage, identified as the uncertainty that the language used in the intervention will be understood by the entire targeted age group: students in Grades 5 through 8. The findings of identified shortcomings of the intervention are prevalent in 70 statements, through all four focus groups, as identified by 17 of 20 participants.

*Follow-up* consisted of 42 responses, across all four focus groups, as represented by 12 of the 20 participants. All cons identified with follow-up derived from the proposed ending of the intervention after the tenth day as procedurally depicted within the criteria of the intervention. All 42 responses felt that an abrupt end to the intervention could have an adverse effect on students and could potentially negate the benefits associated with the intervention; within the context of this immediate concern, some made recommendations as to how to continue the program after the prescribed time of ten days was fulfilled.

Examples that support *Follow-up* as a con to the intervention include Becky's response, "This may be part of it—after the 10 days, either some kind of check-in, like a week later or a month later; or for some students you get out a little more slowly, so meeting every day for 10 days and then every other day and then every other week for students who have come to depend on that support." Chloe recommended an extension of the intervention within commonly used social groups, "Or maybe you could even do it [follow-up] in a small group setting and say oh, introduce everyone. Just like you met with me, she met with me, and so forth, and have them discuss their situations and see how they respond to certain things." Concerned about negating the bond formed between mentor and mentee, Charles stated, "The time you spend with this person, they're going to have a connection with you anyway so I do like the idea of having something formal where you're getting together every two weeks or the 15th or 30th of the month." Congruently, Amanda stated, "Suggest a follow-up piece to intervention so that it occurs all year long," something also supported by Beth, "Not just abruptly ending but maybe phasing it out." As heard throughout, Adam stated, "It needs a long-term component

beyond 10 days." As recommended by Aaron, "I think it may be beneficial for, like, the participants to maybe have a monthly group meeting or some kind of supervision with counselors, coordinators, where they can just talk." As many of our participants are either school counselors or administrators who work very closely with both of these resources, there was much support for Amanda's statement. "Some kind of recommendation to see a psychologist or a counselor to follow up, I think would be important, depending on if the student had a serious issue that the mentor feels they need additional assistance or something they can't handle." In a way to receive feedback from the students to ensure the process met their needs and to continue to develop the intervention Aaron recommended, "Suggestion of having students evaluate the program after intervention." In support of Aaron's statement Brooke stated, "So just following through with the child and the staff and teacher."

*Verbiage* was identified by 28 statements, across all four focus groups, from 13 of 20 participants. The perceived con of verbiage as perceived by the participants was identified within data that depicted concerns of the intervention being fully comprehended by students of all the ages from fifth to eighth grade. Findings that supported *verbiage* as a potential con to the intervention were expressed within Diane's statement, "I think sometimes we get lost in words and concepts and we lose sight of the child." Danielle also stated, "No, I mean I think the language is pretty heavy duty." Charles stated very directly that "younger students may not understand the language of the intervention." Charles' thoughts were confirmed by Aaron, who stated, "I think there's going to be unfamiliar language." As a solution, Brooke suggested, "because the questions that are asked may be difficult for the younger ones to fully understand, so just

trying to bring it down to their level." Courtney recommended, "More visuals with the younger kids." Chloe warned, "Ethics: making sure that they understand the vocab for younger elementary students." Britany recommended differentiation, "You'd either have to scale it down or scale it up, depending on the age, but I think you can probably use it." And Britany's data were supported by Candice's statement, "Maybe the intervention could be modified for the age of the student." Chloe further proposed, "Clips of bullying movies or YouTube videos." Charles urged, "Use at discretion. [Intervention]" While Aaron stated, "If the adult has the flexibility to break from the script but maintain the integrity of the intervention and have the flexibility to substitute words or explain words or summarize [that would be beneficial]."

**Research Question 2:** To what extent do Burlington County District Coordinators and School Specialists find the intervention developmentally appropriate for general education students in Grades 5 through 8?

In an attempt to determine the developmental appropriateness of the intervention for general education students from fifth through eighth grade, as determined by the findings of participating Burlington County District Coordinators and School Specialists, the themes of *identifying eligible students* and *age appropriateness* arose.

### **Identifying Eligible Students**

Within the context of identifying eligible students, this notion supports the definition of an intervention: an academic intervention is a strategy used to teach a new skill, build fluency in a skill, or encourage a child to apply an existing skill to new situations or settings. An intervention can be thought of as "a set of actions that, when taken, have demonstrated ability to change a fixed education trajectory" (Methe & Riley-

Tellman, 2008; p. 37). By definition an intervention is intended to identify and remediate only the students whose current level of understanding of a particular concept or skill is not equivalent to their developmental ability, or determined as inadequate in comparison to the level of function of their classmates or a fixed educational trajectory. Therefore, the intent of this intervention is no different. The purpose of this intervention, reflective of a traditional academic intervention, is not to address the developmental, social, and emotional needs of all general education students from fifth through eighth grade, but instead only to offer support to students who are lacking the skills founded in social and emotional learning core competencies as demonstrated or symptomatic in everyday situations or interactions with their peers.

The category of identifying eligible students is defined by identifying or determining which specific subpopulation of students would benefit from the proposed intervention. The findings supportive of identifying eligible students, includes members from all four focus groups, as expressed by 16 of the 20 participants, within the context of 53 statements. Although there were many different recommendations provided by the participants recommending how to identify potential students for the intervention, the majority of recommendations were derived from three main areas: students with high discipline referrals or recurring instances; special education students found to exhibit these types of at-risk social behaviors; and teacher recommendation and/or input.

Within the subcategory of students with high discipline referrals or recurring instances there were 18 statements, by nine of 20 participants, as found across all four focus groups. In support of this finding, Amanda stated, “Students with high discipline issues could benefit,” while Adam stated, “Repeat offenders would benefit from

intervention.” In regard to participants identifying special education students that were found to exhibit at-risk social behaviors, there were nine statements, across two of the four focus groups, by seven of the 20 participants. Evidence to support this claim was provided by Aaron who stated, “Kids with developmental needs would benefit from this intervention.” Adam stated, “I think it would be especially for special needs students,” and Denise stated, “I feel very strongly that the children that I work with primarily that have behavioral challenges are also identified socially emotionally as having disabilities.”

Finally, there is evidence to acknowledge the participants’ recommendations to gather teacher recommendations and/or solicit input from teachers to identify student participants within the intervention; this sentiment is captured in ten statements, across three of the four focus groups, by seven of the 20 total participants. Supportive statements include Barbara’s, “I think we really do need teacher input.” Chloe suggested, “I think talking to the teachers is a way to help select participants,” and David stated, “I think there needs to be an agreement that the teachers be able to identify these students and communicate with either the school counselor or the office staff.” Also, three people from two focus groups believed it would be beneficial to provide students with the ability to self-identify as stated by Charles, “Student self-selection to identify students for intervention.”

### **Age Appropriateness**

The findings of *age appropriateness*, as identified by the responses of participants in the focus groups, are made with the assumption that grade levels or cognitive abilities of students are not influenced by a potential disability or medical condition. Furthermore, it is to be understood that all recommendations made to support an appropriate age level

are created under the assumption that all potential participants of the intervention would be of general education status, as communicated to all focus group members within the introduction portion of each focus group.

The findings by participating Burlington County District Coordinators and School Specialists in evaluating if the intervention was developmentally appropriate for general education students in Grades 5 through 8 was captured within the theme of age appropriateness. Age appropriateness, for the purpose of further considerations, was disaggregated into three categories: benefiting fifth grade and younger (with the assumption that if the intervention was developmentally appropriate for any of the grades from kindergarten to fourth grade, then it would also be of value for a fifth through eighth grade audience), sixth to eighth grade students only, and seventh grade and higher. The findings of age appropriateness were represented across all four focus groups, by 14 of 20 participants, within the context of 49 statements.

Twenty-seven of the 49 total statements, as represented by ten of 20 participants, as seen throughout all four focus groups supported the finding of benefiting fifth grade and younger is reflected in Chloe, Denise, and Bret's statements, respectively: "I like the fifth grade for the start, just for them understanding the content of it and the ability to then look at themselves"; "But see in our school, I do have fifth graders and they definitely understand, comprehend, you know, give the answers back"; "But definitely say fifth grade." Additionally Beth acknowledged, "For fifth grade and over, I can imagine a lot of those students were very willing sometimes to come and say, 'I'm having a problem; I would like to talk to you about something.'" Courtney stated, "Even maybe to second with some very minor modifications. I think you could take the language [as



is] down to third grade." Candice and Amanda, respectively, believe that the intervention could work even with kindergarteners: "All of the bullying in-services that I've gone to, and the Olweus—they always say it needs to start in kindergarten"; "Kindergarten students would benefit from intervention."

The twelve statements, as represented by six of twenty participants, as evidenced in three focus groups that support the finding of the intervention being developmentally appropriate for students in sixth to eighth grade were identified in two thoughts. Each of the relevant statements either identified participation in the proposed intervention to be appropriate in grades sixth, seventh, or eighth as identified by Denise, "Reading this I think it would be beneficial for sixth, seventh and eighth." or was supported for the use of children over fifth grade as supported by Brooke, "Children over 5th grade would benefit the most, for them to recall and remember everything discussed." All other statements in support of over fifth grade, or for sixth, seventh and eighth grade mirrored the two examples given.

The ten statements, as identified within three of the four focus groups, as stated by four of twenty participants, that support the developmental appropriateness of the intervention for students in seventh grade and higher as indicated by Denise and Ashley respectively, "But I think seventh and eighth definitely"; "I see it being really good for 7th and 8th graders because it is a big transition for them." Many within this category were very steadfast in not using it for sixth or younger and some even saw the intervention conducive for high school students as stated by Danielle, "I can't really picture a sixth grader responding to this language so much."; "I think for seventh through twelfth grade kids its right at their level and I think it would be beneficial for them."

In a further disaggregation of the data, it can be concluded that although twenty-seven statements, as represented by ten of fourteen participants that commented, as seen throughout all four focus groups, support the finding of benefiting fifth grade and younger, the majority of the support came from eight of the identified twelve participants that believed the intervention was developmentally appropriate for general education students below fifth grade, Kindergarten to fourth, and that only four believed it was developmentally appropriate starting at fifth grade. Six of the fourteen participants who commented addressed this question believed the intervention was only developmentally appropriate for grades sixth through eighth (identified middle school years within the context of the study), and four of the participants who commented believed it was developmentally appropriate for identified students to participate in the intervention in seventh grade or older.

Overall, the data suggest ten of the fourteen total participants that responded to questions aligned to the intervention being “developmentally appropriate for general education student in grades five through eight” believed that the intervention was developmentally appropriate for fifth grade and younger. It is also recognized that the same ten participants who demonstrated support for fifth grade and younger, also made supportive comments that expressed support for the intervention being appropriate in Grades 6 through 8 and Grades 7 and up. Of the four that did not believe it was developmentally appropriate for general education students in Grades 5 through 8, three believed it would be appropriate for Grades 6 through 8, and one believed it would only be appropriate for seventh grade and older.

**Research Question 3:** How does the prescribed intervention align with current initiatives that have been adopted by individual schools and districts since the introduction of the Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act (ABRA)?

### **Punitive**

Prior to, and even well after the implementation of New Jersey's Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act of 2011 (ABRA) many District Coordinators and School Specialists reported their school or district's primary response to bullying as being *punitive*, defined amongst the focus groups as assigning punishment or consequences for bullying and other at-risk social behaviors. Coordinators and Specialists described their school's or district's current philosophy as being *punitive*, or the issuing of a punishment such as suspension and other consequences as dictated by their district's policies and their school's code of conduct. This theme was prominent across three of the four focus groups, identified by nine of the 20 participants, as represented by a total of 17 responses, all of which recognized their current or prior (before ABRA) practices to negate bullying as punitive.

Within the common theme or trend of *punitive*, focus group members describe their current or prior efforts to address the concerns of bullying and other at-risk social behaviors as punitive, including Charles who stated, "Students getting suspended or consequences—in upper middle and high school we're pretty punitive," Danielle, Aaron, and Adam similarly stated, respectively, "Current methods are punitive"; "I would say our current model is punitive"; "I would say ours right now is mostly punitive." Aaron added, "There is always a punitive aspect of it . . . I think we could be better, so yes there's going to be a consequence." Daniel confirmed Aaron's view by capturing the

practice of his district, “Current district policy is punitive. Certain behaviors have to be punitive,” and David stated, “Our method is reactionary and punitive.” Adam introduced a fact that administrators in New Jersey deal with on a consistent basis when he stated, “. . . they’re [parents of the victim] not going to want to hear that the intervention was we gave them a mentor, so it has to be punitive.” This challenge to New Jersey Administrators is further developed by Ashley when she stated, “. . . couldn’t really get away with really putting it through without being a punitive aspect. That would be looked down upon.”

### **In Response to ABRA 2011**

After the New Jersey Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act was implemented in 2011, the objective of the law was intended to strengthen the standards and procedures for preventing, reporting, investigating, and responding to incidents of harassment, intimidation, and bullying. In schools across New Jersey, reporting, investigating, and responding to acts of bullying was part of the everyday repertoire in dealing with students’ at-risk social behaviors; however, the new mandate of preventing acts of bullying before they occur created a schism in how schools would approach the New Jersey state-mandated anti-bullying initiative versus how schools would have to approach a process that had become so routine and rehearsed. A common theme or trend across all four focus groups including 26 statements, by 13 of the 20 participants, was how each school or district changed its policies, practices, and beliefs.

The first thing that all school districts have had to adapt to in proceeding with the ABRA 2011 was how to deal with situations that have substantially disrupted the academic process that transpired off school grounds, and for which the school is now

responsible under the guidelines of the law, as depicted by Candice, “We are now legally responsible for cyberbullying; it seems that anything happening out of school is now ours also.” The next change identified by the participants in regard to a contrast between pre- and post-ABRA was district efforts to move away from punitive consequences and focus more on developmental approaches that address systemic concerns of bullying within students, classrooms, schools, and districts. Daniel stated, I think the developmental is the area that you want to put more emphasis in,” while Barbara stated, “Our current district’s method is more developmental.” However, the essence of Daniel’s words seemed to truly capture the paradigm shift of pre- and post-ABRA when he stated, “If we want kids to succeed, [they] need a safe environment.”

Although the demands of ABRA have changed our approach to bullying, some feel as if there is still something missing. Amanda stated, “I do think you need to have some more positive ways to deal with HIB cases.” Amanda’s statement leads us to our final notable configuration of data, which is the lack of interventions that are provided, proven, and supported within the field of social and emotional learning. Dakota stated, “I find that this is one of the most challenging areas—the application of the Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Law. You are directed to use research-based interventions; and in order for you to secure research-based prevention, it has to be trialed and you have to collect data on whether it is working, which means that it has to have some type of structure or format or script to it.” Courtney explained, “Nobody is really that afraid to tackle academic interventions because there’s a million supplemental materials out there. But there isn’t that much for behavior.”

### **Paradigm Shift**

Within the data we see schools and districts, as represented by the School Specialists and District Coordinators, as primarily demonstrating punitive practices to remediate instances of harassment, intimidation, and bullying prior to the ABRA 2011. After the implementation of the New Jersey Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act of 2011, it became difficult to satisfy all aspects of the new law through the continuation of previous schools' and districts' practices. The new demand of preventing instances of harassment, intimidation, and bullying before they occurred led to new considerations on how to approach the problem as it existed in each of the schools and districts, as represented through the participation of this study. The *paradigm shift* (including participants' negative perceptions towards a punitive approach and demonstrating current methods and practices incorporating positive reinforcement and a developmental approach) of acknowledging that punitive measures do not have lasting results and positive reinforcement or a developmental approach are preferred methods to meet the requirement of preventing HIB and addressing students' emotional needs, as experienced and expressed by participating District Coordinators and School Specialists.

Data that demonstrate the paradigm shift caused by a schism between prior punitive practices and the new demands of the Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act were reflected within the themes and trends found across all four focus groups, representing 12 of 20 participants, as demonstrated by 22 statements. It was apparent that the District Coordinators and School Specialists recognized that punitive consequences or a punitive approach were counterproductive to achieving desired progress or outcomes in students regarding social and emotional learning or social and emotional character development. This finding is prevalent, as Charles stated, "Punitive doesn't change their behavior" and

further supported by Amanda who stated, “Once we get out of consequences there’s nothing to follow up with to make sure that we’re helping the student change that behavior.” Daniel added, “I think we have too many examples in all of us of punitive measures, which kids come back and it’s either non-effective or it might even be worse. It goes back to the knee jerk kind of reaction and our need to find something with longevity and relevance.”

Within the context that punitive consequences do not work, it is understood that District Coordinators and School Specialists must be using or attempting to implement procedures, recognitions, or programs into their school or district setting that would potentially negate instances of at-risk social behaviors including bullying. This theme was found prevalent under the code of paradigm shift within 11 statements, across three of the four focus groups, addressed by six of the 20 participants. Evidence of such programs was demonstrated by Aaron who stated, “[After a student’s positive choice or action] I’ll take the kid up to the office and just find one of our administrators and say, ‘Can I tell you what he did?’ so the kid gets positive praise.” At Danielle’s school, “Teachers recommend kids who have shown the character trait of the month.” And then they’re recognized in the newsletter and their names are written out on a certificate.” At David’s school they have “Heroes in the Hallway, where someone’s doing something nice and they get their name on the board as a hero.” At Courtney’s school, “We do a lot of positive reinforcement in the school like ‘caught doing something great or nice.’ Student recognition is very positive reinforcement.”

### **Social and Emotional Character Development**

In response to ABRA 2011 and promoting prevention in schools and districts regarding violence and at-risk social behaviors including bullying, the New Jersey Department of Education supports and recommends social and emotional character development for all schools and districts to serve as the vehicle to preventing harassment, intimidation, and bullying and securing a school culture and climate that is conducive to learning and enriching positive student emotional development. In 2012, Dr. Maurice Elias of Rutgers University defined social-emotional and character development (SECD): “Employs a project-based, constructivist, and inquiry-oriented social-learning approach to pedagogy and an ecological-community psychology approach to understanding settings and designing, delivering, and evaluating interventions. In addition, it carries out applied research related to bullying/youth violence, victimization, character development and identity, spirituality, purpose, and forgiveness, social-emotional and social decision-making skills, social support, classroom organization, management, and discipline . . . emotional intelligence, and the design, implementation, and sustainability of preventive interventions.” For the state’s purpose, the definition has been adopted to support the Anti-Bullying legislature to include social-emotional and character development: “The New Jersey Department of Education has been promoting social-emotional and character development through a variety of programs and services. Social-emotional and character development (SECD) encompasses the enhancement of school-wide climate, infusion of core ethical values into the curriculum, and teaching strategies that are designed to assist young people develop positive character traits, relationships, and behaviors that result in a nurturing environment for students. SECD is designed to create a climate where youth feel safe and are ready to learn. Successful infusion of SECD results in positive



behaviors, increased academic success, and caring communities” (State of New Jersey, Department of Education: Keeping our kids Safe and Healthy in School, 2016). Within each definition there are no specifics on how a school or district would accomplish the aforementioned objective, therefore, leaving a multitude of options within implementations and approaches possible for districts and schools to meet the needs of their individual students while also meeting the demands of the state. Through the examination of the data collected from each of the focus groups the theme/trend of social-emotional and character development (SECD) was identified by 14 of the 20 participants within this study, found across all four focus groups, and within the context of 72 statements in regard to how their school or district implements initiatives (self-designed or pre-designed), programs, and mentoring/counseling.

Self-designed or created initiatives for the purpose of this study is defined as created initiatives or practices designed to address the need of a specific school or districts climate or culture, that is implemented by schools or districts to support SECD as a method of best practice to fulfill the obligation of negating instances of bullying and creating a positive school culture and climate as mandated by the ABRA of 2011; these self-designed or created initiatives are not found within a script, publication, or copyrighted related to SECD. Examples of a self-designed (created) SECD interventions was found to be prevalent within twelve statements, within three of the four focus groups, within the context of twelve statements as shared by seven of the twenty participants. Providing examples of social-emotional and character development through schools, Diane states, “Named each hallway of the school: Welcome Way, Brainstorming Boulevard, Cool School Court, so everybody had an address” and in Beth’s school, “We

have developed a peace path where it will be in each classroom to focus on conflict resolution; it will be on the playground and spots throughout the school so that children not only have the tools but have the visuals to learn how to resolve these conflicts on their own.”

Pre-designed intervention for the purpose of this study is defined as “prior initiatives or common practices that are implemented by schools or districts to support SECD as a method of best practice to fulfill the obligation of negating instances of bullying and creating a positive school culture and climate as mandated by the ABRA of 2011.” Many of the implementations referenced within the context of pre-designed intervention can be found in a script, publication, or are copyrighted as a program as related to SECD.

Examples of these commonly used and unoriginal interventions that have been adopted by schools or districts are found in Britany’s school as “sensitivity training.” “Each month there’s a different desired character trait,” and “Our teachers are also doing conflict resolution and bullying intervention class lessons once a month in classroom. If things are going on in the classroom, the teacher will say okay, we need to meet.” Candice stated, “We have guidance counselor at our school. She implements a character education program, going into each grade level. She coaches anti-bullying; she has lessons on an anti-bullying program.” Diane explained what she sees as the biggest implementation. “I think our biggest is we have core values and every month we focus on one core value, and every day the morning message is delivered by students; this month’s core value is respect.” Danielle shared some of her school’s efforts. “We have random acts of kindness and we do the ‘character word of the month’ and that’s put out in the

newsletter.” Dana stated, “We have a student’s creed, and from pre-K up they recite that creed, ‘Character ed. Lessons.’” Candice stated, “Current programs incorporate conflict resolution.” At Beth’s school, “We have been working in the past on social emotional character development.” And in Aaron’s school he is working on how “to reinforce positive bystander behavior.”

Specific SECD programs for the purpose of this study are identified as a plan or system under which action may be taken towards accomplishing SECD, which encompasses the enhancement of schoolwide climate, infusion of core ethical values into the curriculum, and teaching strategies that are designed to assist young people to develop positive character traits, relationships, and behaviors that result in a nurturing environment for students. The theme of specific SECD programs used was found in 17 statements, across all four focus groups, as indicated by ten of the 20 total participants. Candice identified that in her school, “We have the Olweus books.” Chloe described, “a Dolphin program for pre-K, but they give the kids situations and ask for their reaction.” Daniel stated, “The older one is a peer mediation program which our fifth and sixth graders run.” Amanda stated, “We’ve done peer mediation,” and Chloe revealed, “Some schools do programs on Challenge Day, and it’s a whole day where students miss class and meet their mentors for an entire day.”

Within the attempt to identify the current SECD Mentoring/Counseling programs within districts and schools, there were 11 statements provided, by six of the 20 participants, as found across all four focus groups. Understanding the extent to which mentoring or counseling is currently being used in schools gives valuable feedback as to what extent mentoring/counseling is already being used in schools and districts.

Evidence to support the practice of mentoring or counseling is apparent. Barbara stated, “We don’t do it ten consecutive times, but we do tend to sit with the students.” In support of Barbara’s statement, Dana said, “Not as regimented, but I do make contact with them.” Amanda confirmed, “We’ve counseled students.” There is also evidence of mentoring existing throughout buildings and districts as stated by Candice, “We have shop teacher, teachers who aren’t in homeroom—everybody goes into different classroom so they can be a part of it.”

### **Effective With Current Initiatives**

Capturing the essence of the participants’ evaluation of how bullying was addressed prior to the ABRA 2011, immediately after, and at the start of the third year of implementation gives a comprehensive review of “How does the prescribed intervention align with current initiatives that have been adopted by individual schools and districts since the introduction of the Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act of 2011?” Understanding through the themes and trends of the participants’ responses of where their efforts started prior to the legislation, immediately after, and in October of 2013, when the focus groups were conducted, allows for a comprehensive understanding of districts and school’s efforts to meet the mandates of the legislation in an attempt to determine if the designed intervention is something that can be implemented into current practices, and if so to what degree?

The themes and trends of *effective with current initiatives* identify the ability to adopt the proposed intervention within the context of current practices of represented schools and districts. Effective with current initiatives was found between all four focus

groups, in accordance with the responses from 16 people, as represented in 46 statements. Of the 68 responses, 16 responses from ten of 20 participants, across all four focus groups spoke directly towards the intervention fitting in to what they currently are doing in their schools. Candice stated, “This would be considered kind of what we’re doing in a more individual kind of way. And I think it would be effective.” Daniel stated, “To answer your question ‘would this fit in?’, yeah, I think it would take a little bit of tweaking on our part; but I think it could be one more tool in the tool kit.” Denise stated, “I just think it’s a good tool to really kind of dig a little bit deeper into some of the students we have already been working with,” and Barbara stated, “I think it would work very well (with current initiatives).”

To further answer “How does the prescribed intervention align with current initiatives that have been adopted by individual schools and districts since the introduction of the Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act of 2011?” there is evidence to suggest that schools and districts may be likely to adopt the intervention because of the redeeming qualities and potential benefit of the actual intervention. This sentiment was found in 15 statements, in three of the four focus groups, by nine of the 20 participants. David stated, “Most of the time when we talk to the kids, it’s just all on the surface. And this peels the layers back until we dig deeper and find out what’s in the center.” Denise supported David’s thought by stating, “I just think it’s a good tool to really kind of dig a little bit deeper into some of your students.” Dana stated the intervention “brings dignity back to the child because a lot of kids will say, ‘You don’t care about me.’” Beth added, “The intervention makes working through a process more advantageous with the human aspect.” Diane suggested, “It’s a start and will open the door,” and Charles concluded by

stating, “It’s a very simple down-to-earth reasonable thing that a school can try to implement and [can] work well.”

There is also some evidence to show that the intervention fits into most individual schools’ and districts’ mission statements and core beliefs of providing the safest learning environment possible and calls to duty all individuals within a specific learning community to do their part to ensure a positive school culture and climate. These findings are evident in 15 statements, across three of the four focus groups, as identified by seven of the 20 participants. In support, David stated, “I think that’s 100% of a mission statement—a safe learning environment.” Diane stated, “I don’t think any child should ever suffer because of another child, teacher, adult, anybody.” Aaron stated, “Helps home/school tie, it helps tear down that ‘Well, what are you doing for my kid?’” Daniel stated, “And if you’ve got that child that is feeling threatened, feeling unsafe, feeling someone’s bugging him, you know, you’re wasting countless dollars and time on people that he or she is coming across throughout the day.” Candice stated, “We’re there for each other; we have to take care of each other regardless of what we are,” and Aaron stated, “Every time we say somebody cares, [the intervention] is just another way to reinforce that.”

**Research Question 4:** To what extent, if any, would District Coordinators and School Specialists consider using the prescribed intervention as a way to remediate at-risk behaviors, including bullying, within their own schools or districts?

In examining the findings associated with the essence of Research Question 4, the findings of the data supported three prevalent themes of relevance. The three themes of

relevance have been identified as the following: *teacher and counselor's likelihood of implementation, selection of mentors, and support needed to ensure a successful and sustainable implementation.*

### **Teacher's and Counselor's Likelihood of Implementation**

The theme of teacher and counselor's likelihood of implementation captured District Coordinators and School Specialists' perceptions of how likely members of their staff would be to consider using the prescribed intervention as a way to remediate at-risk social behaviors, including bullying, within their respected schools or districts. The findings were represented throughout all four focus groups, including responses from 16 of 20 participants, in the form of 46 statements. Danielle stated, "I love the idea of a brief counseling session where it's just five minutes every day for ten days." Denise stated, "I would hope zero percent would be uncomfortable because if you can't do this, you shouldn't be a teacher." Amanda stated, "I think educators overall are mentors or should be mentors in their daily day." Adam stated, "I don't think it's anything over the top. You almost think it should be going on anyway," and Beth stated, "I think you would jump at the chance to effectively help kids."

### **Selection of Mentors**

Secondly, the theme of *selection of mentors* captured District Coordinators and School Specialists' perceptions of the criteria used to select a mentor, and a process in which staff members should be selected as mentors in consideration of administering the prescribed intervention as a way to remediate at-risk behaviors, including bullying, within their own schools or districts. The category of *selection of mentors* was represented in all four focus groups by 15 of the 20 participants, as reflected in 34

responses. Of these 34 responses, many brought independent ideas and recommendations that could prove to be beneficial to the study. Dakota suggested that “administrators, case managers, guidance counselors, your head teachers, your ICR teachers, your resource room teachers could help determine who to use as mentors.” Barbara provided another option, “But senior citizens, some of them would love to just help; that would be very valuable.” Aaron stated, “So if you could identify somebody that already has a positive relationship with the student, just like in the classroom, hopefully you can get even more out of that time.” Denise suggested, “On the parent volunteer thing, I mean with us just because Delanco is just so—we’re very small; I think a parent volunteer would be good for this,” and Ashley stated, “You could limit it to people who want to do it and who are available to do it.”

### **Support Needed to Ensure a Successful and Sustainable Implementation**

Finally, the theme of *support needed to ensure a successful and sustainable implementation* derived from District Coordinators and School Specialists’ perception of the essentials needed to adopt this intervention over a long period of time as a tool in remediating at-risk behaviors, including bullying, within their own schools or districts. This category of *support needed to ensure a successful and sustainable implementation* was represented in all four focus groups, by 15 of 20 participants, as reflected in 48 responses. Of those 48 responses, four spoke to accountability and follow through, as Amanda stated, “There needs to be accountability.” Also of the 48 responses, there were an additional five that believed support from members of the school community was vital for the program’s success, as stated by Brooke, “Support from the rest of the staff in the building [is needed] to bring awareness to the whole school.” However, all of the



remaining 39 statements were in support of training or additional training as the key to ensuring a successful and sustainable implementation of the proposed intervention. In support of this recommendation, Beth stated, “And I think there are probably many people who would be more than happy and 100% committed to do this to the best of their ability if they were trained.” Aaron proposed, “Confidentiality training to make sure teachers are aware of what is required.” On behalf of the students Chloe proposed, “If there were to be negative emotions that came out, this is what to do. Set up protocol that would happen if something were to occur like that.” Denise suggested a good time to have these trainings might be “sometimes we do training at faculty meetings or in-service, so I definitely think taking one of the in-service days to go over this—the days before school starts, and we only have two days before school starts—so I think that would be a good time. And Adam recommended, “Additional support of training for mentors could benefit intervention.”

Table 7

*Results of Findings (Codes/Themes) as Supported by Number of Statements, Focus Groups, and Participants*

Common Themes	Statements	Focus Groups	Participants
<b>Research Question #1</b>			
1. Pros	<b>130</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>20</b>
a) Social and Emotional Learning Core Competencies	<b>37</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>15</b>
1) Self-awareness	11	4	8
2) Self-management	4	2	4
3) Social-awareness	6	4	5
4) Relationship skills	5	3	4
5) Responsible decision-making	11	3	6
b) Benefits of Mentoring	<b>53</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>13</b>
c) The Functionality of the Intervention	<b>40</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>13</b>

2. Cons	<b>181</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>19</b>
a) Projected Obstacles of Implementation	<b>111</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>18</b>
1) Students' projected obstacles	33	3	10
2) Staffs' projected obstacles	60	4	16
3) Parents' projected obstacles	18	4	11
b) Identified Shortcomings of the Intervention	<b>70</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>17</b>
1) Follow-up	42	4	12
2) Verbiage	28	4	13
<b>Research Question #2</b>			
3. Identifying Eligible Students	<b>53</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>16</b>
4. Age Appropriateness	<b>49</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>14</b>
a) Starting K-4	18	4	8
b) Starting 5th grade	9	3	4
c) Appropriate for 6th-8th	12	3	6
1) Not for 5th grade	4	2	3
d) Appropriate for 7th and older	10	3	4
1) Not for 6th grade	2	1	1
<b>Research Question #3</b>			
5. Punitive	<b>17</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>9</b>
6. In Response to ABRA 2011	<b>25</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>13</b>
7. Paradigm Shift	<b>22</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>10</b>
8. Social and Emotional Character Development (SECD)	<b>72</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>14</b>
a) Self-Designed Interventions	12	3	7
b) Pre-Designed Interventions	32	4	8
c) Programs	17	4	10
d) Mentoring/Counseling	11	4	6
9. Effective With Current Initiatives	<b>68</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Research Question #4</b>			
10. Teachers and Counselor's Likelihood of Implementation	<b>46</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>16</b>
11. Selection of Mentors	<b>34</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>15</b>
12. Support Needed to Ensure a Successful and Sustainable 12. Implementation	<b>48</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>15</b>

### Limitations

This was a qualitative study designed to acquire data from four independent focus groups consisting of District Coordinators and School Specialists from Burlington County, New Jersey. The objective of the study was to solicit feedback from participants

in regard to the potential relevance of the intervention that was designed within the context of the theoretical framework of social and emotional learning. The identified limitations of the study include the sample size, as Burlington County provides only 40 eligible school districts, in comparison to the 573 districts found statewide; despite evidence that supports Burlington County demonstrating reasonable comparisons to the state's socio-economic status, there is no evidence found to support the opinions of the participants as relevant to all Coordinators and Specialists within New Jersey; furthermore, Burlington County is only one county of the 21 counties that are identified in New Jersey. Another limitation of the study may be the intended design to receive feedback of District Coordinators and School Specialists only, and not teachers or other invested stakeholders. Moreover, it is noteworthy to consider that the design of the intervention was to meet the immediate needs of students exhibiting at-risk social behaviors on a differentiated level; however, the design of this study does not address individual needs of specific students, but instead only solicits feedback from participants in a more global approach as determined by participants' prior experience with students and the culture and climate of each district or school represented in the study. Also, the intervention was designed with the original intent to exclude students with disabilities as identified by Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) and also to exclude students with specific medical conditions as determined by their 504 Accommodation Plan; the decision to exclude particular students had manifested from the belief that such limitations regarding student ability may alter the perception of participants in regard to determining the appropriateness of the intervention for relevance within the ability to comprehend within intended grade levels, Grades 5 through 8. In regard to mentoring, the

data are acknowledged to be inconclusive when determining the potential relevance in addressing behaviors. Subsequently, there were significant data found within the process of data collection that would refute this design limitation, as many participants encouraged the intervention to be used with students with disabilities and medical conditions as identified within individuals' 504 plan; many practitioners remained steadfast through the data they provided that the intervention may in fact be more beneficial when used with these identified subpopulations. Finally, and possibly most important, is the fact that the intervention has not been tested with students, but only examined by District Coordinators and School Specialists through the means of a qualitative study that depicted participants' perceptions of relevancy as determined by their individual learning communities and experiences.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **Summary of the Problem and Methods**

The law provided specific guidelines for reporting, investigating, and responding to incidents of HIB with newly legislated timelines and procedures; however, the elusive task of preventing instances of HIB was left to individual districts and schools and fell solely on the shoulders of the individuals who were designated as District Coordinators and School Specialists as defined by ABRA 2011. As a response to ABRA 2011, it was pertinent to create an intervention, grounded in proven research, which would assist School Specialists and District Coordinators with the overwhelming task of addressing individual students' social and emotional needs as necessitated by the law to minimize the risk of harassment, intimidation, and bullying. Before actual implementation with students, I felt it was my duty to gain feedback pertaining to the intervention from my

colleagues as a way to ensure the most effective intervention possible, which had the potential to meet the greatest number of students' social and emotional needs.

### **Summary and Significance of the Findings**

The purpose of this study was to determine to what extent Burlington County District Coordinators and School Specialists, as defined by the 2011 New Jersey Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act, deem a prescribed mentoring intervention founded within the framework of social and emotional learning (SEL) advantageous in their everyday duties to negate at-risk social behaviors, including bullying, within students from fifth to eighth grade. In this chapter, I first discuss the key findings as outlined in Chapter IV as well as speak to the significance of such findings as explored per research question. Finally, I conclude by unveiling all future implications and make recommendations on the potential use and validity of the self-created intervention as determined by the data provided from Burlington County District Coordinators and School Specialists.

### **Research Questions**

After developing a self-created intervention designed to negate at-risk social behaviors including bullying, it was the purpose of this study to compile the thoughts and feelings of 20 District Coordinators and School Specialists from Burlington County, New Jersey. This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the pros and cons of the prescribed intervention as indicated by the Burlington County District Coordinators and School Specialists?
2. To what extent do Burlington County District Coordinators and School Specialists find the intervention developmentally appropriate for general education students in Grades 5 through 8?

3. How does the prescribed intervention align with current initiatives that have been adopted by individual schools and districts since the introduction of the Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act (ABRA)?
4. To what extent, if any, would District Coordinators and School Specialists consider using the prescribed intervention as a way to remediate at-risk behaviors, including bullying, within their own schools or districts?

To answer these questions, I conducted a qualitative study to solicit feedback from Burlington County School Specialists and District Coordinators as to the perceived benefits of a self-designed intervention intended to negate at-risk social behaviors including bullying with students from fifth to eighth grade. Within the context of four, two-hour focus groups, I was able to obtain relevant feedback from 20 participants in the original form of over 100 transcribed pages. Of these 20 participants, 15 were identified as Anti-Bullying Specialists and five were identified as Anti-Bullying Coordinators. Within the 15 Anti-Bullying Specialists, there were three administrators, eight school counselors, one social worker, one elementary school teacher, one behaviorist, and one school psychologist. Within those identified as Anti-Bullying Coordinators, there were four administrators and one school counselor. It was a conscious decision to have both District Coordinators and School Specialists participate within the same focus groups; although the function of each position is slightly different, the overall objective remains the same in creating a positive school culture and climate conducive for every child to learn. The goal for the heterogeneous grouping was to obtain feedback pertaining to a proposed self-created intervention, as it related to the everyday duties and responsibilities

of both identified groups in preventing and responding to incidences of bullying as mandated by the Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act of 2011.

To enable the development of grounded theory, Corbin and Strauss (2007) suggest three phases of coding: open, axial, and selective (Merriam, 2009, p. 200). Through this process major themes, codes, and trends are disseminated by research questions as outlined in Chapter IV.

**Research Question 1:** What are the pros and cons of the prescribed intervention as indicated by the Burlington County District Coordinators and School Specialists?

**Summary of the Findings: Pros**

The true essence of Research Question 1 was to capture the pros and cons of the prescribed intervention based upon the reaction of Burlington County District Coordinators and School Specialists. Pros of the intervention consisted of social and emotional learning core competencies, the theoretical foundation of the intervention. These were identified by positive attitudes towards the components of the intervention including self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. The next significant theme that arose to support the pros of the intervention was the benefits of mentoring, which in its totality was further disseminated into the benefits of a trusting relationship, having an unbiased person that a student could turn to, the significance of building a rapport with students, and students knowing that someone cares about them at school. The final identified theme to support the pros of the intervention was captured with the functionality of the intervention. In a further analysis of the data, the functionality of the intervention was supported by the perception that the intervention was time effective, logical and sequential, consistent,



simple enough for children to understand, comprehensive, and the supported relevance of the intervention's scripted format.

**Significance of the Findings: Pros**

The significance of the data that supports the social and emotional learning core competencies and all of the components thereof, depicts the participants' perception regarding the validity of the theoretical framework used to design the proposed intervention. The desired goal of the intervention was to introduce the social and emotional learning core competencies in a manner which students with at-risk social behaviors, can understand, internalize, and utilize in examination of past scenarios and how a better understanding of the core competencies can be demonstrated to support future pro-social behaviors. Although the acknowledgement of the core competencies as a pro does not ensure student success or that the intervention will reach its desired goal with students, it does reflect District Coordinators' and School Specialists' recognition of the theoretical framework within the intervention and acknowledges the attitudes of the participants towards inclusion of these core competencies as relevant to potentially achieving desired outcomes with students in their current districts and schools.

The next identified pro of the intervention was the perceived benefits of mentoring. The significance of this perception was that the participants recognized the benefits of a trusting relationship, having an unbiased person that a student could turn to for guidance or assistance, the significance of building a rapport with students, and the importance of students knowing that someone at their school cares about them. The undertone of this perception is that the District Coordinators' and School Specialists' preconceived notions on meeting students' needs is congruent with that of the

intervention. This finding also demonstrates that subjects valued the role of a mentor within a school and shared similar understandings of the function of a mentor that aligned with the intended design of the intervention.

The final recognized pro, the functionality of the intervention, was supported by the participants of the study as evident in the data that support time effectiveness, the logical and sequential order, consistency, simplicity, comprehensiveness, and the relevance of the scripted format. This body of evidence supports the procedural components of the intervention based upon the experiences and knowledge of currently utilized interventions and the students' responses within their respected districts or schools. Also, the components described as a pro of the functionality of the intervention were all desired goals of the intervention, with sympathy towards the limited time that educators have during the course of a school day, acknowledging that the most worthwhile interventions were logical, sequential, consistent, directed towards a targeted audience, and that potential mentors within a learning community may be outside of their comfort level and benefit from a provided script.

### **Summary of the Findings: Cons**

In contrast to the perceived pros of the intervention, there were also common themes identified by the Burlington County District Coordinators and School Specialists regarding the cons of the prescribed intervention. The cons of the intervention were identified by *projected obstacles of implementation* and *identified shortcomings of the intervention*. Under projected obstacles of implementation, further coding was developed within the context of the learning community, which included students, staff, and parents. Under shortcomings of the intervention, the participants of the study identified concerns

such as lack of follow-up with students after the prescribed ten-day intervention and the concerns with language or verbiage, as it may not be understood by the range of targeted grade levels.

### **Significance of the Findings: Cons**

The significance of the data in regard to the projected obstacles of implementation of students, the potential cons of implementation were identified as non-compliance, lack of trust (with mentor), and the inability for a student to be rehabilitated. The perceptions of these concerns were shaped by participants through personal experience that students are sometimes unable or unwilling to cooperate. District Coordinators and School Specialists allude to some students' lack of trust and the further understanding that many efforts have fallen short in their own attempt to rehabilitate students demonstrating at-risk social behaviors.

Within the context of projected staff obstacles pertaining to implementation of the prescribed intervention, the participants acknowledged their potential concerns of confidentiality, the need for staff training, time restrictions, and staff resistance. The concern of confidentiality manifested into two separate components. First, it was the concern of the participants that non-guidance counselors, social workers, or school psychologists were held to a lesser standard in regard to confidentiality than those who are traditionally assigned the role of District Coordinators and School Specialists. This could lead to the potential concern of a selected mentor not knowing what to report or a lack of support offered to students who share information over and beyond the daily responsibilities of a teacher or support staff member. Secondly, it was the expressed concern of the participants that if mentors were volunteers or nonentities of the school,

then a breach in confidentiality would be more likely to occur. Next, it is the expressed concern of the participants that staff within their designated schools or districts would request more training. The support for staff training derives from the subjects' perception that teachers will not feel as if they are adequately trained to deal with the social and emotional considerations of students, and subsequent staff would then request additional training to support their efforts. The participants viewed time as a source of potential resistance amongst staff in reflection of the demands of the participants' workday, as well as the perception of the demands of their colleagues' workday. It is supported that the intervention may be seen as one more thing to do during an already overloaded workday. Additionally, there is evidence indicating that interruptions from academic time either on behalf of the mentors or from taking the students from class would be another area of resistance for staff.

Within the context of projected parental obstacles pertaining to implementation of the prescribed interventions, the data supported two projected parental concerns. The first concern would be allowing parents to act as mentors in regard to the lack of boundaries some parents may have or within the information they may share, while the other dealt with resistance that may occur when identifying their children as individuals that may benefit from the intervention.

Moreover, within the context of the identified shortcomings of the intervention, the concern of ending the intervention abruptly after the original ten days was believed to potentially affect children in a negative way by taking away the individual they have learned to trust, confide in, and rely upon unreservedly to allow closure to the process. In regard to verbiage or the appropriateness of the language, concerns focused on all

intended age levels and the students' ability to comprehend extensive concepts as found within the intervention. This action led to a fear that the child may not comprehend the intent of the intervention and may take away from the intervention an alternative message that could be detrimental to the student and potentially lead to more self-doubt or lower self-esteem.

### **Future Implications: Pros and Cons**

It is the future recommendation to exemplify the social and emotional learning core competencies as the theoretical framework of the intervention based upon the data supporting the recognition of the five core competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making as a perceived positive tool in remediating at-risk social behaviors including bullying. It was apparent through the data that these key elements also served at the helm of the participants' daily interaction with students in an attempt to assist a child to reach a position of self-actualization within his or her own social and emotional development. It is also the recommendation that the benefits of mentoring remain consistent as the primary vehicle to deliver the intervention based upon the perceived contributions of a trusting relationship, having an unbiased person that a student could turn to, providing an opportunity to build a rapport with students, and allowing the students to know someone at their school cares about them. Finally, it is the recommendation based upon the support of the participants to continue to utilize the functionality or construct of the intervention within its intended design pertaining to duration, scope, sequence, simplicity, comprehensiveness, and scripting.

The projected concerns of the intervention are depicted in areas such as non-compliance, lack of student trust, and the inability for a student to be rehabilitated. In regard to non-compliance and lack of student trust, it is recommended that a time prior to the proposed intervention be added to the structure and design to allow the mentor and mentee to become familiar with each other and for the student to engage in forming a bond with a trusted adult. It is recommended that time to talk to each other and build a true rapport or to engage in high interest tasks separate from the daily trials and tribulations of the of the immediate concerns may address this shortcoming. In regard to the inability for a student to be rehabilitated, it may be necessary to differentiate the intervention to meet the more systemic social and emotional needs of each child. It is recommended to adjust timelines and visit vital concepts or ideas in a way that is unique to the needs of a specific child. There also may be benefit to extending the time for the intervention and chunking information in a way that is more relative to individual behavior or the social and emotional development of a specific child. After all avenues have been exhausted, it is possible that the proposed intervention may not generate the desired results in behavior and peer interaction and another intervention or program should be considered. In addition, it should be noted that the intervention should be further studied in regard to effectiveness before considering the intervention as a reliable source to mediate behavior and obtain desirable results.

Within the context of projected staff obstacles, it is the future recommendation that additional training pertaining to confidentiality should be provided. It should be the comprehensive understanding of every potential mentor as to when to report specific information that is in potential conflict with a student's well-being, and it should be

equally understood that under no circumstance should information from individual sessions be shared unless it is with a support staff member or with the student's parent or guardian in an attempt to further assist the child. Furthermore, additional training should be offered in regard to the implementation of the intervention. Training should continue until every mentor is completely comfortable with the process, the student, and has a secure handle on the desired outcomes of the intervention, including a plan on how to deliver the intervention to every child, as every child's experiences and behaviors are different. It is proposed that training should derive through the clinical support staff, including the school psychologist, counselor, social worker, and even the school nurse. Administrators should also be a part of the training while gaining a comprehensive understanding of the process of implementation and how to respond in a time of potential crisis. Continued support should persist throughout the duration of the intervention to allow the mentor to discuss sessions with a child's assigned clinical support staff member. In regard to projected resistance within staff obstacles, it is advised that no staff member be assigned the position of mentor; mentors should believe in the process and be committed to servicing the social and emotional needs of either a specific or select group of students.

Within the context of projected parental obstacles, it is the recommendation that the selection of parents or community members as mentors be left to individual districts, schools, and communities. However, it is important to note that although a small group of participants believed that the use of seniors, parents, and other community members would enhance community involvement in their school or district and such involvement would support the manpower needed for a new initiative, the greater focus is prominent

in the data that depict the many convincing obstacles to having seniors, parents, and community members as mentors. Some of the most compelling concerns are related to confidentiality, competence, time, availability, and most of all liability as depicted by the majority of participants. If a parent is selected to participate as a mentor, the parent should receive the same level of training to ensure comfortability and reliability as their staff member counterparts. Confidentiality should be a part of the training, and a signed contract on the laws and expectations of confidentiality should be agreed upon by both the parent volunteer and the school or district; however, even within the compliance of such measures the school may not be found blameless if a volunteer's actions are found to be negligent, or simply because the complexity of social and emotional needs of children cannot reasonably be met by just any volunteer. In fact, there are data presented by participants that would suggest not even teachers have the right amount of training and knowhow to deal with the complexity of at-risk children and that certificated staff members such as school counselors, behaviorists, and school psychologist should be the only ones that implement this type of intervention. In regard to parents being resistant to their child's participation in the intervention, it is the recommendation of potential future implementation that no child receive the intervention without the consent of a parent or guardian.

Pertaining to identified shortcomings of the intervention, it is the future recommendation of the intervention to include a process to follow up with the students after the ten-day intervention comes to a close. A proposed follow-up to the intervention can take on many forms and should meet the needs of a specific learning community. Some future recommendations to potentially be explored consist of continued services for



the students to meet weekly to further support implemented strategies and monitor how such strategies are being applied to current situations. It may be necessary to phase the students out of the intervention process by meeting weekly, then bi-weekly, and then monthly. Other districts or schools may elect to have a counselor or other similarly trained personnel do a group session for those who have completed the process, which would maximize resources and time. It is accepted that any potential gains experienced within the intervention will be marginalized if services are discontinued after the immediate intervention expires at the end of the tenth day.

In response to the concern of verbiage, as identified through the collected data of the participants, it is recommended for future consideration that the script be used only as a guide to help pace the intervention and to highlight the integral parts of the core competencies of social and emotional learning as they relate to actual experiences of students. It therefore remains the duty of the interventionist (mentor) to differentiate the script in a way that benefits the specific student with whom he or she is working. In communicating with students, it is imperative to meet them at their level in regard to concepts and language. The intention of the proposed intervention is only to provide an outline for appropriate communication for students in Grades 5 through 8; however, as educators we are aware that there is a wide range of ability levels within the context of every grade, and certainly throughout the middle school years. When dealing with students with whom one is not familiar, it may be necessary to interact with the mentee prior to the interventions not only to form trust and a collaborative relationship, but also to better understand the most effective way to communicate with a student. All of the aforementioned recommendations should be further explored within the context of a

future quantitative and qualitative analysis that focuses on actual outcomes on behalf of students, mentors, and learning communities.

**Research Question 2:** To what extent do Burlington County District Coordinators and School Specialists find the intervention developmentally appropriate for general education students in Grades 5 through 8?

### **Summary of the Findings**

In an attempt to determine the developmental appropriateness of the intervention for general education students from fifth through eighth grade, as determined by the findings of participating Burlington County District Coordinators and School Specialists, the themes of identifying eligible students and age appropriateness arose. Within the context of identifying eligible students, the notion supports the definition which serves as the premise for all interventions: an intervention is a strategy used to teach a new skill, build fluency in a skill, or encourage a child to apply an existing skill to new situations or settings. Therefore, the purpose of this intervention is not to address the developmental social and emotional needs of all general education students from fifth through eighth grade, but instead only to offer support to students who are lacking the skills founded in the social and emotional core competencies as demonstrated or witnessed to be symptomatic in everyday occurrences or interactions.

The data suggest that participants believed identifying eligible students should derive from three main areas: students with high discipline referrals or recurring instances, special education students found to exhibit at-risk social behaviors, and teacher recommendations and/or input. In regard to the participating District Coordinators' and School Specialists' perceptions, age appropriateness was also found to be a major theme,

as navigated by the shared intention of the proposed intervention that all participants of the intervention would be of general education status. Age appropriateness was further disaggregated into three categories: benefiting fifth grade and younger (with the assumption that if the intervention was developmentally appropriate for any of the grades from kindergarten to fourth grade, then it would also be of value for a fifth through eighth grade audience), sixth to eighth grade students only, and seventh grade and higher.

### **Significance of the Findings**

The significance of the findings within the category of identifying eligible students is derived from three main ideas: students with high discipline referrals or recurring instances of at-risk social behaviors, special education students found to exhibit similar signs of at-risk social behaviors as their non-classified counterparts, and teacher recommendations. Understanding that the proposed intervention is not intended for all students, it is suggested that students that would benefit from the intervention could be identified by the use of discipline or office referrals, individuals who were identified as the aggressor within substantiated harassment, intimidation, and bullying investigations, teacher recommendations, self-referrals, or through the Intervention and Referral (I&RS) Team as a method to identify students exhibiting at-risk social behaviors. These data suggest that schools across Burlington County possess the ability to appropriately identify the students that are in need of remediation and that could potentially benefit from the proposed intervention. It is also proposed that the intervention encompass students with special needs or students with identified medical conditions if the student is identified in any of the aforementioned ways.

In regard to age appropriateness, the data suggest ten of the 14 total participants that responded to questions aligned to the intervention being “developmentally appropriate for general education students in grades five through eight” believed that the intervention was also developmentally appropriate for fifth grade and younger. It is also noteworthy that the same ten participants who demonstrated support for fifth grade and younger, also made supportive comments that expressed positive attitudes towards the intervention being appropriate in Grades 6 through 8 and Grades 7 and higher. Of the four that did not believe it was developmentally appropriate for general education students in Grades 5 through 8, three believed it would be appropriate for Grades 6 through 8, and one believed it would only be appropriate for seventh grade and older.

In considering to what extent Burlington County District Coordinators and School Specialists find the intervention developmentally appropriate for general education students in Grades 5 through 8, it is supported that the intervention is not believed to be for all general education students from fifth to eighth grade; in fact, the data provided suggests the proposed intervention should be considered only as remediation for students who are exhibiting at-risk social behaviors including bullying as identified by a gamete of data sources, including disciplinary records and teacher recommendations. It is further supported that students with special needs and students with diagnosed medical conditions should also be considered for the intervention if they too are identified with the same validity as their general education counterparts. In specific consideration of a student’s grade in relation to the proposed intervention being developmentally appropriate, the data support that the majority of the District Coordinators and School

Specialists feel that the intervention is appropriate for some if not all of the intended grade levels.

### **Future Implications**

The future implications based upon the perceptions of the prescribed interventions would suggest that the proposed intervention should be used for general and special education students in reaction to prevalent at-risk social behaviors as identified by a multitude of student data sources easily obtained and identified by District Coordinators and School Specialists. It is also a future recommendation to have students be identified not only by student data and by individual student need, but also to incorporate teacher input in the solicitation process. It is further recommended that the proposed intervention be differentiated to ensure it is developmentally appropriate for the projected grade and ability levels, as bullying is a systemic problem in all grades from fifth to eighth, and does not discriminate across ability levels or amongst students with or without disabilities or diagnosed medical conditions. According to Carol Tomlinson (1999) differentiation means giving students multiple options for taking in information; although this sounds counterintuitive to a scripted intervention, I do believe it to be the duty of the designated mentor to understand the ability level of his or her mentee and implement the proposed intervention in a way that is understandable and beneficial.

**Research Question 3:** How does the prescribed intervention align with current initiatives that have been adopted by individual schools and districts since the introduction of the Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act (ABRA)?

### **Summary of the Findings**

The data relevant in determining if the prescribed intervention aligns with current initiatives adopted by individual schools and districts since the introduction of the Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act exacerbates the phenomenon of the evolution of new approaches and the entomology of words or descriptions used to describe the acknowledged changes. The first theme emphasized to describe District Coordinators' and School Specialists' current efforts towards negating at-risk social behaviors, including bullying, was *punitive*. Many District Coordinators and School Specialists recognize this punitive approach as something that has lingered and remained prevalent in their daily practice but are also aware as identified by the relevant data that it is the least effective way to negate at-risk and undesirable social behaviors.

However, the new mandate of preventing acts of bullying before they occur has created a schism between past practices and how districts and schools represented in the study are currently trying to find new and more effective ways to address the concern. This change in perception and practice was coded as *in response to ABRA 2011*. In response to ABRA 2011, it was revealed that districts and schools are attempting innovative ways to deal with situations that have substantially disrupted the academic process and that have transpired not only at school, but anywhere else. It is acknowledged that participants were left in a state of disequilibrium in regard to their own contradiction that exists between pre- and post-ABRA practices. The essence of this state of disequilibrium was captured within the code of *paradigm shift*. After the New Jersey Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act of 2011 was passed, it became difficult for Coordinators and Specialists to satisfy all aspects of the new law through the continuation of conventional methods such as punitive discipline. The paradigm shift captures the

essence of the participants' negative perceptions towards a punitive approach and demonstrated support for current practices, which emphasized positive reinforcement and developmental approach.

In lieu of punitive consequences, the participants were able to describe the benefits of *Social-Emotional and Character Development (SECD)* as identified as a predominant theme. SECD encompasses the enhancement of schoolwide climate, infusion of core ethical values into the curriculum, and teaching strategies that are designed to assist young people in developing positive character traits, relationships and behaviors that result in a nurturing environments for students. Within the context of SECD, participants described three ways they are currently attempting to embed the benefits of this approach into their districts and schools: through self-designed or individually created initiatives, pre-designed or adapted interventions, and specific SECD programs that have been designed by an outside source and packaged for the greater use. The final theme found to support whether the current intervention would align with current initiatives that have been adopted by individual schools and districts since the introduction of the anti-Bullying Bill of Rights was coded as effective with current initiatives.

### **Significance of the Findings**

In determining whether the prescribed intervention is congruent with current school and district initiatives, it is imperative to compare past and current practices of the participants to the ideologies of the proposed intervention. The purpose of the proposed intervention is to provide a learning opportunity grounded in the theoretical framework of the social and emotional core competencies. Through the further exploration of self-

actualization in the areas of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making, the proposed intervention provides a process for students to learn how to better manage their emotions and interactions with fellow students. This therapeutic experience is intended to empower the students with the social and emotional tools needed to better handle the everyday challenges with which one is faced.

The desire for sustainability through this intended process was developed to supersede any potential immediate change in behavior associated with punitive consequences. This philosophy aligns with the development in data that captures the lack of sustainability that is described by District Coordinators and School Specialists. Furthermore, this intended process is also congruent with the findings identified as In Response to ABRA 2011 and support the schism found between routine practices of assigning punitive consequences and obtaining lasting results in preventing future incidences as mandated by the Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights. The data that substantiate this paradigm shift are a large body of evidence that insists that punitive consequences do not, over time, obtain the intended goals of the new law or the desired outcomes of the efforts of District Coordinators and School Specialists.

Instead, the data significantly support that participants largely support an effort which encompasses the enhancement of teaching strategies that are designed to assist young people in developing positive character traits, relationships and behaviors that result in a nurturing environment for students as coded as SECD. Currently used implementations as described by participants are self-designed, pre-designed, and specific SECD programs. The case can be made that the proposed intervention can be



determined as self-designed, pre-designed, and specific to SECD. This statement is also supported within the findings of “Effective with Current Initiatives.” These data suggest that schools and districts may be likely to adopt the intervention because of how it aligns with what the participants have described as being most effective within their individual beliefs and daily efforts in negating instances of bullying while meeting the individual needs of all students. Furthermore, there is no evidence to suggest that implementation of the proposed intervention is perceived to interfere with current practices or initiatives found within any of the schools or district.

### **Future Implications**

In regard to the data derived from District Coordinators and School Specialists in answering the question: How does the prescribed intervention align with current initiatives that have been adopted by individual schools and districts since the introduction of the Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act (ABRA 2011)? It is supported that the ideologies of the proposed intervention are congruent with identified elements of best practice such as SECD, and the continued effort to find sustainability in supporting positive interventions rather than punitive consequences.

It is, however, imperative to understand that the intent of the proposed intervention is not to replace any current self-designed, pre-designed, or specific SECD programs or processes but rather to function as an intervention which meets the individual needs of students. It is equally important to consider that the proposed intervention is not intended to service large groups of students, but instead to focus upon individual student’s needs.

In following the response to the intervention model (RTI), the first enrichment to negate at-risk social behaviors may be found within the curriculum, within the context of teachable moments, following a program that prompts role play or other pro social activities, schoolwide assemblies, or maybe even friendly competitions between homerooms or grade levels that instill in students that the way we treat one another matters within a specific learning community. The second tier of intervention for a student who may still need additional support in this area may be to allow the student to attend social groups that gather students in small sessions, usually under the supervision of a guidance counselor or other related services and create an opportunity for students to interact in a positive manner. The final tier of intervention may consist of assigning a mentor, one-to-one sessions with a counselor, or within the form of a specific intervention congruent with the one proposed. The examples from each of the tiers are derived directly from examples provided by the participants of this study. The sole purpose of the proposed intervention is to offer another tool for assisting students in making more pro-social decisions and to negate instances of bullying with some level of sustainability. The continued recommendation would be to implement this intervention with students and document any positive or desirable change to verify the validity of its intended purpose.

**Research Question 4:** To what extent, if any, would District Coordinators and School Specialists consider using the prescribed intervention as a way to remediate at-risk behaviors, including bullying, within their own schools or districts?

### **Summary of the Findings**

In examining the findings associated with the essence of Research Question 4, the data support three prevalent themes of relevance: *teacher and counselor's likelihood of implementation, the selection of mentors, and the support needed to ensure a successful and sustainable implementation*. The theme of teacher and counselor's likelihood of implementation captured District Coordinators and School Specialists' perceptions of how likely members of their staff would be to consider using the proposed intervention as a way to remediate at-risk social behaviors, including bullying, within their respected district or school. Secondly, the theme of selection of mentors was identified amongst the participants' perception in regard to the criteria used to select a mentor and a process in which staff members should be selected as mentors with the purpose to remediate students exhibiting significant delays in appropriate interactive and social skills. Last, the theme of support needed to ensure a successful and sustainable implementation derived from the perceptions of District Coordinators and School Specialists in their depiction of key elements associated with the essentials needed to adopt the proposed intervention over a prolonged period of time as a tool in remediating at-risk social behaviors, including bullying, as manifested within their current responsibility of program and intervention implementation.

### **Significance of the Findings**

Within considerations of "To what extent, if any, would District Coordinators and School Specialists consider using the prescribed intervention as a way to remediate at-risk behaviors, including bullying, within their own schools or districts," we must disseminate the data found within the following derived themes: teacher and counselor's likelihood of implementation, selection of mentors, and support needed to ensure a

successful and sustainable implementation. It is a necessity to further analyze the theme teacher and counselor's likelihood of implementation as derived from the perceptions of how likely colleagues of the participants would be to potentially implement the intervention. Data collected to support this theme were in support of not only District Coordinators and School Specialists' willingness to implement the proposed intervention but also supported potential implementation through all educators with the caveat that it is what many already do on a daily basis and that many would view it as an educational opportunity to better support the emotional needs of students.

Secondly, the theme of selection of mentors captured District Coordinators and School Specialists' perceptions of the criteria to be used in order to select a mentor, and the process in which staff members and other members of the learning community should be selected to become mentors pertaining to the proposed intervention. The data support the use of virtually all members of the learning community including administrators, case managers, guidance counselors, special education and general education teachers, senior citizens, parents, or any trustworthy adult. The criterion and only mandate suggested were that a mentor should be someone who has a desire to pursue the role of a mentor with the sole intention of demonstrating to a selected student he or she is cared about and supported. This perception of the participants demonstrates the potential for a collaborative effort to overcome individual social and emotional deficiencies in hopes of creating and sustaining a positive school environment where students interact positively with all members of the learning community, where they feel safe at school, and where all students are able to learn.

Last, is the theme of support needed to ensure a successful and sustainable implementation derived from District Coordinators' and School Specialists' perception of the essentials needed to adopt this intervention over a prolonged period of time as a tool in remediating at-risk behaviors, including bullying, within their own schools or districts. Through a further disaggregation of the data, it was deemed evident that participants would consider using the prescribed intervention as a way to remediate at-risk social behaviors, including bullying, within their own schools or districts if accountability and follow-through were a priority, if members of the school community supported the initiative, and if appropriate training was provided for all essential personnel.

The factors consistent with the theme of support needed to ensure a successful and sustainable implementation can only be minimally dictated by the intervention itself but are instead products of what could be perceived as a more systemic problem found within a particular learning community. Within this cultural defeat, the implementation of any new initiative would be met with the same challenges. Follow-through and accountability, support from members within the school community, and training to allow each active member of the learning community to feel comfortable in delivering the intervention falls heavily upon the leadership of a specific district or school as well as the current climate and culture unique to each participant's experiences. It is my assumption that the same shortfalls of potential implementation that are categorized under the data support needed to ensure a successful and sustainable implementation would be just as evident in the examination of any newly implemented intervention when considering sustainability and effectiveness.

In summary, in regard to the data provided by the perceptions of District Coordinators and School Specialists, the likelihood of the subjects to consider using the prescribed intervention as a way to remediate at-risk social behaviors, including bullying, within their own schools or districts seems to be optimistic in regard to essential personnel. It is further concluded that the selection of mentors has the potential to be a positive experience if mentors are able to volunteer rather than be mandated or assigned. In identifying the support needed to ensure a successful and sustainable implementation, it appears that the District Coordinators and School Specialists would be more likely to consider using the prescribed intervention if the identified inconsistency of follow-through, accountability, support from within the school community, and training were addressed. The consideration of using the prescribed intervention would rely on district or school leadership and the culture and climate of that district or school to rectify the concern as potentially evident in all prior new interventions or implementations. There are no data that link the identified concerns to the considered intervention.

### **Future Implications**

In regard to Research Question 4. “To what extent, if any, would District Coordinators and School Specialists consider using the prescribed intervention as a way to remediate at-risk behaviors, including bullying, within their own schools or district,” it is recommended that a brief training guide and emergency manual be provided to all schools or districts interested in testing the intervention for effectiveness in students exhibiting shortcomings in their social and emotional interactions and behaviors. It is believed that a training guide would ensure continued consistency and outline potential anomalies such as situations where a student may show signs of emotional distress and

would provide procedures regarding how to respond if such a situation was to occur. In regard to the potential implementation of the intervention, it would also be relevant to follow the current trends of new initiatives and implementations within a school or district to serve as a precursor in determining to what extent the initiative will be supported by fellow staff members, administration, and the community, and also to what degree will the staff be accountable in following through with the initiative once it has begun. There may be significant consideration to exploring prior implementations so pre-existing factors systematic to the culture and climate of a school do not go undetected in performing a future qualitative study focused on effects.

### **Comprehensive Summary**

#### **Aligning Proposed Intervention to The Foundation of Social and Emotional Learning**

A discussion of findings, in terms of what we are learning about school-based, pro-social interventions for adolescents outside the classroom follows:

The identified research of this study supports the infusion of social and emotional learning's core competencies of self-awareness, self-management, social-awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making into successful social and emotional character development processes. Furthermore, there is significant data generated by this study that support the importance of this outlined theoretical framework as being seen as a positive contributor to the proposed intervention; this body of evidence was demonstrated in the 37 statements, by 17 of 20 participants, across all four focus groups. Simply stated, the practitioners responsible for negating at-risk social behaviors including bullying value the purposeful theoretical framework of the design of the intervention.

Furthermore, what is also prevalent were the concerns or “cons” of this type of intervention; 181 statements, from 19 of 20 participants, across all four focus groups shared their frustrations as determined by prior attempted programs or processes throughout their schools or districts pertaining to potential projected obstacles of implementation, which included student obstacles, staff obstacles, and parental obstacles. Putting aside the evidence gathered pertaining to the construct and logistical implications of the actual intervention such as age appropriateness and how to identify students, the larger and potentially more important concern was the significant evidence pertaining to the prior experiences of School Specialists and District Coordinators, who are still in search of an implementation that meets the needs of individual students demonstrating at-risk behaviors while minimizing some of the negative experiences and obstacles related to the lack of success these programs have demonstrated, in accordance with the way that such programs have fallen short of participants’ intended outcomes.

### **Support for Social and Emotional Learning**

When determining how this proposed intervention measures up to the intended benefits of a social and emotional learning process, some of the most compelling information comes from findings of the largest, most scientifically rigorous review of research ever done on interventions that promote children’s social and emotional development (Durlak et al., 2011). This review of more than 700 studies published through 2007 included school, family, and community interventions designed to promote social and emotional skills in children and adolescents between the ages of 5 and 18. This large sample of studies was divided into three main areas: (a) school-based interventions, (b) after-school programs, and (c) programs for families. Our focus here is on results of



the school-based research, which included 207 studies of programs involving 288,000 students. In this meta-analysis, researchers used statistical techniques to summarize the findings across all the studies and found a broad range of benefits for students:

- 9% decrease in conduct problems, such as classroom misbehavior and aggression
- 10% decrease in emotional distress, such as anxiety and depression
- 9% improvement in attitudes about self, others, and school
- 23% improvement in social and emotional skills
- 9% improvement in school and classroom behavior
- 11% improvement in achievement test scores

In a 2008 analysis of social and emotional learning programs, program effectiveness was compromised if staff failed to conduct certain parts of the intervention, or new staff members arrived and were insufficiently prepared to deliver the program. This finding suggests schools must invest the time and resources necessary to implement programs in a high quality way, which was identified in this study by participants in the sections entitled “Support Needed to Ensure a Successful Implementation” and “Projected Obstacles of Implementation.” It is imperative for the mentor to not only have a solid foundation of the five core competencies of social and emotional learning as identified in the sections “Pros: Social and Emotional Learning Core Competencies” and “Teacher and Counselor’s Likelihood of Implementation” to understand the current level of expectation pertaining to desired outcomes as set forth by social norms and determined by individual improprieties that oppose these social norms but to also have an invested interest in or at the very least an initial rapport with the targeted student, which is

identified in the section “Selection of Mentors.” Without this foundation, the effort of the intervention may fall short of its intended outcome.

Secondly, it was seen in this same 2008 meta-analysis of social and emotional learning programs that significant gains were only seen across the six areas, as bulleted above, when classroom teachers were the primary implementers (as opposed to outside researchers or as preliminarily suggested community volunteers as outlined in the early phase of this study). This finding demonstrates that school staff can effectively conduct SEL programs, and schools do not need to hire outside personnel for effective delivery. Using existing staff may also increase the likelihood that SEL becomes an essential and routine part of school life attended to by all staff rather than a marginal add-on provided by only a few, which further supports the design of the proposed intervention.

These are the results of a meta-analysis of 213 studies of SEL programs involving a broadly representative group of 270,034 students from urban, suburban, and rural elementary and secondary schools. This study was funded by the William T. Grant Foundation, the Lucile Packard Foundation for Children’s Health, and the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC); the findings are the result of research that was carried out by Roger P. Weissberg at UIC and Joseph A. Durlak of Loyola University, Chicago, with the assistance of graduate students Allison Dymnicki, Rebecca Taylor, and Kriston Schellinger. The meta-analysis project, spearheaded by the UIC Social and Emotional Learning Research Group and the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), a not-for-profit research organization, is the first meta-analysis of outcome research on social and emotional learning programs that take place during the school day.

**From the Balcony: A Macro Look at Federal Recommendations to Decrease Bullying**

To address the growing concerns surrounding the implications of bullying, the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services co-hosted the Federal Partners in Bullying Prevention Summit in 2010. This event brought together government officials, researchers, policy makers, and education practitioners to discuss ways to effectively address bullying in our schools. There had been considerable discussion among state and local officials, educators, and policy makers as to how to create or improve anti-bullying legislation; the bullying summit further highlighted the need for more comprehensive information regarding bullying legislation in the states and how this legislation translated into policy and practice in the schools. Furthermore, the Office for Civil Rights released a memo reminding schools that some instances of bullying and harassment may violate federal antidiscrimination laws:

School districts may violate these civil rights statutes and the Department's implementing regulations when peer harassment based on race, color, national origin, sex, or disability is sufficiently serious that it creates a hostile environment and such harassment is encouraged, tolerated, not adequately addressed, or ignored by school employees. (U.S Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2010).

Following the release of this guidance from the Office for Civil Rights and in response to requests for assistance from state and local districts regarding appropriate legislation and policy, the Department of Education released a technical assistance memo

(U. S. Department of Education, 2010), detailing 11 key components that encompassed their framework for bullying legislation:

- **Purpose Statement:** Outlines the negative effects that bullying has on students and student engagement and explicitly states that bullying is unacceptable and every incident should be taken seriously.
- **Statement of Scope:** Indicates that the legislation or policy covers all conduct that occurs on the school campus, at school sponsored activities and events (on or off campus), on school-provided transportation, through school-owned technology, or that otherwise creates a significant disruption to the school environment.
- **Specification of Prohibited Conduct:** Provides a specific definition of bullying that includes a clear definition of cyberbullying. The definition of bullying includes a nonexclusive list of specific behaviors that constitute bullying and specifies that bullying includes the intent to harm. The definition should be easily understood and interpreted by school boards, policy makers, administrators, staff, students and their families, and the community. The definition should also be consistent with other federal, state, and local laws.
- **Enumeration of Specific Characteristics:** Explains that bullying may include, but is not limited to, acts based upon real or perceived characteristics of students (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation). It also makes clear that bullying does not have to be based on any particular characteristic.
- **Development and Implementation of LEA Policies:** Directs each LEA to engage in a collaborative process with all interested stakeholders to develop

and implement a policy prohibiting bullying that best addresses local conditions.

- **Components of LEA Policies:** The LEA policy includes a definition of bullying that is consistent with the definition specified in state law, a procedure to report incidents of bullying (including a process to submit information anonymously), and designation of the school personnel responsible for receiving and investigating reports. The LEA policy should outline a procedure for investigating and responding to a report of bullying, including immediate intervention strategies for protecting the victim, notification of the reported victim's and alleged bully's parents, and if appropriate, notification of law enforcement officials, as well as a procedure of keeping written records of each reported incident and the resolution. LEA policy should include a detailed description of a range of consequences and sanctions for bullying as well as procedures to refer individuals to counseling and mental health services as appropriate.
- **Review of Local Policies:** Includes a provision that local policies will be regularly reviewed by the state to ensure the goals of the statute are met.
- **Communication Plan:** Includes a plan for notifying students, families, and staff of the components of the bullying policy.
- **Training and Preventative Education:** Includes a provision for school districts to provide training on bullying prevention, identification, and response and

encourages districts to implement school- and community-wide bullying prevention programs.

- **Transparency and Monitoring:** Includes provisions for LEAs to report the number of reported bullying incidents and the action taken, and to make these data available to the public.
- **Statement of Rights to Other Legal Recourse:** Includes a statement that victims may seek other legal remedies.

The U.S. Department of Education initiated a study to examine the extent to which state bullying laws and policies addressed the 11 key components identified by the U.S. Department of Education considered to be the most important (USDOE, 2011). The goal of this study was to summarize the status of state bullying laws and policies; it did not examine the effectiveness of any specific piece of legislation or policy of reducing bullying.

Furthermore, President Obama just recently announced his administration's endorsement of each of these pieces of legislation and its support for addressing the issue of bullying and harassment in schools. There is still a lot of work that needs to occur before these bills will become law; but with continued advocacy, we can get a few steps closer to ensuring that all schools are implementing policy and practices designed to reduce bullying and harassment.

The Safe Schools Improvement Act (SSIA, S. 506/H.R. 1648) seeks to help address the problem of bullying and harassment by ensuring that schools and districts use comprehensive and effective student conduct policies that include clear prohibitions regarding these behaviors. This legislation would also require that schools and districts

maintain and publically report data regarding incidents of bullying and harassment. SSIA would establish a definition of bullying and harassment in federal law and would require schools that receive federal funding to specifically prohibit bullying and harassment based on a student's actual or perceived race, color, national origin, sex, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, or religion. According to the analysis conducted by the U.S. Department of Education, 17 states enumerate characteristics in the law (USOE, 2011). Enumeration of specific characteristics refers to language that conveys explicit protection for certain groups or classes of people, or for anyone who is bullied based on personal characteristics (i.e., physical appearance). Advocates for enumeration argue that specifically naming groups helps to safeguard populations of students most vulnerable to bullying. Advocates have also pushed hard for enumeration on behalf of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) students who have high rates of bullying but have no protection under current federal civil rights law. It is noteworthy, that both New Jersey through its Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act of 2011 and other surrounding states such as New York's Dignity Act, have made appropriate provisions not only to address identifiable or perceived characteristics but have also met the requirements of all 11 key components that encompassed the framework for bullying legislation.

### **Implementation: Moving From a Macro to Micro Perspective**

In comparison, we see that despite federal efforts put forth by the United States Department of Education (USDOE) in the context of the 11 key components for bullying legislation, all of which were followed and incorporated into the New Jersey Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights of 2011. It is known that one cannot legislate bullying out of existence within our public schools. In fact, no one-size-fits-all approach exists to

bullying prevention. What is clear, however, is that schools must do more to foster an environment of tolerance and respect for children. Analyzing existing supports and addressing challenges with up-to-date strategies represents just one phase of the long and difficult battle for the safety of the nation's students (Nigam, 2013). What is known, as outlined by Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (2003), is that the success of real initiatives that leave lasting positive effects on students are as follows:

- Gain the support of school leadership to enhance implementation, achieve positive outcomes, and lay the foundation for long-term sustainability.
- Invest in ongoing professional development. It is essential to high-quality implementation and the achievement of successful outcomes. Make sure to provide skills training for all adult members of the school community so that everyone can teach, model, and reinforce SE skills in a variety of settings beyond the classroom.
- Implement evidence-based programs and practices with fidelity (as they are intended). Because program implementation quality influences outcomes, work with program developers if adaptations are needed to avoid interfering with the essential components that make the program work.
- Address implementation issues by proactively anticipating barriers and responding effectively when issues arise.
- Support classroom teachers in integrating SE competency promotion into core subject areas (e.g., language arts and empathy skills; science experiments and the problem-solving framework) and using SEL instructional practices (e.g.,



cooperative learning, dialogic inquiry) so that SEL can become a part of routine classroom practice throughout the day.

- Seek out opportunities to integrate and reinforce the use of key SE knowledge, skills, and concepts from the evidence-based SEL school program at home, through after-school programs, and in targeted supports and interventions provided by school staff or community providers.

Still, the answer for an effective intervention for practitioners seems to be continually elusive. This is a well-known fact for classroom instructors riddled into the basic principles of any Education 101 class. Educational Philosopher John Dewey, in the 1920's, explains this educational phenomenon best when he indicates that when one component of a system (classroom) is changed, then the entire culture and climate of the system (classroom) is altered. This is also supported by the fact that students are “bullies” and “victims” for different reasons. A one-size-fits-all program could never address the complexity of all at-risk social behaviors, which in turn leave today's educators searching for the metaphorical needle in the hay stack.

However, educators may not be as far off as they may think when meeting the multitude of social and emotional needs of today's students. There may be some sanctuary found in a common practice commonly used in schools around the county. The Response to Intervention (RTI) model, when applied to social and emotional learning to meet the needs of students, may offer some refuge at a time when little to no direction seems to be provided. The three-tier approach of Response to Intervention is second nature when it comes to academics, student achievement, and even disruptive behavior. However, when it comes to social and emotional character development, the same tools

and proven methodologies and pedagogy that make academic initiatives a success are very often abandoned and unjustly overlooked. Within best practice of the RTI model across the state and throughout the country, it is understood that all students in Tier One of an intervention are to receive high-quality, scientifically based instruction, differentiated to meet their individual learning needs, and are screened on a periodic basis to identify struggling learners who need additional support. Studies indicate that in both academics and social and emotional character development that approximately 80% of our students' needs can be met within schoolwide or simple classroom interventions. As a mandate of the ABRA 2011, we see the specificity of the law that promotes developmentally appropriate, differentiated, curriculum that introduces and embeds social and emotional learning into each grade level, Pre-Kindergarten to Grade 12. After being assessed on a periodic basis, either formatively or summatively (qualitatively or quantitatively), individuals still exhibiting anti-social behavior should receive additional support, as found in Tier two of the RTI process.

In Tier Two, students not making adequate progress with the infusion of SECD as delivered through the context of the core curriculum are provided with increasingly intensive instruction matched to their needs on the basis of levels of performance and rates of progress; this standard is no different for students who are exhibiting behaviors or interactions that are seen as being developmentally inappropriate or are determined to be at-risk socially; research tells us that within Tier Two of an intervention, which consists of in-class efforts or small-group efforts, supports an additional 15% of our students. Within the context of this study, as demonstrated by Ansary et al. (2014), we see that the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program, The Seville Study, DFE Sheffield Anti-Bullying

Project, and KiVa have beneficial results when used as a whole-class or whole-school initiative. Skills such as conflict resolution are taught at this level to assist with positive social interaction through a multitude of genres including morning meetings which highlights the importance of getting to know one another, how to treat one another, how to handle social concerns, and the establishment of a common language including key words and concepts such as *respect* and *kindness*. Through Tier Two of the RTI model, students are able to engage in activities that assist in avoiding at-risk social behaviors, and those who are exhibiting developmentally inappropriate interactions can receive the additional support needed to resolve ongoing conflicts with classmates.

For students still not responding during Tier One and Tier Two of the Response to Intervention model, a final tier, Tier Three, should be implemented. Within the context of a Tier Three intervention, students should receive small-group or even individualized, intensive interventions that target each student's skill deficits in order to overcome existing problems and the prevention of more severe problems. Most Tier Three models are done in small groups or within the context of one-to-one instruction when possible, which allows us to identify the individual needs of the remaining 5% of our students who have not yet been remediated. In Tier Three, the understanding that students bully or are targets of bullying for a multitude of reasons is prevalent and individual needs is the core of our efforts; therefore, Tier Three should be built upon the individual need of a particular student in an effort to uncover and resolve the systemic problem(s) one endures. Within the context of schools, we can see this approach most often orchestrated by the school counselor, social worker, behaviorist, or school psychologist. The concern with leaving this responsibility to only these individuals is that such mentioned essential

personnel are becoming more and more depleted throughout school districts. Within current day budgetary restraints throughout the state, we see many elementary school counselors being the first cut from staffing. Furthermore, with limitations and cost associated with members of the child study team, many school psychologists and social workers are case managers first, as counseling and student advocacy becomes a secondary responsibility. Finally, only a few districts have behaviorists or other related personnel to meet the immediate needs of students who are acting out.

As a result we are left with many students being underserved without any real plan to address the social and emotional needs of our children who are crying out for help through their poor choices and negative interactions with fellow classmates and staff. This self-created intervention, that is fundamentally rooted in best practice, as evident in the theoretical framework of the five core competencies of social and emotional learning, was created to address individual needs of students and is intended to serve as a Tier Three model of intervention. It is the aim of this proposed intervention to experience significant gains pertaining to student interaction and the mitigation of instances of harassment, intimidation, and bullying. As supported within the data collected by the focus group participants, this type of intervention is congruent with the Tier One and Tier Two programs currently or previously adopted by their schools or districts are “Effective With Current Initiatives” (page 101 of this study), and “Teachers and Counselor’s Likelihood of Implementation” (page 104 of this study). There are individuals within schools and districts that are prepared and welcoming to engage this type of proposed interaction with students. However, some of the reservations are evident when we truly begin to meet the uniqueness of each individual student’s social and emotional concerns;

there is still a fear of the unknown pertaining to the time, resources, and support needed to address the individual needs of students as discussed in “Projected Obstacles of Implementation” (page 79 of this study). It is these obstacles that leave us with much more to be discovered and unveiled in this type of intervention and the reason why most interventions are only congruent with Tier One and Tier Two of the Response to Intervention process.

### **Next Step(s) For The Prescribed Intervention**

The proposed next steps for this intervention is to first make the adjustments to some of the areas that were seen as a “con” or “obstacle” by the participating subject experts, Burlington County District Coordinators and School Specialists. Upon fine tuning the intervention, a training manual is proposed with the intent to share a common language and set of expectations for all participating mentors. Also, the language will be reviewed for developmental appropriateness; and if found conducive to a multitude of cognitive abilities, a different manuscript will be proposed for students in Grades 3 and 4, another for Grades 5 and 6, and finally for students in Grades 7 and 8. Students identified with a disability will also be able to benefit better from an intervention that is differentiated as the manuscript most aligned with their individual ability level can be administered. A training piece will be introduced for all participants, including administrators, which not only will further expand the understanding of social and emotional learning but will also link the process of the program to correlate with desired outcomes of the intervention as determined by each school community.

Finally, the intervention must be tested for effectiveness. I would implement a controlled group of students exhibiting at-risk social behaviors who would not receive the

intervention and do a comparative study to a group of students exhibiting similar types of behaviors who did participate in the study in order to check for a decrease in at-risk social behaviors and possibly even improved classroom behavior, improved social skills, and potentially improvement in academic performance and overall attendance as previously proven within the implementation of the five core competencies of social and emotional learning. I would monitor this progress through qualitative feedback from each student's teachers as well as quantitative means such as disciplinary referrals, suspensions, report cards, bus referrals, parent survey, and attendance records.

After further review and future study, if a significant positive correlation between any or some of the intended goals of the intervention were found, I would use the intervention in my own district for students in Grades 5 through 8. If there was continued success with students, I would then make the intervention open to my colleagues in other districts and would consider creating a team to assist with implementation, training, aligning school goals with intended results, and result analysis in other districts.

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**Appendix A**

**Format of the Focus Group**

## **Appendix A**

### **Format of the Focus Group**

The interviews were audio and video recorded (video, only if school policy allows). After the interviews had been recorded, they were transcribed and coded for apparent themes or trends pertaining to the thoughts, feelings, and attitudes of the aforementioned questions.

The format of the focus group is based upon the recommended best practices of Richard Krueger (Krueger, 2002).

**Appendix B**

**Introduction of Focus Group to Participants**



## **Appendix B**

### **Introduction of Focus Group to Participants**

Good morning/afternoon, and welcome to our session. Thank you for taking the time out of your busy schedules to join us in talking about an intervention designed to negate instances of bullying in at-risk students like the ones you may come into contact with every day. My name is Dan Dooley, and I will be your moderator for this focus group. Mrs. Sara Trombly will assist me during our time together. To provide you some background about both Sara and myself, I was the District Harassment, Intimidation, and Bullying Coordinator for the Florence Township School District prior to becoming Principal/District Coordinator of the Schoenly School in Spotswood, New Jersey. Mrs. Trombly is currently the kindergarten through fifth grade School Specialist at the Roebling Elementary and Riverfront Middle Schools, in Florence Township. The purpose for our focus group is to gather your thoughts and perceptions on a self-created prescribed intervention that focuses on general education students from fifth through eighth grade that are exhibiting at-risk social behaviors such as bullying, harassment, and intimidation. The results of the data you provide for us today will be used for the sole purpose of completing my doctoral studies at Seton Hall University and to modify and improve upon the current intervention, which you have been provided upon entry and which were emailed to you by Mrs. Trombly two weeks prior to today's gathering. We will read through and become familiar with this intervention together for those who have not had a chance to review it prior to today's focus group. I encourage that as Mrs. Trombly reads through the intervention aloud, you follow along (I will request that Mrs. Trombly read the intervention so the participants in the study do not affiliate too close a

connection with me, as the author of the study, which may soften the intended feedback needed). Since there will be no questions permitted at this time, it may prove beneficial for you to make notes that you can reflect upon during the questioning portion of our morning/afternoon. As you have probably suspected, the reason you have been asked to join us this morning is because you are either the 2013-2014 Specialist or Coordinator for your school or district.

As we proceed, please note the guidelines for today's focus group. First and foremost, there are no right or wrong answers, only points of view. The purpose of soliciting your professional opinions is to create the best intervention possible for at-risk students. Please feel free to share your point of view, even if it differs from what others have said. Keep in mind that we're just as interested in negative comments as positive comments, and at times the negative comments will prove to be the most helpful. Secondly, you've probably noticed the microphone, tape recorder, and video camera; we are audio and video recording this focus group because people often say very helpful things in these discussions, and we can't write fast enough to get them all down. Next, we will be on a first-name-only basis for confidentiality and data collection purposes, and I will use only pseudonyms within the context of the actual completed study to assure anonymity. You may be assured of complete confidentiality, so please feel free to share freely. If there is something you would like to say, simply raise your hand and I will identify you by first name; then you can provide your response. I will do my best to hear from everyone, and may direct a question to specific individuals for the purpose of data collection. Please keep in mind that you do not need to agree with others, but you must listen respectfully as others share their views. We do ask that you turn off your cellular

phones at this time; if you cannot turn your mobile devices off, please place them on silent. If you must respond to a call, please do so as quietly as possible and rejoin the group as quickly as possible. My role as the moderator will be to guide and progress the discussion; from time to time additional questions will be added for the purpose of clarification and further data collection.

Well, let's begin. We've placed name cards on the table in front of you to help us remember each other's names. Please take the marker provided, fill out those name cards, and place them in front of you. Let's find out some more about each other by going around the table and telling the group whether you are a School Specialist or Coordinator and what district you represent.

Now let's focus on the intervention itself. Please follow along on your provided copy (see Appendix F) and feel free to make any notes as Mrs. Trombly reads aloud.

**Appendix C**

**Predetermined Questions in the Order They Are Intended for the Study**

## Appendix C

### Predetermined Questions in the Order They Are Intended for the Study

Now that we have completed reviewing the intervention, let's begin the questioning process.

- To start, what are your initial thoughts of the intervention?
- What aspects of the intervention do you find most advantageous and why?
- What aspects of the intervention do you find concerning and why?
- Next, what grade of students do you think would benefit the most from this intervention strategy and why?
- How would you suggest identifying students who would benefit from the prescribed intervention strategy?
- Based on your experiences, how do you predict students at different grade levels would respond to the prescribed intervention?
- What changes would you suggest to make this intervention more beneficial? Please support your rationale.
- In your efforts to negate bullying, would you view your school/district's adopted philosophy as primarily punitive, developmental, or other? Please explain in detail.
- What current initiatives are in place at your school/district to negate instances of bullying? How successful have they been?
- How could the prescribed strategy work in conjunction with any pre-existing programs in place at your school/district?
- Analyzing the intervention's practicality, what additional support, if any, would be necessary to effectively implement the intervention (i.e., trainings or materials)?
- Taking the prescribed intervention to a more personal level, how comfortable would you feel engaging in this sort of intervention with the students that fall under your domain?
- Whom would you recommend to be responsible for implementing this intervention? Does this change by grade? Are there any other members of the school community that you believe can handle this task effectively?
- How can the role of a mentor within the intervention strategy fit into everyday responsibilities?

- Considering the needs of your students, how effective do you feel this intervention would be at your school/district? Regarding implementation, what obstacles would your school/district face?
- To begin wrapping up our focus group, what, of all the things we've discussed, stands out to you as most important?
- Is there anything else you'd like us to consider in regard to the prescribed intervention?

I'd like to thank each of you for taking the time to join our focus group discussions today. The data we were able to collect from you will be helpful in formulating a comprehensive intervention for students displaying at-risk social behaviors. Your thoughts, opinions, and constructive criticism are greatly appreciated.

**Appendix D**

**Focus Group Questions as Related to Research Questions**

Focus Group Questions	Research Question #1	Research Question #2	Research Question #3	Research Question #4
1. What are your initial thoughts of the intervention?	X			
2. What aspects of the intervention do you find most advantageous and why?	X			
3. What aspects of the intervention do you find concerning and why?	X			
4. What grade students do you think would benefit the most from this intervention strategy and why?		X		
5. How would you suggest identifying students whom would benefit from the prescribed intervention strategy?		X		
6. Based on your experiences, how do you predict students at different grade levels would respond to the prescribed intervention?		X		
7. What changes would you suggest to make this intervention more beneficial? Please support your rationale.	X	X		
8. In your efforts to negate bullying, would you view your school/district's adopted philosophy as primarily punitive, developmental, or other? Please explain in detail.			X	
9. What current initiatives are in place at your school/district to negate instances of bullying? How successful have they been?			X	
10. How could the prescribed strategy work in conjunction with any pre-existing programs in place at your school/district?			X	
11. What additional support, if any, would be necessary to effectively implement the intervention (i.e.: trainings or materials)?			X	X
12. How comfortable would you feel engaging in this sort of intervention with the students that fall under your domain?				X
13. Whom would you recommend to be responsible for implementing this intervention? Does this change by grade? Are there any other members of the school community that you believe can handle this task effectively?				X
14. How can the role of a mentor within the intervention strategy fit into everyday responsibilities?				X
15. Considering the needs of your students, how effective do you feel this intervention would be at your school/district? Regarding implementation, what obstacles would your school/district face?	X			X
16. Of all the things we've discussed, what stands out to you as most important?	X			
17. Is there anything else you'd like for us to consider in regards to the prescribed intervention?	X			



### **Research Questions as Supported by Specific Questions of the Focus Group**

*Research Question 1: What are the pros and cons of the prescribed interventions as indicated by the Burlington County District Coordinators and School Specialists?*

- What are your initial thoughts of the intervention?
- What aspects of the intervention do you find most advantageous and why?
- What aspects of the intervention do you find concerning and why?

*Research Question 2: To what extent do Burlington County Coordinators and School Specialists find the intervention developmentally appropriate for general education students in grades five through eight?*

- What grade students do you think would benefit the most from this intervention strategy and why?
- How would you suggest identifying students whom would benefit from the prescribed intervention strategy?
- Based on your experiences, how do you predict students at different grade levels would respond to the prescribed intervention?
- What changes would you suggest to make this intervention more beneficial? Please support your rationale.

*Research Question 3: How does the prescribed intervention align with current initiatives that have been adopted by individual schools and districts since the introduction of the Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act (ABRA)?*

- In your efforts to negate bullying, would you view your school/district's adopted philosophy as primarily punitive, developmental, or other? Please explain in detail.
- What current initiatives are in place at your school/district to negate instances of bullying? How successful have they been?
- How could the prescribed strategy work in conjunction with any pre-existing programs in place at your school/district?
- What additional support, if any, would be necessary to effectively implement the intervention (i.e.: trainings or materials)?

*Research Question 4: To what extent, if any, would District Coordinators and School Specialists consider using the prescribed intervention as a way to remediate at-risk behaviors, including bullying, within their own schools or districts?*

- How comfortable would you feel engaging in this sort of intervention with the students that fall under your domain?

- Whom would you recommend to be responsible for implementing this intervention? Does this change by grade? Are there any other members of the school community that you believe can handle this task effectively?
- How can the role of a mentor within the intervention strategy fit into everyday responsibilities?
- Considering the needs of your students, how effective do you feel this intervention would be at your school/district? Regarding implementation, what obstacles would your school/district face?

Concluding Questions:

- Of all the things we've discussed, what stands out to you as most important?
- Is there anything else you'd like for us to consider in regards to the prescribed intervention?

**Appendix E**

**Research Questions as Developed by Themes/Codes**

## Appendix E

### Research Questions as Developed by Themes/Codes

#### Research Question #1

1. Pros
  - a) Social and Emotional Learning Core Competencies
    1. Self-awareness
    2. Self-management
    3. Social-awareness
    4. Relationship skills
    5. Responsible decision-making
  - b) Benefits of Mentoring
    1. Trusting Relationship
    2. Having an Unbiased Person
    3. Building a Rapport
    4. Students Knowing Someone Cares
  - c) The Functionality of The Intervention
2. Cons
  - a) Projected Obstacles of Implementation
    1. Students' Projected Obstacles
      - i. Non-compliance/Resistance
      - ii. Lack of Trust
      - iii. Inability to be Rehabilitated
    2. Staffs' Projected Obstacles
      - i. Confidentiality
      - ii. Training
      - iii. Time Restrictions
      - iv. Staff Resistance
    3. Parents' Projected Obstacles
      - i. Parent Volunteers
      - ii. Identifying Children Who Would Benefit
  - b) Identified Shortcomings of The Intervention
    1. Follow-up
    2. Verbiage

**Research Question #2**

3. Identifying Eligible Students
  - a) High Discipline/Recurring Instances
  - b) Special Education
  - c) Teacher Recommendations
  - d) Self Select
4. Age Appropriateness
  - a) 5<sup>th</sup> Grade and Younger
  - b) Appropriate for 6<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> Grade
  - c) Appropriate for 7<sup>th</sup> Grade and Older

**Research Question #3**

5. Punitive
6. In Response to ABRA 2011
7. Paradigm Shift
8. Social and Emotional Character Development (SECD)
  - a) Self-Designed Interventions
  - b) Pre-Designed Interventions
  - c) Programs
  - d) Mentoring/Counseling
9. Effective With Current Initiatives
  - a) Currently Fits
  - b) Likely to Adopt
  - c) Fits into Mission Statements/Core Beliefs

**Research Question #4**

10. Teacher's and Counselor's Likelihood of Implementation
11. Selection of Mentors
12. Support Needed to Ensure a Successful and Sustainable Implementation

**Appendix F**  
**Intervention**

## **Appendix F**

### **Intervention**

#### **Day 1: Will Consist of an Introduction:**

Good Afternoon. My name is Mr. Dooley, and I will be meeting with you over the next ten days to talk about your feelings, actions, and choices that you make while you are at school. The reason we are meeting is not to figure out if you are “being good” or “bad” while at school, but to help you deal better with situations that might be uncomfortable or upsetting as they happen from now on. During the next ten days, we will talk about the things you are asked to do on a daily basis and what things you enjoy doing, as well as the things you have the most trouble with. More specifically, we will be talking about how you get along with and treat those around you. The goal for our meetings is to recognize how you are feeling at specific times and talk about the best way you can deal with those feelings in the future. In other words, what way can you handle things in the future that may have a better outcome than the way you have handled them before? It is my hope that you will better understand that you can make a situation better by the daily choices you make. In order to do this, we may have to think about things that happened before in school, take a look at how you responded at that time, and then discuss other possibilities or solutions to better handle a similar situation the next time it may come up. Do you have any questions?

*All students' questions will be answered at this time.*

*Also, the study will be given to the parents ahead of time, with the entire list of questions, so parents can help assist in a comprehensive understanding of the purpose of the process.*

Tell me something about yourself, anything you think I should know about you in order to get to know you better?

Do you have any brothers or sisters, or maybe a pet?

Do you play any sports, dance, or belong to any organizations like Boy Scouts or Girl Scouts?

Do you enjoy playing video games or reading?

Tell me about something you like to do that has not already been asked.

How about at school, what are some of the things you enjoy doing at school?

What is your favorite part about school?

What are some things you don't like, such as vegetables or taking out the trash?

What are some of the things you don't like about school? (After student lists each) Tell me about more about each of them.

### **Day Two: Identifying everyday emotions as “often,” “sometimes,” or “never.”**

Yesterday, you were able to tell me about some of the things you liked and didn't like. With each of these things you described, there are emotions and feelings related to them; for instance, I love playing basketball and I am very ecstatic when I get a chance to play, but I dislike taking tests because they make me very anxious.

Today, I would like to start with a chart of many known emotions like being ecstatic or anxious (see Appendix A) that we may experience on a daily basis. As I point to each picture, I want you to read the word directly under the picture, tell me what the word means, then tell me if a particular word tells how you feel often, sometimes, or



never. If you do not know a word, I will help you understand what it means. Do you have any questions?

*Please see the definitions of each word provided under “Definitions” located in Chapter One. After each emotion is identified, each student will be asked the following questions pertaining to the feelings he or she identified as feeling often or sometimes. Questions will be sequenced in the order they were identified from the chart starting with “often” and then moving to “sometimes.”*

**Days Three and Four: Linking personal actions or responses with each emotion experienced “often” or “sometimes.”**

Yesterday, we talked about identifying different feelings and emotions that all of us have. Sometimes we may have many different feelings or emotions during the course of one day. This is normal. However, what is most important is how we deal with the emotions that we feel.

Can you tell me about a time during the school day that you remember feeling \_\_\_\_\_; what made you feel this way? Explain how you responded through your actions and choices when you felt this way. Was this the best way to handle things, why or why not? Was the outcome good or bad? Is there any other way that you could have handled the same situation that may have made the outcome better? Explain.

*All positive emotions/feelings identified will serve only as comparative indicators of actions and behaviors. It is anticipated that students will identify approximately ten or less of the given emotions or feelings as “often” or “sometimes.” If students identify more than ten different emotions, the questioning will be directed towards their first ten responses, but will include all emotions/feelings identified as “often.” This part of the questioning/mentoring will be concluded at the end of the fifteen-minute time allotment on the fifth day.*

**Day Five: Relating at-risk social behaviors, including bullying, to personal experiences.**

The last time we met, we spoke about different feelings and emotions we have experienced during the course of a school day. We also talked about different experiences in school that have led you to feel a particular feeling or emotion and how you responded after feeling a specific feeling or emotion. Finally, we discussed if there were other ways you could have responded when feeling a specific feeling or emotion that may have led to a better or more positive outcome.

Today, I would like you to understand that sometimes people, particularly our classmates or others who attend our school, walk home with us, or ride our bus, can also cause us to feel a certain way or make us feel different emotions like the ones we identified earlier from the chart. More importantly, I want you to understand that we can't control how someone makes us feel, but we can control how we react after they make us feel a certain way.

Sometimes when we feel certain emotions or feelings, we react in a way that can hurt the feelings of others or make those around us feel bad about themselves. Sometimes we may be tempted to yell at those around us; call them names; tease them; make fun of how they look or act; or even push, shove, hit, punch, or threaten those around us to express the feelings we are currently experiencing. At times we do this to those around us for no reason, just because we want people to feel how we were made to feel. Do you know what acting in this manner is called?

*If the student does not make the immediate connection he or she will be prompted: Bullying (clarification or explanation of the term may be offered, simulated from the description below).*

For the remainder of our time together today, I would like you to remember different times this year that you have treated a member of our school community (fellow students) in a way that was unkind or insensitive to how you were making them feel.

Please describe the most recent time that you have not been kind to one or more of your fellow classmates or to any other student(s) that may attend the Riverfront school. What happened? Please describe in detail.

*If student is hesitant to respond, he or she will be prompted: Please remember that you will not get in trouble for the answers you give. We simply want to examine how and why you handled a specific situation the way you did. Keep in mind that we all make mistakes and we all do things that we wish we hadn't.*

*At least one scenario will be described in detail; a second will be prompted if time allows.*

Please describe another time that you have not been kind to one of your fellow classmates or to any other student that may attend the Riverfront school. What happened? Please describe in detail.

**Day Six: Relating at-risk social behaviors, including bullying, to personal experiences (Continued).**

The last time we met, we identified ways that we have treated our fellow school mates including those in our class, ones that may walk home with us or other students that ride our bus with us, in a way that was not considerate of their feelings, belongings, personal space, or their right to feel safe. We discussed that sometimes we may be tempted to yell at those around us; call them names; tease them; make fun of how they look or act; or even push, shove, hit, punch, or threaten those around us to express the

feelings we are currently experiencing. We described these actions as different forms of bullying, although we may not always intend for our actions to hurt others' feelings.

Today, I would like you to come up with different example(s) than those you shared before of how you didn't consider someone else's feelings because of how you may have been feeling at the time or because of the choices you made at a particular moment.

*Again, if student is hesitant to respond he or she will be prompted: Please remember that you will not get in trouble for the answers you give. We simply want to examine how and why you handled a specific situation the way you did. Keep in mind that we all make mistakes and we all do things that we wish we didn't.*

*After two examples have been given, the process of day seven will begin.*

**Day Seven: Understanding one's actions and infusing the SEL process to personally selected and described situations.**

*This process could begin towards the middle of day six, dependent on time limitations.*

I would like to thank you for sharing stories with me over the last few days that were very honest in telling me how you had treated someone, or a group of people, in the past that could have been handled better. It is never easy to admit that we have made a mistake. The exciting part is that when we acknowledge our mistakes, we are less likely to make the same ones again in the future. Even more exciting is to know that we have the power, no matter what the situation, to make the right decision at all times. Today, I would like to ask you some questions about the situations that you have described over the last few days.

*The most severe significant situation demonstrating at-risk social behaviors, including bullying, will be selected first. All other subsequent examples will be run through the same process, moving from the most significant to the least. As many situations as time*

*allows will be discussed; however, the most significant situation described and selected will be run through the entire gamut of questions.*

*A recap of the situation described and selected will be given.*

## **SELF-AWARENESS**

### *Accurately Assessing One's Feelings*

- During the first situation you described to me, do you remember how you felt and what made you feel that way?

### *Interests*

- How would you have handled the situation differently if you were thinking about what was in your best interest at the time?

### *Strengths/Maintaining a Well-Founded Sense of Self-Confidence*

- Do you know you have the power to determine the outcome of any situation, no matter how much emotion you have at the time?

### *Values*

- In the situation you described, what do you think you could have done differently? Why?

## **SELF-MANAGEMENT**

### *Regulating One's Emotions to Handle Stress*

- As we discussed before, we feel different feelings and emotions throughout any given day. How could you have better controlled your emotions during the situation you described?

### *Controlling Impulses and Persevering in Addressing Challenges*

- Sometimes when things happen to us we just react; what could you do instead, to make sure you are handling the situation the best way possible?

### *Expressing Emotions Appropriately*

- How could you have expressed your emotions more appropriately during the situation that you described?

### *Setting and Monitoring Progress Toward Personal Goals*

- What would you have liked to change about the situation? What can you do to make sure the situation is handled in a way that will make you happier in the future?

## **SOCIAL AWARENESS**

*Being Able to Take the Perspective of, and Empathize with, Others*

- After the situation had occurred, did you think about how your actions had made the other person feel? Do you realize that your actions have an impact on those around you?

*Recognizing and Appreciating Individual and Group Similarities and Differences*

- Many conflicts occur with people we find different than us, whether by the way individuals look, the clothes they wear, the friends they have, or by the way they act. Can you tell me some of the differences of the person or group of people in the situation you described? Can you tell me some of the similarities of that person or group of people may have to you?

*Recognizing and Making Best Use of Family, School, and Community Resources*

- In the future, what is another way you can handle a situation like the one you described to me? Are there people in school, at home, or in the community, like a coach, that could give you advice on how to better handle a situation like the one you described?

**RELATIONSHIP SKILLS***Establishing and Maintaining Health, Rewarding Relationships Based on Cooperation*

- Could you ever see yourself being friends with the person or group of people you described when you told me about your situation? Would it be better to be friends and get along with this person(s)? If so, why?

*Resisting Inappropriate Social Pressures*

- During the situation you described, were there other people supporting you to handle the things the way you did? If so, how will you deal with these people, or people like them, in the future when you handle things differently?

*Preventing, Managing, and Resolving Interpersonal Conflict*

- What could you have done to avoid the conflict?

*Seeking Help When Needed*

- It is okay to get help when you are in a situation that is not going well. Who could you have gone to in order to keep situation from occurring?

**RESPONSIBLE DECISION-MAKING***Making Decisions Based on Consideration of Ethical Standards, Safety Concerns, Appropriate Social Norms, Respect for Others, and Likely Consequences of Various Actions*

- Do you now know what is expected of you if this situation, or one like it, comes up in the future? What will be a better way to handle it?

*Applying Decision-Making Skills to Academic and Social Situations*

- Every reaction or choice is made with a decision. What decisions will you make differently the next time this situation, or one like it, comes up?

*Contributing to the Well-Being of One's School and Community*

- Do the decisions you made in the situation you described make our school a better or worse place to be? Explain. How did it affect those around you? What can you do next time to make a decision that is best for you and those around you?

**Day Eight: Understanding one's actions and infusing the SEL process to personally selected and described situations (Continued).**

*If day seven's questioning runs over the prescribed time limit, the questions eluded to in day seven will be completed; picking up from where we left off in the process on day eight. If the questioning process from day seven runs over into day eight, the questioning process for only one example will be exhausted. For the remainder of the time during day eight, the student will be engaged in questions and process from day nine, with the understanding that the prescribed process will take a particular student more than one 15-20 minute gathering to exhaust all questions.*

I would like to thank you again for sharing stories with me over the last few days that were very honest in telling me how you had treated someone, or a group of people, in the past that could have been handled better. It is never easy to admit that we have made a mistake. The exciting part is that when we acknowledge our mistakes, we are less likely to make the same ones again in the future. Even more exciting is to know that we have the power, no matter what the situation, to make the right decision at all times. Today, I would like to ask you some questions about another situation that you have described over the last few days.

*The most severe and significant situation demonstrating at-risk social behaviors, including bullying, will be selected first. All other subsequent examples will be ran through the same process moving from the most significant to least (determined by time). As many situations as time will be allowed will be questioned; however, the most significant situation described and selected will be ran through the entire gamut of questions.*

*A recap of the situation described and selected will be given.*

**SELF-AWARENESS***Accurately Assessing One's Feelings*

- During the first situation you described to me, do you remember how you felt and what made you feel that way?

*Interests*

- How would you have handled the situation differently if you were thinking about what was in your best interest at the time?

*Strengths/Maintaining a Well-Grounded Sense of Self-Confidence*

- Do you know you have the power to determine the outcome of any situation, no matter how much emotion you have at the time?

*Values*

- In the situation you described, what do you think you could have done differently? Why?

**SELF-MANAGEMENT***Regulating One's Emotions to Handle Stress*

- As we discussed before, we feel different feelings and emotions throughout any given day. How could you have better controlled your emotions during the situation you described?

*Controlling Impulses and Persevering in Addressing Challenges*

- Sometimes when things happen to us we just react; what could you do instead, to make sure you are handling the situation the best way possible?

*Expressing Emotions Appropriately*

- How could you have expressed your emotions more appropriately during the situation that you described?

*Setting and Monitoring Progress Toward Personal Goals*

- What would you have liked to change about the situation? What can you do to make sure the situation is handled in a way that will make you happier in the future?

**SOCIAL AWARENESS***Being Able to Take the Perspective of, and Empathize with, Others*

- After the situation had occurred, did you think about how your actions had made the other person feel? Do you realize that your actions have an impact on those around you?



*Recognizing and Appreciating Individual and Group Similarities and Differences*

- Many conflicts occur with people we find different than us, whether by the way individuals look, the clothes they wear, the friends they have, or by the way they act. Can you tell me some of the differences of the person or group of people in the situation you described? Can you tell me some of the similarities of that person or group of people may have to you?

*Recognizing and Making Best Use of Family, School, and Community Resources*

- In the future, what is another way you can handle a situation like the one you described to me? Are there people in school, at home, or in the community, like a coach, that could give you advice on how to better handle a situation like the one you described?

**RELATIONSHIP SKILLS***Establishing and Maintaining Health, Rewarding Relationships Based on Cooperation*

- Could you ever see yourself being friends with the person or group of people you described when you told me about your situation? Would it be better to be friends and get along with this person(s)? If so, why?

*Resisting Inappropriate Social Pressures*

- During the situation you described, were there other people supporting you to handle the things the way you did? If so, how will you deal with these people, or people like them, in the future when you handle things differently?

*Preventing, Managing, and Resolving Interpersonal Conflict*

- What could you have done to avoid the conflict?

*Seeking Help When Needed*

- It is okay to get help when you are in a situation that is not going well. Who could you have gone to in order to keep situation from occurring?

**RESPONSIBLE DECISION-MAKING***Making Decisions Based on Consideration of Ethical Standards, Safety Concerns, Appropriate Social Norms, Respect for Others, and Likely Consequences of Various Actions*

- Do you now know what is expected of you if this situation, or one like it, comes up in the future? What will be a better way to handle it?

*Applying Decision-Making Skills to Academic and Social Situations*

- Every reaction or choice is made with a decision. What decisions will you make differently the next time this situation, or one like it, comes up?

*Contributing to the Well-Being of One's School and Community*

- Do the decisions you made in the situation you described make our school a better or worse place to be? Explain. How did it affect those around you? What can you do next time to make a decision that is best for you and those around you?

**Day Nine: Reflecting on individual actions and understanding how actions are interpreted from other perspectives, while using the SEL process to further understand how to negate observed behaviors in the future.**

*One of the written identifiers from each teacher pertaining to examples provided for original identification will be depicted. The written response from the teacher will be shared with the student. The student will be asked if he or she remembers the described incident and will be prompted to explain in greater detail, from their perspective, what transpired during the situation depicted by the teacher.*

*After a comprehensive explanation and understanding of the situation observed by their teacher, the students will be asked a series of questions based on the rationale and structure of SEL to help him or her reflect on the situation and determine what part he or she had in the perceived negative and/or undesirable observed example. An emphasis will be made on how, if faced with a similar situation in the near future, he or she could make a better choice, or array of choices, that would lead to a more desirable and emotionally intelligent outcome.*

## **SELF-AWARENESS**

### *Accurately Assessing One's Feelings*

- During the first situation you described to me, do you remember how you felt and what made you feel that way?

### *Interests*

- How would you have handled the situation differently if you were thinking about what was in your best interest at the time?

### *Strengths/Maintaining a Well-Grounded Sense of Self-Confidence*

- Do you know you have the power to determine the outcome of any situation, no matter how much emotion you have at the time?

### *Values*

- In the situation you described, what do you think you could have done differently? Why?

## **SELF-MANAGEMENT**

### *Regulating One's Emotions to Handle Stress*

- As we discussed before, we feel different feelings and emotions throughout any given day. How could you have better controlled your emotions during the situation you described?

*Controlling Impulses and Persevering in Addressing Challenges*

- Sometimes when things happen to us, we just react; what could you do instead, to make sure you are handling the situation the best way possible?

*Expressing Emotions Appropriately*

- How could you have expressed your emotions more appropriately during the situation that you described?

*Setting and Monitoring Progress Toward Personal Goals*

- What would you have liked to change about the situation? What can you do to make sure the situation is handled in a way that will make you happier in the future?

## **SOCIAL AWARENESS**

*Being Able to Take the Perspective of, and Empathize with, Others*

- After the situation had occurred, did you think about how your actions had made the other person feel? Do you realize that your actions have an impact on those around you?

*Recognizing and Appreciating Individual and Group Similarities and Differences*

- Many conflicts occur with people we find different than us, whether by the way individuals look, the clothes they wear, the friends they have, or by the way they act. Can you tell me some of the differences of the person or group of people in the situation you described? Can you tell me some of the similarities of that person or group of people may have to you?

*Recognizing and Making Best Use of Family, School, and Community Resources*

- In the future, what is another way you can handle a situation like the one you described to me? Are there people in school, at home, or in the community, like a coach, that could give you advice on how to better handle a situation like the one you described?

## **RELATIONSHIP SKILLS**

*Establishing and Maintaining Health, Rewarding Relationships Based on Cooperation*

- Could you ever see yourself being friends with the person or group of people you described when you told me about your situation? Would it be better to be friends and get along with this person(s)? If so, why?

*Resisting Inappropriate Social Pressures*

- During the situation you described, were there other people supporting you to handle the things the way you did? If so, how will you deal with these people, or people like them, in the future when you handle things differently?

*Preventing, Managing, and Resolving Interpersonal Conflict*

- What could you have done to avoid the conflict?

*Seeking Help When Needed*

- It is okay to get help when you are in a situation that is not going well. Who could you have gone to in order to prevent the situation from occurring?

## **RESPONSIBLE DECISION-MAKING**

*Making Decisions Based on Consideration of Ethical Standards, Safety Concerns, Appropriate Social Norms, Respect for Others, and Likely Consequences of Various Actions*

- Do you now know what is expected of you if this situation, or one like it, comes up in the future? What will be a better way to handle it?

*Applying Decision-Making Skills to Academic and Social Situations*

- Every reaction or choice is made with a decision. What decisions will you make differently the next time this situation or one like it comes up?

*Contributing to the Well-Being of One's School and Community*

- Do the decisions you made in the situation you described make our school a better or worse place to be? Explain. How did it affect those around you? What can you do next time to make a decision that is best for you and those around you?

**Day Ten: Recap of essential components of feelings/emotions, individual at-risk social behaviors including bullying, and the highlights of the SEL process.**

*The agenda of day ten will begin on day nine if time allows.*

In our final day together I would like to recap some of the things we have focused on during our time together. First, as we talked about before, feelings/emotions are things that we experience every day, and sometimes we experience many different feelings or emotions within the same day. Feelings themselves are neither good nor bad, but what determines the impact of our feelings is how we respond to them. At no time it is ever

acceptable to make someone else feel bad by calling them names, making fun of a physical characteristic such as wearing glasses, intimidating, hitting or any type of physical contact, or making another person feel unsafe in any way just because we feel a certain way. This type of behavior is called bullying. There are better ways of dealing with our feelings and emotions, as we have discussed throughout our time together. Can you tell me some examples of better choices to make when dealing with feelings or emotions that may bother us?

*If student is hesitant, an example of telling a trusted adult so they can help with a situation will be provided, or an example that a student had previously given in either the teacher observed behavior or self identified behavior will be eluded to.*

What are some positive ways you can do the following?

## **SELF-AWARENESS**

*Accurately Assessing One's Feelings*

How will being able to identify how you are feeling help in situations?

*Strengths/Maintaining a Well-Grounded Sense of Self-Confidence*

How does knowing you have the ability to handle things in a positive way make you feel?

*Values*

Values are the things you believe in. Will having values help you make good decisions?

## **SELF-MANAGEMENT**

*Regulating One's Emotions to Handle Stress*

What will you do in the future to handle emotions that are hard to deal with?

*Controlling Impulses and Persevering in Addressing Challenges*

How will you avoid just reacting to situations and address challenging situations in the future?

*Expressing Emotions Appropriately*

What are some appropriate ways to express your negative emotions?

*Setting and Monitoring Progress Toward Personal Goals*

What are your goals for handling challenging situations in the future? How will you know if you are reaching your goals?

### **SOCIAL AWARENESS**

*Being Able to Take the Perspective of, and Empathize with, Others*

How important is it to be able to try and take into consideration other peoples' feelings or emotions in the future? Why?

*Recognizing and Appreciating Individual and Group Similarities and Differences*

Will you try to recognize not only how people are different but also how they are similar to you in the future? Why is this important?

*Recognizing and Making Best Use of Family, School, and Community Resources*

Why is knowing who to go to for help with challenging situations important?

### **RELATIONSHIP SKILLS**

*Establishing and Maintaining Health, Rewarding Relationships Based on Cooperation*

Why is it important to be friendly and cooperative with people in the future?

*Resisting Inappropriate Social Pressures*

How will we resist the people around us who encourage us to handle things negatively?

*Preventing, Managing, and Resolving Interpersonal Conflict*

How can you prevent or resolve conflict in the future?

*Seeking Help When Needed*

Why is it important to seek help in a challenging situation?

### **RESPONSIBLE DECISION-MAKING**

*Making Decisions Based on Consideration of Ethical Standards, Safety Concerns, Appropriate Social Norms, Respect for Others, and Likely Consequences of Various Actions*

How do you intend on treating people in the future?

*Applying Decision-Making Skills to Academic and Social Situations*

How can your decisions make for a better outcome when dealing with your fellow classmates?

*Contributing to the Well-Being of One's School and Community*

What decisions will be the best for your school community in dealing with your fellow classmates?

This concludes the mentoring process. I want you to try to remember the things that we have talked about, and try your best to use the things we talked about when dealing with your emotions and the actions you choose to respond to your emotions in the future. We have done a lot of hard work, and I am proud of you. I look forward to hearing about all the great choices you make in the future.

**APPENDIX G**  
**IRB DOCUMENTATION**





September 3, 2013

Dear Mr. Dooley,

The Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board has reviewed the information you have submitted addressing the concerns for your proposal entitled "Perceptions of a Prescribed Intervention". Your research protocol is hereby approved as revised through expedited review. The IRB reserves the right to recall the proposal at any time for full review.

Enclosed for your records are the signed Request for Approval form and the stamped original Consent Form. Make copies only of this stamped form.

The Institutional Review Board approval of your research is valid for a one-year period from the date of this letter. During this time, any changes to the research protocol must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to their implementation.

According to federal regulations, continuing review of already approved research is mandated to take place at least 12 months after this initial approval. You will receive communication from the IRB Office for this several months before the anniversary date of your initial approval.

Thank you for your cooperation.

*In harmony with federal regulations, none of the investigators or research staff involved in the study took part in the final decision*

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Mary F. Ruzicka, Ph.D." in a cursive script.

Mary F. Ruzicka, Ph.D.  
Professor  
Director, Institutional Review Board

cc: Dr. Joseph Stetar

Office of Institutional Review Board  
Presidents Hall • 400 South Orange Avenue • South Orange, New Jersey 07079 • Tel: 973.313.6314 • Fax: 973.275.2361 • [www.shu.edu](http://www.shu.edu)

A H O M E F O R T H E M I N D , T H E H E A R T A N D T H E S P I R I T

REQUEST FOR APPROVAL OF RESEARCH, DEMONSTRATION OR RELATED ACTIVITIES INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS

All material must be typed.

PROJECT TITLE: Perceptions of a Prescribed Intervention

CERTIFICATION STATEMENT:

In making this application, I(we) certify that I(we) have read and understand the University's policies and procedures governing research, development, and related activities involving human subjects. I (we) shall comply with the letter and spirit of those policies. I(we) further acknowledge my(our) obligation to (1) obtain written approval of significant deviations from the originally-approved protocol BEFORE making those deviations, and (2) report immediately all adverse effects of the study on the subjects to the Director of the Institutional Review Board, Seton Hall University, South Orange, NJ 07079.

Daniel J. Dooley Daniel J. Dooley 04/01/13  
RESEARCHER(S) OR PROJECT DIRECTOR(S) DATE

\*\*Please print or type out names of all researchers below signature. Use separate sheet of paper, if necessary.\*\*

My signature indicates that I have reviewed the attached materials and consider them to meet IRB standards.

Dr. Joseph Stetar 5/3/13  
RESEARCHER'S ADVISOR OR DEPARTMENTAL SUPERVISOR DATE

The request for approval submitted by the above researcher(s) was considered by the IRB for Research Involving Human Subjects Research at the in June 2013 meeting.

The application was approved  not approved  by the Committee. Special conditions were  were not  set by the IRB. (Any special conditions are described on the reverse side.)

Nancy F. Ruzicka, Ph.D. 9/3/13  
DIRECTOR, SETON HALL UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR HUMAN SUBJECTS RESEARCH DATE