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The Bully-Free School Zone Character Education Program:  
A Study of Impact on Five Western North Carolina Middle Schools

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A dissertation

presented to

the faculty of the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education

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by

Richard Alan Spurling

December 2004

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Dr. Cecil Blankenship

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Dr. Terry Tollefson

Keywords: Bully, Bullying, Bystander, Classroom Management, School Climate,  
School Violence, Victim

## ABSTRACT

### The Bully-Free School Zone Character Education Program: A Study of Impact on Five Western North Carolina Middle Schools

by

Richard Alan Spurling

In today's schools bullies have the power to be more tenacious, more vicious, and meaner than ever. We are all beginning to understand that victims of bullying are at a greater risk for depression, suicide, and hurting others through violent acts. The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate common threads of effective Bully-Free School Zone character education programs as perceived by administrators, teachers, and parents in five middle schools in Western North Carolina. Through this strategic inquiry, I attempted to determine if the views of administrators, teachers, and parents were consistent with published research on anti-bullying programs.

Specifically, the study focused on views of administrators, teachers, and parents of middle school students in grades five through eight by examining perceptions of the impact of bullying on students' safety. Participants shared their concerns about barriers to discipline programs and how school personnel and parents can contribute to a safer and more productive environment. The study was conducted in five middle schools in Western North Carolina. All participants were interviewed and asked open-ended questions during a three-week period in the spring of 2004.

The study supports the hypothesis that well disciplined and productive anti-bullying programs are not products of good luck or chance; they result from efforts made by caring administrators, teachers, parents, and students. All stakeholders should have an interest in changing behaviors that lead to aggressive and violent acts. Exerting extra efforts toward minimizing disruptions and providing safer schools requires a team effort in working toward a common goal that students enter the building each day excited, enthused, and looking forward to their school day.

## DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to Felicia, my loving wife of 15 years and mother of my two beautiful children. We met on campus 21 years ago and are truly an East Tennessee State University love story. My wife blesses and enriches my life daily and I am so glad she decided to spend her life with me. Madison, my eight-year-old daughter, has already written several stories about school bullying and she designed the cover for my dissertation notebook. She is a beautiful girl who loves school and already knows she wants to be a teacher. My five-year-old son, Max, recently completed his first year of school in a prekindergarten program at the middle school where I have served as principal for five years. That was a great experience for both of us in having that time together and Max and his class were the youngest Bully-Free Bulldogs in the building. All my family and friends have always genuinely encouraged and supported my educational endeavors and for that I will be eternally grateful.

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A special thanks goes to the administrators, teachers, and parents who made this study possible. I appreciate their kindness, cooperation, concern, and courtesy to me. Thank-you to all the principals involved who were very helpful in scheduling interviews and follow-up meetings with all participants.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Bullying has been a problem since a jealous Cain murdered his brother, Abel . . . or since the first caveman hit another over the head. Because kids spend much of their time at school, that's where a lot of bullying takes place--usually out of adults' sight and hearing. Despite recent efforts to publicize the problem, most bullying still goes unnoticed and unreported. (Beane, 2000, p. 1)

It was only 8:30 a.m. and already 11-year-old Nathan was on his way to the school's main office to let them know he was not feeling well and needed to go home. Nathan had decided on his way down the long school corridor leading to the front office that he would say his stomach hurt. Nathan would pretend he had stomach flu. This story had already worked several times for him this year. The school nurse always got nervous when she was around a stomach virus. He also felt that it was not much of a lie since his stomach was upset the majority of the time anyway. This upset stomach seemed always to be associated with a lack of appetite and an inability to sleep.

It would be just a matter of time before Nathan's parents would come to take him to the safety of his home. While waiting for his parents to come and check him out, Nathan felt tears rolling down his face as he wondered what made Travis and his friends be so mean to him. As these tears burnt his eyes, Nathan had never felt so alone. He was scared, embarrassed, and ashamed of what was happening to him and could not comprehend why it had started and when it would stop. What was even scarier was that Nathan did not think it would ever end.

At the same time, Travis who was fast becoming known as the class bully was being scolded by his language arts teacher for disrupting class repeatedly during second period. Since Nathan had checked out of class, Travis had turned his attention to another quiet, small boy who wore thick glasses and sat two seats in front of him. Travis did not care that the teacher was

upset about his behavior; all he noticed was his laughing classmates when he insulted the much smaller boy about his appearance.

Travis remembered that this was the way it had started out with Nathan, by calling him names in front of their classmates and seeing him cry and hearing them laugh. Travis had reasoned that his bullying behavior was no problem because nobody liked Nathan anyway. Nathan was big, clumsy, shy, and always the last person picked for games in gym class. He also made the highest grades in the class. His high classroom average and hard work always drew praise from his teachers who loved to brag on Nathan. These reasons tended to keep him from having many friends and made him an easy target for Travis.

Travis liked the attention his classmates gave him when he harassed Nathan. Travis found himself doing meaner things to Nathan for the approval of his new friends. Mike, who was the quarterback of the sixth-grade football team, started hanging out with him after he had punched Nathan in the bathroom last week. Mike had laughed when Travis kicked Nathan so hard that he fell hands-first into the urinal he was using. At first Mike thought it was funny, but he could not help feeling sorry for Nathan. He later confided to a friend that he hoped Travis would not start picking on him. Mike felt badly that he had not taken up for Nathan when he had the opportunity. He would never forget the disappointment and embarrassment in Nathan's eyes as Travis continued to kick him in the backside, laughing. Even though Mike was not guilty of bullying Nathan, his conscience had bothered him ever since. His fear of Travis had led him to turn his back on a classmate in need.

According to a survey by the National Institute of Child Health (as cited in Hoover, 2002), the number of children directly affected by bullying behavior is estimated at nearly 20%. That equates to five million plus elementary and middle school age children being bullied (Hoover). This bullying behavior fosters a vicious cycle of violence featuring three main characters: the bully, the victim, and the bystander. Coloroso (2002) explained that younger children are prone to try out all three roles and "play each one with relative ease, then abandon

the bully and bullied roles to become bystanders, while some children play both bully and bullied and move effortlessly between the two” (p. 4). Bystanders have the ability to empower the bully or to take that power away. Most effective anti-bullying programs emphasize the importance of the bystander and his or her reaction to abusive behavior. According to Naomi Drew, a conflict resolution expert, everyone involved--the bully, the victim, and the observer lose when bullying behavior is allowed to take place (as cited in Adams, 2003). Bullied students, according to Beane (2003), are made to feel that they "do not belong and are teased, harassed, socially isolated, intimidated, sexually molested, discriminated against, harmed by rumors, and threatened because of their race, sex, religion, ethnicity, and for having a characteristic that makes them different" (p. 14).

Teachers, administrators, parents, school board members, and citizens usually agree that too much time and energy is devoted to problems associated with bullying behavior. This type of bullying includes threats of bodily harm, weapon possession, extortion, civil rights violations, assault and battery, gang activity, attempted murder, or sometimes even murder. Recently, experts have added sexual harassment to the list of bullying behaviors.

In a study of 41 students who shot classmates, two thirds had been bullied repeatedly for long periods (Tench & Waters, 2003). Victims of bullying have become more aggressive toward others and themselves as indicated in recent school shootings and violence on a number of school campuses. According to a study of 15,000 school age students in grades 6 through 12, children who bullied others were much more likely to carry weapons and to start fights (Fitzgerald, 2003). This same study offered evidence that nearly one in three students was involved with bullying, an act that was defined as doing or saying nasty things to another student (Fitzgerald).

There are many unanswered questions regarding the reasons students bully and mistreat others or inflict physical, verbal, or emotional abuse on one another. Other concerns to be examined relate to the school climate variables that contribute to producing bullies, victims, and

uncaring bystanders. What educators are increasingly aware of is that when bullying is allowed to exist unencumbered, then learning and instructional activity will take a back seat to the fear that exists in the building.

### *Statement of the Problem*

Bullying has been defined as a relationship in which one individual seeks to dominate, control, and terrorize the life of another (Adams, 2003). Bullies repeatedly hurt other people who are perceived to have less power than they have. This abuse can be delivered by bullies in a physical, verbal, or emotional form; regardless, it delivers the same negative impact to the victim. According to Rinaldo (2001), each day in the United States 160,000 students miss school because they are threatened, harassed, or bullied. These victims are youngsters whose anger, frustration, and loss of self-esteem can result in violence directed toward others and themselves. Sadly, bullying is becoming increasingly common in middle and high schools. Bullying behavior is on the rise, and in addition, bullies are meaner, more vicious, and have more avenues to threaten than ever before (Pollack & Shuster, 2000). In today's schools, this bullying becomes increasingly dangerous because harassed students are now taking revenge with weapons. The stakes are much higher in our world today. We now understand that bullying is a serious problem that can, and often does, lead to increased violence that takes a terrible toll on schools and the community.

It is important that bullying is not viewed as just "inappropriate behavior" that needs modification. It is a serious problem and must not be minimized by such labeling. The physical and mental health of children is often destroyed by what they call "slow and painful torture." They are invalidated and injured by others (Carter, 1989). They feel rejected; in fact, they are victims of violence.

Violence is any condition or situation that creates actual fear of physical, psychological, or emotional harm and, therefore, impedes learning. One topic that educators appear to agree on



concerning our nation's schools is that students are increasingly out of control (Brookover, 1992). Disruptions hamper lessons for all students and disruptive students are even more handicapped by their own behavior. School violence and ineffective discipline practices have become perennial problems in public schools (Devine, 1996). School violence, fighting, gang-like behavior, and bringing weapons or drugs to schools are catalysts to disciplinary actions. Mercy and Rosenberg (1998) conducted studies indicating that as many as 8% of boys carry guns to school on a routine basis. Another finding associated with this study was that in a one-year period, 20% of high school students had brought guns to school on more than one occasion (Mercy & Rosenberg). The American Medical Association reported in a study of more than 15,000 6<sup>th</sup> through 10<sup>th</sup> graders that approximately 3.7 million youths engaged in, and more than 3.2 million were victims of moderate or serious bullying each year (as cited in Canter & Cohn 2000). Canter and Cohn reported that from 1994 to 1999 there were 253 violent deaths in schools of which 51 casualties were the result of multiple-death events. An emergent theme in most research on this subject is the role of bullying and its association with school related deaths.

This type of student behavior places all involved with public schools in the line of potential violence. As administrators seek to eradicate school-wide safety problems, the responsibility of teachers in addressing discipline leads to a lack of consistent learning and time off task. The National School Safety Center (1993) reported that behavior that was disruptive to classrooms occurred on an average of about every six seconds when school was in session. In a study focusing on time off-task concerning students' behavior, it was discovered that 45% to 55% of the teacher's time was spent in dealing with students who did not conform to classroom procedures (Jones, 1989). Jones acknowledged that these students exhibited behaviors so disruptive that instructional activity stopped while the teacher dealt with the problem students.

Communities everywhere are faced with a tremendous mix of challenges. For example, they are striving to reduce teen pregnancies, school dropout rates, drug use, and discipline problems. Caring community members desire to teach children cultural diversity, to prevent

children from joining gangs and hate groups, to implement inclusion successfully, and to eliminate weapons in our schools. Our country's citizens are living in a time when the horrific events at Columbine High School in April, 1999, are still fresh on their minds; apprehension about school safety is increasingly prevalent.

Educators must work collegially to provide a school environment that is safe, calm, and orderly, and one in which people care for others. Consistent and holistic emphasis in our schools must be emphasized as a concept that creates a unified and uniform climate of understanding. This is especially critical in middle-school settings where students are attempting to coexist with others in a different school setting. A school climate that focuses on the importance of teaching students to treat others with respect and dignity is one in which bullying behavior is not tolerated. This environment cannot exist in schools where bullies are allowed to set the tone for the day through their actions. When bullying behavior is allowed to take place without restitution in schools, learning will take a back seat to the fear that exists throughout the student body.

The Bully-Free School Zone is a character education program that is showing great promise in improving school safety. Anti-bullying programs show that the smallest minority of students are bullies and they are allowed to gain power over other children because appropriate intervention strategies do not exist in the schools (Tench & Waters, 2003). Cowie and Sharp's (1994) study indicated that bullying problems in schools were determined by several aspects: (a) aggressive and violent behavior, (b) family neglect or abuse, (c) low self-esteem, and (d) underdeveloped social skills.

Schools need to strive to become learning communities that provide students with an environment of high expectations, maintain a climate where students feel they belong and know they are safe, and have the opportunity to be exposed to positive adult role modeling (Beane, 2003). The objective for this dissertation was to provide a useful guide for teachers, administrators, and school safety and school violence committees as well as all school personnel

who strive to create environments that are caring, nurturing, inclusive, and where all students are respected and valued.

### *Research Questions*

The focus of this study was to investigate common threads of effective Bully-Free School Zone curriculum practices as perceived by administrators, teachers, and parents of students in five middle schools in Western North Carolina. This study concentrated on schools that had recently implemented Bully-Free School Zone character education programs at the middle school level. This study focused on grades five through eight. Administrators, teachers, and parents were interviewed and asked open-ended questions using a qualitative design guided by the following inquiries:

1. What are the views of administrators, teachers, and parents concerning the current implementation of a Bully-Free School Zone character education program?
2. What factors, as perceived by the participants, play a role in a well-organized Bully-Free School Zone character education program?
3. What aspects are perceived as barriers to an effective Bully-Free School Zone character education program?
4. What changes have occurred with attendance, aggressive/violent occurrences, and perceptions toward school safety by administrators, teachers, and parents since the implementation of a Bully-Free School Zone?
5. What ideas can administrators, teachers, and parents contribute to enhance the effectiveness of a Bully Free School Zone character education program?

### *Significance of the Study*

According to Ryder (1993), approximately three million bullying incidents per year or 1,700 per day were reported in the United States by kindergarten- to 12th-grade students. This

means that every 20 seconds, a child was being harassed, taunted, or abused. Other researchers reported that three out of five children had been bullied by another child and that two out of five were bullied daily. A report by The National Association of School Psychologists showed that one in seven children (male and female) is either a bully or a victim of bullying (as cited in Foltz-Gray, 1996). Therefore, it is not surprising that all children are affected by bullying. There are three characters in the bullying scenario: bullies, victims, and bystanders. As explained by Beane (2000):

Say the word “bully” to almost anyone you know, and the stories will start pouring out about the fourth-grade bully who regularly tripped kids walking to their desks or down the hall, the second-grade bully who makes girls cry, the sixth-grade bully who lies in wait around the corner for kids walking home from school, ready to bloody noses or toss books in a gutter. If bullying is, as some people claim, a “normal, natural” part of childhood, why do our memories of bullying incidences remain so vivid – and universally painful? (p. 1)

Many schools have initiated Bully-Free School Zone character education programs to help combat a disruptive, belligerent, and violent environment. A Bully-Free School Zone curriculum provides direction for educators in teaching character education to all students. Bully-Free School Zone programs focus on anger-management, conflict resolution, accepting and appreciating differences in others, and processes to follow when bullying and harassing behavior takes place in schools.

Staff development is provided to help teachers learn how to create a classroom environment where everyone feels safe, accepted, and valued. All involved work collaboratively to establish an open line of communication in reporting inappropriate behavior and to develop zero-tolerance policies for bullying. Teachers help students to understand the important role of the bystander in the bullying scenario. Bystanders must be taught to understand the ability they have in empowering the bully or in taking that power away by their actions. Identifying current or potential bullies and acting quickly and effectively when learning of a bullying incident, communicating and involving parents, and mobilizing witnesses and bystanders to become bully busters are all important components of a Bully-Free School Zone character education program.

If children fear for their safety, they cannot learn effectively. A supportive environment is important for troubled young people--both bullies and victims--if they are to learn and grow appropriately (Beane, 2000). According to Olweus (1995), all students have the right not to be humiliated or harmed by classmates at school and in society. Creating an orderly and disciplined school environment free of violence is essential for learning to take place effectively. Nationwide, hundreds of schools throughout the United States are adopting anti-bullying policies and programs that have been shown to reduce bullying incidences by more than 50% (Fitzgerald, 2003).

Consequently, schools and school systems are trying to construct character education programs that help make schools a safe place to learn. This dissertation was meant to provide assistance to educators who are attempting to implement anti-bullying programs. The qualitative approach in offering insights from administrators, teachers, and parents demonstrates why it is important for everyone associated with schools to become involved with the prevention of and intervention into bullying behavior.

#### *Definitions of Terms*

1. *Bully*, as used in this study, is a person who attempts to dominate, control, and terrorize the life of another. Bullies are not identified by physical characteristics but by how they act and treat others (Coloroso, 2002).
2. *Bully-Free School Zone* is a character education program that offers a collection of tips, strategies, and activities designed to address and ameliorate the multifaceted problem of bullying in schools (Beane, 2000, p.1).
3. *Bullying*, as used in this study, is verbal, emotional, psychological, or physical intimidation occurring repeatedly over time to create an ongoing pattern of harassment and abuse. It differs from teasing in that its intent is to do harm and is persistent (Adams, 2003).

4. *Bystander(s)* are students who are aware of or witness bullying behavior. They are the key players in their ability to empower the bully or take that power away.
5. *Climate* refers to a school's atmosphere; ideally, it is an environment that best fosters and enhances student learning and appropriate student behavior.
6. *Types of bullying* refer to (a) physical--contact, such as, pushing or punching; (b) verbal--begins all bullying, teasing, name calling, and gossiping; and (c) emotional--rejection, exclusion, and embarrassment (Rinaldo, 2001).
7. *Victims*, as used in this study, are the targets of a bully or a gang of bullies. Physical appearance, mannerisms, or just because one does not fit in are all factors associated with potential victims (Coloroso, 2002).
8. *Zero-tolerance policy*, as used in this study, is a predetermined procedure used by schools and school systems that addresses severe misbehaviors by students.

#### *Limitations, Delimitations, and Assumptions*

This study was delimited to administrators, teachers, and parents from five schools in Western North Carolina concerning a Bully-Free School Zone character education program. All five schools included in this strategic inquiry have recently initiated anti-bullying programs in their schools. All participants have limited knowledge, experience, and data offering conclusive evidence of the program's overall effectiveness.

The study was dependent on the involvement and the ability of the participants to be familiar with the anti-bullying program process in their schools. A limitation of this study was that parent participants might not have had the detailed knowledge base concerning anti-bullying procedures that have been initiated within the schools. Another possible limitation was that teachers and administrators might have assumed that they could be perceived as school wide or personal failures if they reported problems with the program.

The study was based upon emergent themes given during open-ended interview questions through one-on-one interviews. These factors might have influenced over responses and skewed the results of the study. Participants were perceived to be thoughtful, attentive, forthright, and honest in offering insights when answering interview questions.

### *Overview of the Study*

This study is organized and presented in six chapters. Chapter 1 includes an introduction to the study, a statement of the problem, and the research questions. In addition, it contains the significance of the study; definitions of terms used in the study; limitations, delimitations, assumptions; and an overview of the study. Chapter 2 contains a review of literature supporting the need for the study. It identifies characteristics of the bully, the victim, and the bystander; explains violence and contributing factors related to bullying behavior; provides statistics related to bullying; and presents teachers and students' responsibilities and the role of the principal as an educational leader. Chapter 3 includes a description of the methods and procedures used in the study, provides information about the participants in the study, describes the process of data collection, and explains the trustworthiness of these data. Chapter 4 introduces the participants; discusses the time of the study; and examines administrators, teachers, and parents' interview dialogue. In addition, Chapter 4 addresses emergent themes pertaining to the participants' perspectives of the impact of bullying behavior in schools and the effects of anti-bullying programs recently implemented in their schools. Chapter 5 presents an analysis of the data and contains overall findings of the study. Chapter 6 provides conclusions from the study, stakeholders' responsibilities for practice, and recommendations for further research.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

When a human being experiences himself and his thoughts and feelings as separated from the rest of humankind, it is a kind of optical delusion of consciousness. This delusion is a prison, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for the few persons nearest us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion, to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty. Nobody is able to achieve this completely, but the striving for such an achievement is, in itself, a part of the liberation and foundation for our inner security. (Albert Einstein, as cited in Aronson, 2000, p. 89)

Bullying begins in preschool and kindergarten and seems to intensify in the middle school years. This abusive behavior tends to decline somewhat during the high school and college years. Often, in high school and college, bullying is disguised as hazing and initiation (Beane, 2000). Reports of hazing and initiation that cross the line into violent behavior seem to appear increasingly in the media.

In Denver, Colorado, Lacey Henderson, a 13-year-old girl who was an amputee, withdrew from her middle school because of threats toward her that had escalated to the point that she feared for her personal safety (Kirksey, 2003). Four years earlier, she had lost her right leg to synovial carcinoma and had been teased by classmates since. There had been pictures drawn of her with one leg and circulated as well as prank letters and even the humiliation of teachers making insensitive remarks--one using her as an example of the vocabulary word "amputation" while another referred to her as a "one-legger." However, it was only when the harassment took on an ominous tone that the Hendersons faced the unbelievable decision of moving Lacey for her own safety. Her parents' decision to take Lacey out of her school was a tough one but fear for their daughter's deteriorating state of mind finally prompted them to make that move.



Schools have recently encountered new technology-savvy bullies who have taken their taunting to cyberspace. Principals who at one time were concerned with erasing harmful graffiti from bathroom walls were discovering that cracking down on bullies on the internet was much more challenging (Tench & Waters, 2003). In the case of Lacey Henderson, profane and threatening messages were aimed at her on a teenage website (Kirksey, 2003). Internet capability has now given bullies a high-tech playing field and an opportunity to hide their actions. Many school systems are now rushing to implement policies regarding the use of websites and are looking for more powerful filtering systems for schools' computers (Tench & Waters).

We are beginning to understand that bullies do not just grow up and stop abusing others; the older the bullies become, the more the abuse continues. Bullying behavior does not just take place in schools, it also occurs in churches, neighborhoods, and workplaces. Beane (2000) acknowledged that as adults, we hear about workplace bullies and abusive spouses. This underscores the fact that bullying is a learned behavior that must be unlearned. Research by Fried and Fried (1994) indicated that 25% of adults who were labeled as bullies when children had a criminal record by the age of 24. This was compared to 5% of adults who had never been labeled as bullies. These findings indicated that early intervention is crucial. Another disturbing factor related to Fried and Fried's research was that bullies did not often go away or grow out of this stage of life. Most school-age bullies become more vicious as they age, reminding us about problems we will continue to encounter.

According to Jim Kelly, chief of the Palm Beach County, Florida, school police division, between 2001 and 2002, officers had been called into elementary schools for the first time, in many cases, to deal with parents who had become angry with the administration and teachers when their children were disciplined (as cited in Toppo, 2003). In many cases, these schools are attempting to deal with irrational and often belligerent and violent parents who create serious school safety issues.

Researchers have established that millions of school age children have been bullied every year. Olweus (1995) stated that bullying was a tremendous problem that took forms that were more serious and it was more common now than it had been 10 to 15 years ago. According to Ryder (1993), bullying was a form of terrorism and everyone was a potential victim. Of equal concern are bullied children who sometimes turn the misery they feel inward and take their own lives (Tench & Waters, 2003).

Bullying is a worldwide problem. Many countries have initiated national anti-bullying policies in an attempt to rectify the problems associated with this abusive behavior. Some of the more productive anti-bullying programs have taken place in England and Scandinavia. According to a study reported by McTaggart (1995), the Cardiff Institute of Higher Education noted that an estimated 1.3 million children a year in England were involved in bullying.

There are plans in Japan to form a national committee, as this country has experienced a crisis related to bullying that has escalated over the last 10 years (Pollack, 1994). In one academic year, in the early 1990s, 21,000 bullying incidents were recorded in state-run schools in Japan. Increased numbers of suicide by children in Japan were attributed to the increase in bullying behavior in the schools. To help combat this problem, 14,000 welfare officers have been contracted to work in Japanese schools (Pollack).

Olweus (1995) stated that the percentage of American children who said they had bullied others with regularity rose from 7% in 1984 to 30% in 1995. According to Olweus, data from other countries such as Sweden, Finland, England, United States, Canada, the Netherlands, Japan, Ireland, and Australia indicated that they have had similar prevalence rates. In Ireland, approximately 5% of the children were involved as bullies and a similar percentage indicated children who had been bullied. In a similar study in Canadian, 15% of students reported that they had bullied others more than once or twice during the school term (Marano, 1995).

Johnson and Immerwahr (1994) reported that according to a 1994 Gallup poll survey, bullying was listed as one of the top three of the “biggest problems” taking place in public

schools. This list included school violence, weapons, drugs, and gang activity. These survey results are a mirror reflection of societal problems that exist in homes and communities. In many homes, children find themselves in violent and abusive environments with families and peers where many of these people torment them daily. This behavior is referred to as bullying.

The physical and mental effects caused by bullying can cost children their lives. Horrific school shootings occurred in Littleton, Colorado, on April 20, 1999, when two teenage boys killed 12 classmates and a teacher, injured 18 others, and then committed suicide. Coloroso (2002) wrote concerning the two high-school age shooters at Columbine High School, "People surrounded them in the commons and squirted ketchup packets all over them laughing at them, calling them faggots. That happened while teachers watched. They couldn't fight back" (p. 27). The motivating factors of this heinous crime became obvious in the suicide note left by one of the shooters: they felt bullied, alienated and in their minds they were getting revenge (Coloroso). In the words of Eric Harris, one of the teen shooters, "We're going to kick-start a revolution . . . a revolution of the disposed and we will finally get the respect we have always deserved (Aronson, 2000, p. 40).

Children need to be loved and to feel comfortable in their settings. Students need to feel accepted and cared for in their relationships with their families, school personnel, and peers (Beane, 2003). In recent years, numerous practices have emerged to deal with the problems of bullying in our country's schools. Anti-bullying programs have yielded positive results; even so, each school and school system should develop an individual plan of action to address its own needs (Beane).

This literature review focuses on published literature as it relates to: (a) understanding that bullying is much more serious than mere initiation, hazing or horseplay; (b) identification of the bully, the victim, and the bystander; (c) the harmful results of bullying; (d) contributing factors that lead to a bullying environment; (e) methods for changing inappropriate behavior; and (f) creating a bully-free school.

### *Bullying Is More Than Initiation, Hazing, or Horseplay*

Bullies come in all different sizes and shapes; some are big, some are small; some are bright and some not so bright; some are attractive and some not so attractive; some are popular and some are absolutely disliked by almost everybody. You can't always identify bullies by what they look like, but you can pick them out by what they act like. (Coloroso, 2002, p.11)

Bullying that takes place in schools is not a new occurrence. In the novel *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, written in 1856, Hughes (2004) gave in detail the experience of a young boy attending an English boarding school where he was burned horribly by bullies in a sadistic roasting episode. In today's information age, there is more discussion than ever before concerning the negative impact of bullying. This bullying behavior is not limited to school age children. Bullying became national news during the last 10 years because of the rash of school shootings such as at Littleton, Colorado. Since then, many school systems have adapted anti-harassment policies in an attempt to not repeat the horrific events that occurred at Columbine High School on April 20, 1999. Aronson (2000), author of *No One Left to Hate: Teaching Compassion After Columbine*, stated, "Two students consumed by rage and armed with an arsenal of guns and explosives went on a rampage, killing a teacher, several of their fellow students, and then turned the guns on themselves" (p. 1).

According to the National Association of School Psychologists, 1993 statistics (as cited in Foltz-Gray, 1996) indicated that 900 teachers were threatened each hour during the school day and that 40 were assaulted each hour on school property. According to the National Education Association, in 1992 there were approximately 70,000 assaults on teachers (as cited in Haberman, 1994). Because many incidents go unreported, that is probably a low estimate. According to Saunders (1994), more than one million students reported that they have avoided some part of their school building out of fear of an attack at least once during the school year.

Olweus (1995), a school safety expert, defined bullying as "one or more individuals engaging in aggressively physical contact or violent, harmful and consistent behavior that is intentionally designed to harm another and create fear of more bullying in one or more persons"

(p. 8). When a child is abused repeatedly either physically or psychologically against his or her wishes and is unable to stop such a situation, it is a strong indicator that the child is a victim of bullying (Bryne, 1994). Bullied victims are usually seen as individuals who are unable to defend themselves, thus, giving the bully some degree of satisfaction (Olweus).

Psychological research concerning bullying has become a focus of many studies (Olweus, 1991; Pepler & Craig, 1995; Stephenson & Smith, 1989; Tattum, 1989; Ziegler & Pepler, 1993). Psychological bullying is difficult to discern and often difficult to prove (Bryne, 1994). Playing the role of either victim or bully, from 7% to 34% of children are involved frequently in school-wide bullying (Besag, 1989). Further research indicated that 75% of middle school age children have been bullied during their academic years (Hazler & Hoover, 1991). Over two thirds of students reported that their schools responded poorly to bullying with a high percentage of students noting that adult help was infrequent and ineffective (Canter & Cohn, 2000).

Any type of hazing or initiation that is allowed to happen once or more per year is referred to as institutionalized bullying, according to Bryne (1994). A good example of this type of bullying is hazing; it is often permitted each year and can cause pain, suffering, and sometimes death. When students react poorly to hazing, they are considered as weak and often become prime targets for future bullying (Beane, 2000).

Bullying can be either direct or indirect and some children experience both types (Olweus, 1995). Direct bullying starts with verbal harassment and many times develops into physical bullying. Physical violence experienced by a bully's victim includes hitting, shoving, kicking, taking or damaging belongings, restraining, belittling, and other violent behaviors. Most bullies are not quick to hit their victim but they tend to let him or her know they will if necessary (Olweus). Direct bullying also includes name-calling, insulting, ridiculing, repeated teasing, racist remarks, dirty gestures, taunting, jeering, pestering, or deliberate provocation of

the victim by making negative comments about his or her mother, sister, or girlfriend (Beane, 2003).

Indirect bullying deals with the psychological and emotional damage that follows this type of behavior. Indirect bullying includes behaviors such as spreading nasty rumors, excluding someone from a group (intentional social isolation/rejection), manipulating relationships (turning a best friend against someone), and whispering insults loud enough so that others can hear. Many of the victims of indirect bullying are labeled as outcasts (Beane, 2003).

### *The Major Players*

#### *The Bully*

Bullies are people who have a need to feel powerful and they have learned that harassing, threatening, and physical abuse works in giving them the desired feeling. A bully distinguishes himself or herself from someone who teases because of the repeated pattern of physical or psychological intimidation (Beane, 2000). Bullying behaviors range from being overtly teased and intentionally socially isolated to being harassed and assaulted (verbally and/or physically) by one or more individuals. According to Olweus (1995), for it to be said that bullying has occurred, there also has to be an imbalance of strength, power, and dominance. Consequently, the victim has trouble defending himself or herself and feels helpless (Beane, 2003).

According to McTaggart (1995), there is something of a bully in everyone. Certain events and people may bring this behavior out or subdue it. Furthermore, Marano (1995) stated that bullies are not like most people; instead, they should be considered as a special breed of people. According to Marano, bullies have a distinctive makeup--a hostile attributional bias, a kind of paranoia. Greenbaum, Turner, and Stephens (1989) considered that bullies were a subset of aggressive people who derive satisfaction from controlling others both physically and psychologically and who do not pick fair fights. Bullies have a need to feel powerful and they have learned that bullying helps them get what they want.

Some bullies are tough, popular, and rebellious, while others may be small and weak but able to project an intimidating image; there is not a typical bully. Coloroso (2002) stated:

Bullying is a conscious, willful, and deliberate hostile activity intended to harm, induce fear through the threat of further aggression, and create terror. There are bullies who seem to enjoy inflicting pain on others. They have a positive attitude toward aggression and seem to enjoy conflict. (p. 13)

Olweus (1995) noted that there were three types of bullies: aggressive, anxious, and passive.

Elliot and Kilpatrick (1994) listed the characteristics associated with each type of bullying:

1. **Aggressive Bullying.** The majority of bullies fall in this category. Characteristics of aggressive bullies show that they demonstrate poor impulse control, have a positive view of violence, wish to dominate and control, feel good about themselves and their actions, and are insensitive to the feelings of others.
2. **Anxious Bullying.** This category makes up a smaller percentage of bullies. Characteristics of anxious bullies show that they are anxious and aggressive, have a low self esteem usually as a result of a dysfunctional home life, are insecure and friendless, usually make the mistake of picking on someone who is more powerful than they are, provoke attacks by other bullies, and are emotionally unstable.
3. **Passive Bullying.** This category consists of followers of more aggressive bullies. They tend to be easily dominated, are passive and easily led, are usually not particularly aggressive, are empathetic toward their victims, and feel guilty after bullying. (p. 9)

According to Marano (1995), there are bullies who are consistently aggressive and do not need conflict to activate them; this type is referred to as “proactive aggressors” or “effectual aggressors” (p. 65). They are the typical playground bullies. They are not cooperative and they lack empathy. They are also goal oriented in that they are motivated by a potential future reward: getting something they want. They may also have a high threshold of arousal and the act of bullying provides an increase in their arousal level (Marano).

Three key elements are usually associated with bullying behavior: imbalance of power, intent to harm, and the threat of further aggression (Coloroso, 2002). The imbalance of power element describes bullies who are bigger, stronger, and more verbally aggressive. This type of bully is usually validated by the group surrounding the incident. Intent to harm occurs when bullies intentionally inflict emotional and/or physical pain, expect the action to hurt, and take

great pleasure in witnessing the hurt. Great psychological and emotional distress is caused by the third element, threat of further aggression. Bullies let their victims know that this is not a onetime deal and that this aggressiveness will continue. In this situation, when bullying is allowed to take place unencumbered, a fourth element will occur in the form of terror for the victim (Coloroso). Coloroso described this key component of the bullying process, stating, "Terror struck in the heart of the child targeted is not only a means to an end, it is an end in itself. Bullying is systematic violence used to intimidate and maintain dominance" (p. 73).

### *The Victim*

Less is known about the victims of bullying than about the bully. One survey (Hoover & Oliver, 1996) reported that children often become victims because of their physical appearance, their mannerisms, or simply because they do not "fit in." The same survey offered evidence that not fitting in was the most common reason given for bullying. According to Beane (2000), children who are overly protected by their parents, who are disabled, or who suffer with a chronic illness were found to be easy targets for bullies.

According to Sharp and Smith (1994), there are two types of victims, classic victims and provocative victims. Classic victims are not responsible for being bullied. Provocative victims contribute to their being bullied by provoking others in some way. According to Garrity, Jens, Poter, Sager, and Short-Camillie (1995), many provocative victims tend to be diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder. It is important to note that victims of bullying often blame themselves for their situation. As noted by Foltz-Gray (1996), "They tend to think, "If I do what the bully asks, he or she won't pick on me" (p. 23). Bryne (1994) described four types of victims:

1. Passive victims. These victims are usually weaker physically (clumsy/awkward) than most peers, shy, withdrawn, and most of the time friendless.
2. Provocative victims. These victims are usually irritating, loud mouthed, obnoxious, emotional (cries, laughs uncontrollably, overreacts), taunting, perceived as tattletales, and are easily riled.



3. Colluding victims. These victims appear to enjoy being victimized and complain a great deal about their perceived mistreatments.
4. False victims. These victims tend to create bullying when it is not present as an avenue in seeking attention. (p. 26)

Elliot and Kilpatrick (1994) identified six types of victims:

1. Chronic victims. These victims are not only bullied at schools but in churches, within families, neighborhoods, and they can be passive, active, or provocative.
2. Passive victims. These victims are sometimes bullied for long periods before the activity is found out; they are usually sensitive, insecure, and scared of any type of interaction.
3. Different victims. These victims are usually thought to be odd or different from the norm.
4. Accidental victims. These victims tend to be in the wrong place at the wrong time.
5. Special needs victims. These are victims with disabilities or disabled parents; they tend to be sick much of the time.
6. Victims because of race, religion, language, culture, or sex. Cultural diversity tends to lead to many problems with people of all ages and seems to be intensified with younger children in a school setting; this is often because of the beliefs learned in the home by parents who model inappropriate behavior.

### *The Bystander*

Characteristics found in the majority of bullied victims can be also found in the attributes of the bystander. The bystander can stand by and watch, support the bully, or actively engage the bully in support of the victim (Coloroso, 2002). Bystanders have the ability to empower the bully or to take that power away. The bystander should be the emphasis of any anti-bullying school program. According to Floyd (1987), bystanders should be considered surrogate victims and they should think, "That could be happening to me." Most bystanders are ashamed of their role in the bullying process and many times feel guilty for their lack of action. Most young people understand that "there will be a price to pay" if they make a choice to react when witnessing bullying behavior (Coloroso, p. 65).

According to Coloroso (2002), bullying creates a climate of fear that makes children feel unsafe. It is important that students understand their responsibility for helping to create a bully-free environment. In a survey conducted by Rinaldo (2001), it was found that 30% of students in the 6th to 10th grades were affected by bullying, whether they were in the role of victim, bully, or onlooker. Students who actively encourage bullying behavior can cause many problems by rewarding the bullying behavior. Encouragement can lead to continued and more aggressive behavior by the bully who is seeking more attention and personal satisfaction (Coloroso).

According to Pollack and Shuster (2000), when students band together as a group to support someone, this action tends to end 90% of the bullying behavior. One of the world's leading researchers on bullying, Olweus (1995), developed The Bullying Circle, which shows the not-so-innocent role that bystanders have in this vicious cycle of abuse. According to Olweus, bystanders can have several labeling characteristics:

1. Bullying bystander. A bystander who is with the bully from the start by encouraging and actively engaging in either physical or verbal abuse.
2. Follower/henchmen bystander. This is a bystander who is involved after bullying is initiated.
3. Supporter bystander. This bystander offers encouragement but is not a part of the bullying behavior.
4. Passive supporter bystander (disengaged onlooker). This bystander appears not to be bothered by the bullying that is taking place, does not display noticeable support, and appears as though it is not his or her concern.
5. Possible defender bystander. This is a bystander who wants to assist the victim and knows that he or she should help, but does not.
6. Defenders of the target bystander. This bystander does not want bullying behavior in the school, dislikes it, and attempts to help the victim.

According to Coloroso (2002):

Bystanders either get caught up in the crossfire, grow up guilt ridden for not intervening, or become so desensitized to the violence that they minimize and normalize bullying as just part of childhood – not a big deal, just another way to toughen kids up. They pass their assumptions to their children and the stage is set for a reprise. (p.9)

According to Sergares (2001), schools should start initiatives that life is best when students are kind to others while not empowering bullies. According to Pollack and Shuster (2000), students who reach out to rejected students perform a heroic act when they help someone avoid bullying, plus they may make a new friend. Sergares acknowledged the importance of the bystander's learning that popularity should not be based on the misfortune of another.

### *Violence and Bullying*

In their own words, the boys who have killed in America's schools offered a simple suggestion to prevent it from happening again. According to Dedman (2000), staff reporter for the *Chicago Sun-Times*, Evan Ramsey, a sixteen year old who shot and killed his principal and a student in a small town in Bethel, Alaska, stated, "I told everyone what I was going to do, when I was going to do it, and whom I was going to do it to" (p. 1). In fact, he had told so many students of his intentions that several brought video cameras to record his horrific actions. Dedman also described an interaction between two girls who watched the shooting: One of the girls said, "You're not supposed to be here, you are on the list" (p. 4).

School shootings and tragic episodes of violence have become frequent occurrences over the last 10 years. Spivak and Prothrow-Stith (2003) drafted a very disturbing list concerning school shootings and the weapons used from February 1997 until the shootings at Columbine High School in April 1999:

1. February 19, 1997: Using a Mossberg pump shotgun, a 16 year-old killed two and wounded two in Bethel, Alaska.
2. October 1, 1997: A 16 year-old stabbed his mother to death while at home, then went to school and killed two students and wounded seven others. His gun of choice was a .30 caliber-hunting rifle. One of the victims was his ex-girlfriend.
3. December 1, 1997: Using a .22 caliber Ruger pistol, the 14 year-old son of a lawyer, came into a prayer group meeting that was in session and opened fire. The result was three dead and five wounded.
4. March 24, 1998: In Jonesboro, Arkansas, two middle school students pulled a fire alarm and as students filed out of the building, they shot and killed a teacher and 4

- students and wounded 10 more from a field across from the school using high-powered weapons. Police found a .44 caliber Ruger, Remington .30-06 caliber rifle, a Smith and Wesson .38 caliber revolver, a Remington 742, and a Universal .30 caliber rifle.
5. April 24, 1998: In Edenboro, Pennsylvania, during a school dance a 14 year-old student shot and killed one student and wounded several others with a .25 caliber Raven pistol.
  6. May 19, 1998: Using a .22 caliber Marlin bolt-action rifle, a high school senior in Fayetteville, Tennessee, killed a classmate in the parking lot.
  7. May 21, 1998: A 15 year-old killed 2 high school students and shot 23 others using two guns: a .22 caliber Ruger semiautomatic rifle and a Glock 9mm pistol.
  8. April 20, 1999: In Littleton, Colorado, in one of the most horrific school shootings in our country's history, two high-school age students loaded with a TEC-DC9 handgun, a sawed-off double-barreled shotgun, a pump-action shotgun, a 9mm semiautomatic rifle, and several dozen homemade pipe bombs, shot and killed 12 students, 1 teacher, and then committed suicide. (pp.13-15)

Since April 20, 1999, Americans have discovered that the horrible results of the shooting at Columbine High School could have been much worse. According to Aronson (2000), the killers had prepared 95 explosive devices that did not explode because of mechanical problems, while several bombs were set off-campus intended to distract the police and offer the shooters more “killing time” while in the school (p. 2). The two boys had planned this shooting for several months, made a video-tape detailing their murderous plans (their intention was to kill 500 people), posted threats on the internet, and had used their homes as bomb making factories (Aronson). Much of the anger and hate that fueled the killings at Columbine High School was the result of years of abuse through bullying behavior (Beane, 2000).

On the same day as the Columbine High School massacre, 75 people in the United States died from gunshot wounds. According to the U.S. Department of Justice & Federal Bureau of Investigation (1998), 4 to 6 juveniles are shot and killed daily and approximately 90 people lose their lives per day to gunfire . It is obvious that through current research that the epidemic of youth violence would not be viewed as a national issue, let alone a crisis, if guns were not a part

of the equation (Spivak & Prothrow-Stith, 2003). Bloody noses and black eyes resulting from fighting would not create changing national policy concerning school safety

### *Girls Are Bullies Too*

In some studies, there were twice as many bullies among boys as among girls (Byrne, 1994). However, other researchers considered that research efforts were hindered by the fact that girls are more reluctant to reveal they are being bullied and their bullying is far subtler than the overt actions of boys (Beane, 2003). Bullying by boys is usually easier to observe; therefore, bullying by girls may be vastly underestimated. Boys tend to be bullied by other boys and girls tend to be bullied by both boys and girls (Beane).

According to Sharp and Smith (1994), girls tend to bully by groups more than boys and their bullying is less aggressive, more indirect, insidious, and sneaky. Girls tend to create problems but their bullying is hard to detect. According to Beane (2003), girl bullies engage in spreading rumors or malicious gossip, manipulate relationships, offer ethnic slurs, intentionally socially isolate students, publicly humiliate, extort, threaten to totally exclude from their group, and other such behavior. According to Garrity et al. (1995), both boys and girls use verbal aggression (e.g., mocking, name calling, teasing, intimidating telephone calls, verbal threats) and intimidation (e.g., graffiti, publicly challenging others to do something, playing a dirty trick, taking possessions, and coercion).

Byrne (1994) reported that girls also frequently made comments regarding the sexual behavior of girls they did not like. Rather than going after physically weak victims, girls tended to be more motivated by relationships. The research of Hazler, Hoover, and Oliver (1991) indicated, "Who your friends were was more likely to bring on victimization among female scapegoats" (p. 148). Girl bullies usually were very verbal and understood how to push the buttons of their victims. Hazler et al. found that verbal bullying was more likely to be done to members of the same sex than to members of the opposite sex.

Simmons (2002) recommended that systems expand their definition of aggression and that alternate forms should be included. Research on bullying by girls is nearly nonexistent. The first studies devoted to alternative aggression were done 10 years ago. Research conducted by the National Health and Human Development Council (as cited in Fitzgerald, 2003) reported that 29% of girls who bullied on a regular basis sometimes carried guns on campus, compared to fewer than 4% of girls who did not bully.

### *Why Children Become Victims of Bullying*

After examining the characteristics of bullies, victims, and bystanders, it becomes clear that there are numerous factors that may contribute to the high rate of bullying in schools and communities. One contributing factor evident in bullying climates is that it is allowed to happen. According to Joslin (2003), when bullies are allowed to practice their trade unencumbered, instructional activity and learning will take a back seat to the fear that exists within the student body. Research throughout this chapter emphasizes the bully's interest in dominating those perceived to be weaker or different. For example, among the most common reasons for being bullied given by children is that of being physically weak, short tempered, overweight, and socially disliked (Hoover, Oliver, & Hazler, 1992). It would be inappropriate to focus on "fixing" the child who is treated as an outcast. There are contributing factors that require prevention and intervention strategies focusing on community and school policies and procedures and attitudes and behavior of personnel; new prevention and intervention strategies will be discovered (Beane, 2003).

The research of Olweus (1995) suggested that physical attributes that are considered different and/or deviant might contribute more to short-term and indirect bullying (social isolation, spreading rumors) than long-term and direct bullying (hitting, shoving). Dutton (2003), a freelance writer from New York, researched a number of organizations that were helping schools broaden their anti-bullying processes. Moderate levels of correlation have been

found between the appearance of the individual and acceptance. This relationship holds true only for very attractive and very unattractive children (Asher & Coie, 1990).

Most bullying is short-term and is usually as a result of envy, jealousy, or revenge for “stealing” a boyfriend or girlfriend (Beane, 2003). The most common physical characteristic found in the bully-victim relationship is physical strength and the bully is usually a stronger and older individual (Olweus, 1995). Other contributing factors relate to the social history and comfort zone of a student’s life.

Some children may feel more comfortable by thinking they are inferior to others (Derman, 1994). Therefore, they engage in behavior to remain in an inferior position and encourage their social isolation. As reported in Asher and Coie (1990), it is the child’s inadequate social history that leads to his or her having difficulty in handling particular types of interpersonal situations. Asher and Coie stated, “The character of a child’s reactions to specific social circumstances is largely shaped by the history of that child’s interaction with parent-figures, siblings, and nonsibling acquaintances” (p. 336).

Derman (1994) reminded us that from early childhood we are taught that we need to feel superior to those around us and that superiority is the cure for anything that makes us unhappy. We are taught to be special, look better, achieve more, be on top, be number one, and be the best (Beane, 2003). Derman found that such thinking causes the difference game, which is looking for reasons we are superior to others, and playing such games includes engaging in behavior to prove that we are better than others. According to Derman, playing favorites is society’s major pastime and most all humans are guilty of these charges.

Playing favorites is a philosophy that has been supported by the media and it is especially evident in television ads. In the 1987 lecture-video “Still Killing Us Softly,” educator Jean Kilbourne (as cited in Clark, 1993) argued that these ads sell values, images, and concepts of love and sexuality, of romance, of success, of popularity, and perhaps most importantly, of normalcy. A report from the American Psychological Association (as cited in Clark) claimed

that research demonstrated a correlation between television viewing and aggressive behavior. The consensus among researchers on television violence is that there is a measurable increase from 3% to 15% in an individual's aggressive behavior after watching violent television (Beane, 2003).

Video games of a violent nature have also become very popular with children. Video games allow and/or require children to be actively involved in violent actions, and they become active participants in the action (Beane, 2003). By playing video games, children practice violent acts; thus, making it easier for them to perform violent acts in real life, which they can manipulate in their own homes (Clark, 1993). A study of 357 seventh- and eighth-grade students determined that approximately 36% of male students played video games at home for one to two hours per week; approximately 29% played three to six hours and 12% did not play at all (Funk, 1993). According to the National Coalition on Television Violence (1990), there has been a steady increase in the number of video games with violent themes--a 29% increase in games rated extremely violent from 1985 to 1988. Research suggested that there is a short-term relationship between playing violent games and increased aggressive behavior in young children (Funk).

There are three major theories regarding aggressive behavior or aggression (Terry & Jackson, 1985). The biological theory considers aggression as a basic inherent human characteristic. The second theory is the psychological theory stating that aggression is caused by frustration; it is situational. The third theory is the social learning theory that has received the most empirical support and maintains that aggressive behavior is learned through modeling and reinforced by rewards and punishments (Bandura, 1973).

According to Asher and Coie (1990), insufficient attention has been given to the role of aggression and disruptive behavior in peer rejection. Research indicated that low-acceptance boys are often aggressive, whereas low-acceptance girls are withdrawn (Hartup, 1992). Asher and Coie found disruptive behavior and hyperactivity to be possible contributors to rejection in



children from 8 to 12 years. Disruptive behavior was commonplace in preschool settings and preschoolers tended to dislike those who engaged in such behavior. As reported in Morris (1994):

Students who are introverts are at times labeled “withdrawn” and treated as abnormal because they exhibit the following characteristics: (a) they like to eat alone, (b) are at times non-verbal, (c) get nervous when in big crowds, (d) like to interact with only one person at a time, (e) like to be alone even in a crowd, (f) do not like to attract attention to themselves, and (g) have trouble relating to other people in a meaningful way for any significant amount of time. (p. 62)

According to Asher and Coie (1990), social withdrawal resulting from social anxiety and insecurity contributes to rejection. When students feel helpless and rejected, the goal of their behavior may be to withdraw from the social situation rather than confrontation (Dreikers, Grunwald, & Pepper, 1982). These children guard whatever little self-esteem they have by removing themselves from situations that test their abilities. There is evidence to suggest a strong relationship between social ability and peer acceptance (Oden, 1981). Researchers also indicated that children who are accepted by peers, when compared to those who are not accepted, exhibited greater social knowledge, more complex social reasoning, and more positive social behavior in peer interactions (Asher & Coie; Hartup, 1992; Oden).

Putallaz and Heflin (1990) suggested, “There are clear and provocative links between the ways in which parents interact with their children and how their children, in turn, interact with their peers” (p. 9). Putallaz and Heflin determined that the following parental factors were important contributors to a child’s development: (a) parental warmth; (b) gentle parental control; (c) parental sensitivity, responsiveness, and involvement; and (d) a parental democratic and inductive-reasoning approach. The manner in which parents deal with their own conflicts also influences their children. Olweus (1995) found that conflicts, discord, and open arguments between parents or divorced parents created an insecure relationship for children. Children of such environments were found to be four times more likely to be bullied (Olweus).

According to Armocida and Roby (2002), "Feeling safe at school, physically and psychologically, was directly related to students' feelings and beliefs about the teachers at the school. Respect and trust, teacher to student, and vice versa greatly determined how safe students feel at school" (p. 29). Most research on student perceptions of school safety focuses on student and teacher relationships; however, other evidence indicates that children victimized at home are often victims at school. In a recent retrospective study, 210 college freshmen were asked about various traumatic childhood experiences (Duncan, 1996). Duncan found that victims of childhood physical and/or sexual abuse were more likely to have been bullied in schools than nonvictims were. Children growing up in the midst of violence at home often take their fears, anger, and aggression to school. They dare not express them at home. At school, they may express their feelings through abusive language and fighting or they may withdraw (Beane, 2003).

Marano (1995) reported that bullies tend to go "shopping" for victims early in the school year (p. 54). As a result, more children (22%) tend to be victimized during this time than later in the school year. As time passes, bullies tend to focus on a target of about 8% of the students and bully them with regularity. According to Garrity et al. (1995), the bully-victim pattern of interaction is established by the sixth week of school. Nevertheless, some children who are bullied later in the school year were not bullied at the first of the year. According to Marano, "Something increases their likelihood of being picked on; probably their vulnerabilities revealed in a class environment" (p. 54).

### *Contributing Factors*

Bullying not only occurs in nursery schools, preschools, elementary schools, middle schools, high schools, and universities, it also occurs in homes, neighborhoods, churches, city parks, to and from school, and in workplaces. Bullying occurs at and around school as well as to and from school (Duncan, 1996). Olweus (1995), through extensive research, established that

two or three times as many students were bullied while at school rather than on the way to and from school. Bullying may occur any place and any time where there is human interaction (Beane, 2003).

Much of the bullying occurs in places where adult supervision is lacking, such as playgrounds, restrooms, and hidden areas within the building (Beane, 2000). According to Olweus (1995), there is no relationship between the percentage of bullying and the size of a school or class. Bullying occurs at an early age and in all grade levels. Bryne (1994) reported that bullying might have its onset between three and four years of age. According to research conducted in the United States by Hoover et al. (1992), bullying increased for both girls and boys during the late elementary grades, peaked during middle school, and decreased through high school. Hazler et al. (1991) found a smaller increase for girls in the middle school years.

According to Marano (1995), bullying might not worsen at adolescence; it could decline. During adolescence, children are more sensitive to rejection by peers and this rejection causes them more heartache. This is a time when they search for an identity separate from their parents and become preoccupied with conforming to group norms. Beane (2003) agreed that there was a decline in the percentage of both girls and boys being bullied by the time they reached high school.

### *Prevention and Intervention Strategies*

After an examination of current literature, it becomes obvious that prevention strategies should start when children are born and should continue throughout their school years. For example, there is a wealth of literature that addressed the impact of positive mother-child attachments, parental styles, and parental disciplinary practices on the social development of children.

Current laws protect adults against crimes such as extortion, theft, and assault and battery; consequently, if one adult hit another, he or she would likely be arrested (Greenbaum et

al., 1989). This protection should extend equally to children who are generally considered less able to defend themselves than an adult is (Beane, 2000). According to Greenbaum et al., violent crimes against young people were only reported one out of three times making it difficult to determine the true scope of the problem.

According to Olweus (1991), every student has the right to be spared oppression and embarrassment for the sake of another, whether in school or in society. Beane (2000) reported, "Children cannot learn effectively if they fear for their safety. Troubled young people--both bullies and victims--need a supportive environment to learn and grow" (p. 14). Anti-bullying programs have recently been supported by federal and state legislation to help provide safer school environments. Furthermore, Hoover and Oliver (1996) stated that prevention of bullying might become a legal obligation for all schools. Spurling (as cited in Joslin, 2003), stated, "School leaders must understand their responsibility in protecting students while under their watch, and encourage everyone involved to work to provide an environment that is safe, calm, orderly, procedural, and one in which people care for one another" (p. 4).

#### *Description of a Bully-Free School Zone*

Rockman Middle School's faculty and staff made the decision to implement an anti-bullying character education program in the summer of 2000. Throughout the prior school year, several aggressive and violent incidences had occurred; these were possibly the results of bullying behavior. The teachers indicated that they would like to make a collective effort to change their school's negative social impression. The school improvement team at Rockman Middle School researched anti-bullying character education literature available for middle-grade students. A decision was made to develop the Bully-Free School Zone program during a three-day inservice session prior to the start of the 2002-2003 school year.

During this inservice, teachers worked in small groups to develop different aspects of the new character education program; each group presented ideas pertaining to the program.

Teachers produced a curriculum schedule with pacing guides in teaching the concepts from the Bully-Free classroom that provided school-wide direction. Pledges were created for students, teachers, and parents. A mission statement and a credo resulted from work done later in the year by the school's student council executive officers. Throughout the school year, homeroom classes worked on fashioning school-wide beliefs concerning a rationale to prevent bullying and tips for students in dealing with bullying behavior.

According to Beane (2000), the Bully-Free School Zone is a "character education program that offers a collection of tips, strategies, and activities designed to address and ameliorate the multi-faceted problem of bullying in schools" (p. 1). Rockman Middle School, located in Rockville, North Carolina, is one such school that recently implemented a Bully-Free School Zone character education program. Over the two years since the initiation of the program, educators and parents have seen a positive improvement in the school climate. This improvement is reinforced through action research implementation administered over a two-year period.

The two years of action research data from Rockman Middle School focused on attendance, incidents of violent behavior resulting in suspension, students' perceptions of school safety, and students' ability to report bullying behavior. Surveying students prior to the implementation of the Bully-Free School Zone character education program and offering the same survey 170 days after the initiation of the new curriculum provided data. I have used information provided from the School's Information Management System (SIMS) that has helped in analyzing differences in attendance, suspensions, discipline referrals, and end-of-grade test scores.

Rockman Middle School administrators and teachers are aware that bullies still exist and they have worked collaboratively to end bullying behaviors in the school. Discipline records from 1998 to 2002 at Rockman Middle School indicated that the majority of behavioral problems were related to aggressive actions. Belligerent, disruptive, rude, and violent behavior that

occurred during this period was a result of bullying behavior by one or more attackers. I have noticed through my experience that verbal harassment and bullying normally preceded these disruptive acts. The staff at Rockman Middle, a fifth- through eighth-grade Title I school, located in the Western North Carolina mountains, decided in the summer of 2002 that a Bully-Free School Zone philosophy deserved commitment and effort from the school's stakeholders.

Teachers from Rockman Middle School agreed that they have no more important responsibility than to do all they can to provide a school environment that is safe, calm, orderly, and procedural. This process of implementing a Bully-Free School Zone character education program began with a two-day staff development for teachers and support staff in developing a plan of action. Current anti-bullying programs were reviewed and assessed for possible utilization. Dr. Allan Beane's, *Bully-Free Classroom* (2000) was the text selected for adoption by the staff at Rockman Middle School. The *Bully-Free Classroom* handbook offers hundreds of activities, strategies, and tips for teachers of kindergarten- through eighth-grade students.

Using the *Bully-Free Classroom* handbook (Beane, 2000) to direct planning, teachers established a lesson-plan and pacing-guide description of the school-year curriculum. All teachers and staff offered suggestions during the developmental sessions as to how the bully-free philosophy should be presented to students. Figure 1 illustrates the updated curriculum plan and current pacing guides of the Character Education Schedule, the Bully-Free School Zone Mission Statement is shown in Figure 2, and the Bully-Free Credo offered from Rockman Middle School during the 2003-2004 school year is shown in Figure 3.

## Rockman Middle School

### Bully-Free School Zone Character Education Schedule

August 6 <sup>th</sup> – 29 <sup>th</sup>	Chapter #1 Introduction to Bully Free Program Grade level meetings with Mr. Spurlock Student, Parent, Teacher pledges signed. p. 5 “The Top 10 Facts About Bullying”
August 24	Parent Picnic / Pledge Signing 6 pm
September 1st – October 31st	Chapter #2 “Creating a Positive Classroom” (p.15) Tips and strategies in this section will help you create a classroom environment where everyone feels safe, accepted, and appreciated. Key learning opportunities.....p. 17 True/False, p. 20 Classroom credo, naming bullying behavior, p. 23 Bullying Stories, p. 26-29 Bullying Survey, set bully free rules for your classroom, p. 33 “20 Things to Do Instead of Hurting Someone Back”, p. 35 - 12 Tips for Making Friends, p. 40 Getting to know you students better, p. 42-44 How to Deal With Bullies, p. 59 “8 Steps to Conflict Resolution” p. 61 Steps For Mediation, p. 64 Bullying on TV, What can we do to prevent bullying in our school?
November 3rd - December 12th	Chapter #3 “Helping Victims” (p. 77) Teach Anger Management Skills p. 32 Teach Friendship Skills p. 34-36 Explore Ways to Deal with Bullies p. 41 Use a Notes-to-the-Teacher Box p. 41 – 45 Teach students to use “I messages” p. 51 Teach Assertiveness Skills p. 53-54 Teach Conflict Resolution Skills p. 58 Teach Students to Affirm Themselves p. 66 Teach Positive Self -Talk p. 68-71
January 12 <sup>th</sup> – March 27th	Chapter #4 “Helping Bullies” (p. 115) Encourage a Positive Attitude p. 93 Build Students Self-Esteem p. 95-97 Give Them Opportunities to Shine p. 108 Try the Method of Shared Concern p. 99-104
June 3 <sup>rd</sup>	Parent Picnic Bully-Free School End-of-Year Celebration!

Figure 1. Rockman Middle School's Character Education Schedule (Beane, 2003, p. 41).



## **Rockman Middle School**

### **Bully-Free School Zone Mission Statement 2003-2004**

Rockman Middle School begins its second year as a “Bully-Free School Zone.” We believe everyone has the right to come to school excited, enthused, and ready to learn. Bullies will not be tolerated at Rockman Middle School; their negative actions have no place in our school. From Rockman Middle School our motto concerning bullying:

**”We believe.... we should be bully-free!”**

Our character education program follows the writings and teachings of Dr. Allan Beane (2000) and his text *The Bully-Free Classroom: Hundreds of Tips, Strategies, and Activities for School Teachers*. A Bully-Free school zone by no means guarantees that bullies do not exist at Rockman Middle. It does, however emphasize to students how to co-exist peacefully, appreciate differences, solve problems, control anger, and look out for one another. The program also encourages attendance, academic effort, and getting along with each other. Our faculty and staff’s mindset in preventing bullying at our school is to be; ALERT, AWARE, and INVOLVED in the lives of our students.

Our curriculum helps teach character education to all students, and focuses on anger management, conflict resolution, accepting and appreciating differences in others, and processes to follow when bullying behavior takes place. Teachers are learning how to; Create a classroom environment where everyone feels safe, accepted and valued, establish and communicate a zero-tolerance policy for bullying, identify current or potential bullies – and turn them around, act quickly and effectively when you learn of a bullying incident, communicate with parents and get them involved in making your classroom bully free, and mobilize the masses – witnesses and bystanders – to become bully busters.

Our objective for student learning; Stick up for themselves and each other, break the code of silence and report bullying incidents, treat each other with kindness, respect, build self-esteem, empathy, and social skills, resolve conflicts appropriately and effectively, take responsibility for their behavior, and to explore positive ways to feel powerful. Our overall goal is for all our children to come to school excited, enthused, and ready to learn.

*Figure 2. Rockman Middle School's Bully-Free Mission Statement (Public School Manual, Where Tomorrow Begins!).*



## **Rockman Middle School**

### **Bully-Free Credo 2003-2004**

“This is my school, this is my space. I want it to be a safe place. I know that violence prevention begins with me. So that’s why to this I promise, I agree, and I will; Resolve conflicts peacefully, talk about problems openly, treat others with respect, walk away from fights, and take all threats and warning signs seriously. I further agree to take my responsibility seriously in reported inappropriate behavior to adults. I will talk to a parent, counselor, principal, or teacher about my concern.”

#### **Student Responsibility**

As a student from Rockman Middle School I will take seriously my role in learning the basic tactics that those targeted by bullies can use as a defense, called HAHASO. The acronym describes these six strategies:

HELP OTHERS,  
ASSERT YOURSELF,  
HUMOR AS FORM OF DEFENSE,  
AVOID BULLIES WHEN POSSIBLE,  
SELF-TALK, and,  
OWN IT.

#### **Parent Responsibility**

Parent’s involvement with this is crucial. If you feel your child is being bullied, please contact and schedule a meeting with your school’s principal. Everyone involved with the school must be accountable and decide together that bullying will not be tolerated. .

*Figure 3. Rockman Middle School's Bully-Free Credo (Public School Manual, *Where Tomorrow Begins!*).*

I have seen that the strength of the anti-bullying program at Rockman Middle School is in the conviction of all involved in understanding they have a responsibility to teach, encourage, and remind students to treat each other with kindness and respect while offering appropriate modeling. A Bully-Free School Zone program does not guarantee that bullies do not exist at Rockman Middle School or any other school using a similar character education program. It does, however, emphasize to students on a consistent basis how to co-exist peacefully, appreciate and respect differences, solve problems, control anger, and look out for one another. The program also encourages attendance, academic effort, and getting along with one another. Recently, a Rockman Middle School student stated on a local television newscast concerning the Bully-Free School Zone, “It is good to go to a school where bullying is not tolerated, where people care about each other and look out for one another” (Seltzer, 2003, n. p.).

Parents of students at Rockman Middle School are offered a checklist to help identify if their child is being abused. Parents are encouraged and given information about how to be involved in their children’s school life. Communication is critical between parents and children and it is important to discuss what happened during the day, especially the times when bullying most frequently occurs, which is between class, before and after school, and on the way home.

If parents suspect that their child is being bullied, they are encouraged to contact the principal and give him or her a written report of what happened. This is important because many victims are reluctant to open up about being bullied. Parents should ask the principal what they are going to do and schedule a follow-up meeting. Another important component of Rockman Middle School's anti-bullying philosophy is a point of emphasis concerning parental involvement, “When schools work together with families to support learning, children tend to succeed not just in school but throughout life.” This belief system branches out to all aspects of the child and their experiences at school.

One highlight of the Bully-Free School Zone character education programs' schedule is a “Family Picnic” that is held in the fall and spring introducing the Bully-Free School Zone’s

objectives and giving students, parents, and teachers an opportunity to sign the responsibility pledges (see Figures 4, 5, & 6).

**Rockman Middle School**  
"Home of the Bulldogs!"

Bully-Free School Zone  
Student Pledge

We, the Students of Rockman Middle School, say:

***"AT THIS SCHOOL,  
WE BELIEVE...  
WE SHOULD BE...  
BULLY FREE!"***

Bullying defined is when one individual (or group) seeks to dominate, control, and terrorize the life of another. We know bullying can be pushing, shoving, hitting, and spitting, as well as name calling, picking on, making fun of, laughing at, and excluding someone. Bullying causes pain and stress to victims and is never justified or excusable as "kids being kids," "just teasing," or any other rationalization. The victim is never responsible for being a target of bullying. Bullying behavior is not welcome at our school.

Everyone from Rockman Middle School will work to provide a school environment that is safe, calm, orderly, procedural, and one in which people care for one another.

BY SIGNING THIS PLEDGE, WE THE STUDENTS OF R.M.S. AGREE TO:

1. Value student differences and treat others with respect.
2. Not become involved in bullying incidents or be a bully.
3. Be aware of the school's policies and support system with regard to bullying.
4. Report honestly and immediately all incidents of bullying to a faculty member, guidance counselor, or principal.
5. Be alert in places around the school where there is less supervision such as bathrooms, between buildings, buses, etc.
6. Support students who have been or are subjected to bullying.
7. Participate fully and contribute to homeroom class discussions in dealing with bullying.
8. Provide a good role model for younger students and support them if bullying occurs (Gauge Elementary students on buses).

I acknowledge that whether I am being a bully or see someone being bullied, if I don't report or stop the bullying, I am just as guilty.

Signed by: \_\_\_\_\_ Print Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Figure 4. Rockman Middle School's Bully-Free Student Pledge (Beane, 2003, p. 103).



**Rockman Middle School**

“Home of the Bulldogs!”

**Bully-Free School Zone**

**Parent Pledge**

We, the Parents of a Rockman Middle School Student, say:

***“AT THIS SCHOOL,***

***WE BELIEVE...***

***WE SHOULD BE...***

***BULLY FREE!”***

Bullying defined is when one individual (or group) seeks to dominate, control, and terrorize the life of another. We know bullying can be pushing, shoving, hitting, and spitting, as well as name calling, picking on, making fun of, laughing at, and excluding someone. Bullying causes pain and stress to victims and is never justified or excusable as “kids being kids,” “just teasing,” or any other rationalization. The victim is never responsible for being a target of bullying. Bullying behavior is not welcome at our school.

Everyone from Rockman Middle School will work to provide a school environment that is safe, calm, orderly, procedural, and one in which people care for one another.

BY SIGNING THIS PLEDGE, WE THE PARENTS OF R.M.S. AGREE TO:

1. Keep themselves and their children informed and aware of school bullying policies.
2. Work in partnership with the school to encourage positive behavior, valuing differences and promoting sensitivity to others.
3. Discuss regularly with their children their feelings about schoolwork, friendships and relationships.
4. Inform faculty of changes in their children’s behavior or circumstances at home that may change a child’s behavior at school.
5. Alert faculty/administration if any bullying has occurred.
6. Provide a good role model for your children and be involved in their school lives

Signed by: \_\_\_\_\_ Print Name: \_\_\_\_\_

*“ When schools work together with families to support learning, children tend to succeed not just in school but throughout life.”*

Figure 5. Rockman Middle School's Bully-Free Parent Pledge (Beane, 2003, p. 101).

**Rockman Middle School**  
"Home of the Bulldogs!"

**Bully-Free School Zone**

**Faculty Pledge**

We, the Faculty of Rockman Middle School, say:

***"AT THIS SCHOOL,***

***WE BELIEVE...***

***WE SHOULD BE...***

***BULLY FREE!"***

Bullying defined is when one individual (or group) seeks to dominate, control, and terrorize the life of another. We know bullying can be pushing, shoving, hitting, and spitting, as well as name calling, picking on, making fun of, laughing at, and excluding someone. Bullying causes pain and stress to victims and is never justified or excusable as "kids being kids," "just teasing," or any other rationalization. The victim is never responsible for being a target of bullying. Bullying behavior is not welcome at our school.

Everyone from Rockman Middle School will work to provide a school environment that is safe, calm, orderly, procedural, and one in which people care for one another.

BY SIGNING THIS PLEDGE, WE THE FACULTY OF R.M.S. AGREE TO:

1. Develop a clear classroom policy on bullying and display it prominently.
2. Train faculty in appropriate handling of incidents.
3. Develop or adopt a curriculum that educates students about bullying.
4. Teach students about less obvious forms of bullying like gossiping and exclusion.
5. Discuss pro-active anti-bullying measures (such as having lunch with a student who has been excluded in the past).
6. Establish support systems for pupils involved in incidents such as peer counseling and mediation.
7. Establish a system to support and inform parents when incidents of bullying occur.
8. Offer counseling to students who bully.
9. Ensure an atmosphere where students feel safe reporting incidents of bullying and confident they will be dealt with and not ignored.
10. Follow credo at BMS to be ACTIVE, ALERT, and INVOLVED in each student's life.

Signed by: \_\_\_\_\_ Print Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Figure 6. Rockman Middle School's Bully-Free Faculty Pledge (Beane, 2003, p. 99).

Early in the school year, the principal and teachers orient all grade levels through a power-point presentation and workshop session that allows for student discussion and reflection. Students offer input in developing classroom and school-wide rules and regulations concerning bullying behavior. A formal large-group assembly takes place early in the year as student council executive officers read the pledge of conduct concerning students' responsibilities and the bully-free philosophy.

Surveys are provided to students, parents, and teachers at the beginning of the year and given again at the end of the school year to assess perceptions concerning school safety. Action research data has been provided after two years of the Bully-Free School Zone character education program's implementation at the beginning of the 2001-2002 school year from Rockman Middle School. This information can also be viewed on Dr. Allan Beane's website [www.bullyfree.com](http://www.bullyfree.com) offering conclusive evidence that this anti-bullying character education program is making a positive difference with Rockman Middle School students and the school's climate.

The following action research, shown as Table 1, was gathered at Rockman Middle School starting in August of 2001. Student surveys were offered at the beginning of the school year to 200 RMS students. This initial survey was offered prior to the implementation of the Bully-Free School Zone character education program at RMS. These same students were surveyed again 170 days later after they had been exposed to the Bully-Free School Zone character education program. Student questions focused on their perceptions of school safety and the impact that bullying has on our overall climate from RMS. Students were surveyed in the same manner the following years. Other data were collected through School Information Management System (SIMS) records, North Carolina State DPI testing information, and discipline records.

Table 1

*Bully-Free Action Research Data*

Rockman Middle School	School Year		
	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04
Survey Items	%	%	%
Percentage of aggressive occurrences among students	18.0	3.0	1.0
Percentage of suspensions based on aggressive behavior	6.5	1.5	3.0
Percentage of school attendance	90.8	97.8	95.7
Percentage of bullied students	44.8	20.2	24.6
Percentage of students who reported they had avenues to report bullying	24.6	78.6	86.7
Percentage of students reporting that bullies exist in school	74.6	38.9	49.7
Percentage of successful academic performance	74.3 <sup>a</sup>	84.3 <sup>b</sup>	89.6 <sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Non-Recognized Status as recognized by the North Carolina State Department of Public Instruction. <sup>b</sup> School of Distinction Status as recognized by the North Carolina State Department of Public Instruction: 10% improvement in test scores since implementation of Bully-Free School Zone character education program. <sup>c</sup> School of Excellence as recognized by the North Carolina State Department of Public Instruction: 15.3% improvement in test scores since implementation of Bully-Free School Zone character education program.

The program emphasizes the importance of thinking before speaking or acting, which is a concept everyone needs to be reminded of occasionally. This is especially true with middle school age students attempting to coexist peacefully. Information is provided concerning characteristics of victims and bullies. Specific attention is given to the role of the bystander in the bullying scenario. A major emphasis of the program is placed on the onlookers and helping

them to understand their responsibility in being a part of the solution in stopping school bullying.

When asked about the program, one teacher from Rockman Middle School stated:

It is worth the extra effort required, and the program has had a positive impact on students, teachers, and parents . . . it has also been a great thing for the entire community; everyone seems to be responding to this in a good way.

Teachers and staff have developed a credo as a reminder concerning their important role in preventing bullying at Rockman Middle School: be alert, be aware, and be involved. Teachers from Rockman Middle School agree it is important to get to know their students. They consider that hallway supervision is not all about monitoring, but rather an opportunity to talk with students in an informal setting. Rockman Middle School teachers understand the importance of noticing abrupt differences in students' personalities and the importance of proper intervention. It is an overall objective that Rockman Middle be a school where all students are free to learn without being afraid--and where teachers can teach free of fear. One veteran Rockman Middle School teacher stated, "We all seem to have a heightened awareness of the needs of others, and the importance of being concerned for one another."

According to Olweus (1991), every student should have the right to be spared oppression and embarrassment for the sake of another, in school and in society. As stated in Beane (2000), "Children cannot learn effectively if they fear for their safety. Troubled young people--both bullies and victims--need a supportive environment to learn and grow" (p. 14). Anti-bullying programs have recently been supported by federal and state legislation in helping to provide safer school environments and some experts have stated that prevention of bullying may become a legal obligation for all schools (Hoover & Oliver, 1996). Spurling (as cited in Joslin, 2003) stated, "School leaders must understand their responsibility in protecting students while under their watch, and encourage everyone involved to work to provide an environment that is safe, calm, orderly, procedural, and one in which people care for one another" (p. 4).

According to Beane (2003), effective school anti-bullying programs are based on research regarding areas such as school effectiveness, enhancing self-esteem, cultural diversity



instructions, fostering resiliency, increasing parent involvement, school violence, and creating safe environments. Sharp and Smith (1994) suggested that anti-bullying programs have the following as goals:

1. To reduce or eliminate direct bullying (physical or verbal attacks).
2. To reduce or eliminate indirect bullying (social isolation, confidence reduction, spreading rumors, slander, turning your best friend against you, etc.).
3. To reduce the duration of bullying incidents when they do arise.
4. To increase the number of students willing to report bullying.
5. To increase the number of students who are willing to help someone who is being bullied.
6. To achieve better peer relations at school.
7. To create conditions that enable victims and bullies to function better in and out of the school setting.
8. To ensure that at least 80% of the students feel that their school takes serious action against bullying (direct and indirect).
9. To develop relationships with parents of the bullied and the bullies which facilitate efforts to combat the problems (pp. 14-15)

In 1999, 5.1% of student's ages 12 through 18 reported that they were bullied at school during the past six months of their school year. This same research established that students in lower grades were more likely to report being bullied than students in upper grades were (Department of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2003). Since the initiation of the Bully-Free School Zone character education program, a measurable positive change has taken place in Rockman Middle School. It is a plan that requires consistent effort from everyone involved. When that effort is visible, good things will take place in the school. When bullying is allowed to exist unencumbered, learning will take a back seat for students who are concerned for their own safety. In an environment where bullying is not tolerated, instructional activity will be at a higher level, students will be engaged in learning, and teachers will be able to teach free of disturbances. Bully-Free School Zone programs emphasize creating an environment where students are happy, energetic, enthused, and excited about learning.

Most students who are bullied tend to be weak or insecure and either will not or cannot defend themselves. Adults can help children to understand how to project confidence in deterring bullying behavior directed at them. Adams (2003) listed the following suggestions that adults could offer children to help curb bullying behavior:

1. Stand tall, look the bully in the eye, and say firmly, "Stop!" Then walk away with your head held high.
2. Use an I message: "I do not want to be spoken to that way. There is not truth in those words." Then walk away, head held high. Do not engage in an argument; the bully will always win. Keep your dignity by standing tall.
3. Do not take a bully's behavior personally. It is not your fault and does not indicate your value or worth.
4. Even if you are scared, try to look brave. Take slow deep breaths and tell yourself, "I can handle this."
5. Hang out with others. Being alone attracts bullies.
6. Tell an adult and ask for help. This is not tattling. You have a legitimate right to seek help (p. 41).

Bullying is often a secret activity and students are sometimes reluctant to report inappropriate behavior when aimed at themselves or others. These reasons often make the process of gathering data difficult. We do know that bullying is a significant problem that affects a large number of students. Bullying affects all children whether playing the role of bully, victim, or bystander. The bystander's reaction to bullying is becoming a more intense problem because more children are participating as followers or passive bullies. In a survey of 558 middle-school children from Midwestern schools, 80% of the students had been involved in bullying within the last 30 days (Espelage, 2001).

Beane's (2003) research determined that an act of bullying occurs every eight seconds on the school's playground. According to the American Medical Association (as cited in Canter & Cohn, 2000), 3.7 million youth are active participants in bullying while 3.2 million were victims of a bully's actions. At Rockman Middle School, a rationale list (see Figure 7) to prevent

bullying in the school and tips for students (see Figure 8) is offered each year with updated lists provided by students and teachers' input through classroom discussions.

**Rockman Middle School**

**Rational To Prevent Bullying  
In Our School**

We from Rockman Middle School believe bullying must not be tolerated and has to be stopped because:

1. Bullying behavior is a major cause and has been identified as a common link to school shootings and violence (Bowman, 2001).
2. Verbal harassment is the number one form of bullying leading to school violence.
3. Creates an environment that students are scared to come to school and this fear interferes with learning and has a negative impact on student morale (Hoover & Oliver, 1996).
4. Increases suicide risk of victims and bystanders (Hazler & Hoover, 1991).
5. Student at greater risk to join hate gangs, cults, and experience with drugs and alcohol.
6. Posttraumatic stress is a result of a bullying and fearful environment (Kinchin, 2001).
7. A result of bullying is physical, psychological, and emotional injury.
8. Is a major factor in the majority of discipline problems.
9. Creates loneliness with victims and bystanders.
10. Leads to higher rate of student dropout and school change.
11. Causes truancy (Fried & Fried, 1996).
12. Disrupts and interferes with academics.

Figure 7. Rockman Middle School's Rational to Prevent Bullying (Rockman Middle School Manual, *Where Tomorrow Begins!*).

**Rockman Middle School**  
**Tips for Students**  
**In Dealing With Bullying Behavior**  
2003-04

We from Rockman believe that students have the right to attend school excited, enthused and looking forward to learning and improving themselves. We also feel that that student rights are hindered by bullying behavior in the school building. Here is a list of tips offered to students of Rockman Middle in dealing with bullies. This list was composed through teacher and student input during classroom discussion in December of 2003, what can be done to prevent bullying in our school, in their words;

1. Talk honestly to teachers and parents about bullying behavior directed at you or someone you know who is being mistreated.
2. Always remember that no one ever deserves to be bullied.
3. Stay away from bullies whenever possible and do not interact when not necessary, give them space when at all possible.
4. Understand the characteristic of victims and do not allow yourself to be placed in that category.
5. Do not let bullies changed your day for the worst. Do not allow them to make you feel bad by their words. Understand they are trying to get a reaction out of you.
6. Be assertive when confronted by a bully. Tell the bully how you feel with confidence and determination and then walk away. Do not stand there and continue the negative interaction. If the behavior continues an adult in the building needs to be approached.
7. Do not fight back. Let the bully know that you are no easy target.
8. Follow your classroom and school procedures concerning bullying behavior.
9. Be a broken record when confronted with bullies. Have a certain phrase that is repeated over and over again to help diffuse the situation.
10. Remember, bullies want to hurt your feelings. Do not allow them to alter your mood for the day. That is their objective.
11. Disarm the bully with humor. Sometimes agreeing with the bully about what they are saying about you can stop this ugly talk.

*Figure 8. Tips for Students in Dealing With Bullying Behavior (Rockman Middle School Manual, Where Tomorrow Begins!).*



**Rockman Middle School**  
**Tips for Students**  
**In Dealing With Bullying Behavior**  
2003-04

12. If possible, stay with your friends. Never be alone, especially in situations and areas where bullies exist. If you do find yourself alone in a hostile situation join in the conversation with others or adults.
13. If you find yourself in a serious situation that you could be hurt physically, then you need to get out of that climate as quickly as possible. In other words – RUN.
14. Expect to be mistreated sometimes. People say and do mean things to others for whatever reason. Understand that you cannot control what others do, but you can control your actions. Be pleasant, say nice things, and be friendly to others and you will probably be treated better as well.
15. Try to make friends. Remember, a quote for the day last year, “It takes many years to make a good friend, it can take just one ugly word to destroy it.”
16. Make friends inside and outside the school. Be kind to everyone involved with your school: Principal, teachers, bus drivers, custodians, maintenance crew, cafeteria personnel, special needs students, and visitors.
17. Understand how you treat others will dictate in a large degree how they treat you.
18. Be good to your parents and family members. Your family should be your best friends.
19. Be nice to bullies. This may surprise them and possibly change their behavior. Sometimes bullies need a little love.
20. Be careful on the Internet. Chat lines and virtual talk can be fun but also dangerous and is being used more and more by bullies. Take threats on the Internet seriously and report them accordingly. Do not allow yourself to fall in the trap of bullies who attempt to trap you into a nasty dialogue.
21. Keep the emotion out of it. Bullies like to upset you. Do not let them. Sometimes being emotionless in reaction to bullies can be a major deterrent to further bad behavior.
22. Take your role in reporting bullying behavior at you or others very seriously. These are serious accusations and need to be carefully examined before approaching an adult.
23. Be Positive! Always strive to have a Bully-Free School Zone environment.

*Figure 8 (continued). Tips for Students in Dealing With Bullying Behavior (Rockman Middle School Manual, Where Tomorrow Begins!).*

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODS

The focus of my inquiry was to investigate the perceptions of administrators, teachers, and parents about anti-bullying character education practices in their schools and to develop ideas for improving the program. The study was conducted in five middle schools in Western North Carolina concerning anti-bullying curriculum practices that had been recently initiated in each of these schools. Administrators, teachers, and parents were interviewed and asked open-ended questions formulated from the following research questions:

1. What are the views of administrators, teachers, and parents concerning the current implementation of a Bully-Free School Zone character education program?
2. What factors, as perceived by the participants, play a role in a well-organized Bully-Free School Zone character education program?
3. What aspects are perceived as barriers to an effective Bully-Free School Zone character education program?
4. What changes have occurred with attendance, aggressive/violent occurrences, and perceptions toward school safety by administrators, teachers, and parents since the implementation of a Bully-Free School Zone?
5. What ideas can administrators, teachers, and parents contribute to enhance the effectiveness of a Bully-Free School Zone character education program?

#### *Research Design*

A qualitative approach was determined the most appropriate research method because the goal was to identify the participants' views of their schools anti-bullying character education programs. Creswell stated, “The best studies have a strong inquiry procedure, and this procedure can be gained through engaging in field studies by apprenticing with individuals with a strong

tradition of inquiry focus or by reading good examples” (p. 27). The purpose of qualitative research is to seek answers to questions that emphasize how social situations exist (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). In an effort to discover the perceptions of the participants involved, open-ended interview interviews were conducted because of their potential to maximize the use of memories and recollection (Reinharz, 1992).

### *Participants*

Snowball sampling was used to seek the expertise of professionals with experience in school discipline plans in order to optimize the results of the study (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996). The participants were administrators, teachers, and parents associated with five middle schools in Western North Carolina concerning a Bully Free School Zone character education program recently initiated in their schools. This study focused on grades five through eight.

I contacted the assistant superintendent of schools for permission to conduct qualitative studies within his school system. I phoned the principals at each chosen school to get his or her recommendation of a list of participants who would offer quality insight concerning the effectiveness of their anti-bullying character education program. After this list was established, I then contacted each potential participant by phone or letter to explain the purpose of the study. At this point, an agreeable interview time and place was scheduled.

I agreed to make presentations to teachers and support staff concerning our Bully-Free School Zone character education program from Rockman Middle School for the opportunity to interview participants' involved with each school. Two presentations with over 150 teachers in attendance from these four schools took place during end-of-year in-service training for all personnel. Principals, in turn, set-up interviews for me with parents and teachers over a five-day period. Additional interviews were set-up as a result of participants' suggestions to talk with someone else directly involved with the anti-bullying program. All four of the middle schools

that participated the in anti-bullying presentations were a part of the same school district. Rockman Middle School from an adjacent school system comprised the fifth school in the study.

### *Successive Phases of the Inquiry*

Phase one of my research was to apply for authorization from the Institutional Review Board from East Tennessee State University (see Appendix A). Contacting and receiving permission from the superintendent of schools was the next step in the strategic inquiry process (see Appendix B). Obtaining permission with principals and discussions concerning potential participants in the study was the next step (see Appendix C). I developed interview guides for administrators, teachers, and parents with the help of principals during the initial discussions (see Appendices D, E, & F). After pilot testing the interview instrument with several principals, teachers, and parents, no additions, deletions, or suggestions were offered. I determined that the sets of questions were administered in a fair amount of time while allowing interviewees the opportunity to supply substantial information

A tape recorder was used to record all interviews in an attempt to gain insight and to check for unbiased data in the questionnaire interview. Prior to the research the exact number of participants was unknown; however, a point of redundancy was reached with 54 participants. Any effective qualitative approach understands that when the interview process reaches a point of redundancy when no more information is discovered (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

### *Instrumentation*

According to Creswell (1998), “The qualitative approach allows the researcher to study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (p. 15). This study allowed me to describe in thick description the thoughts, perceptions, and beliefs of the participants of this study concerning anti-bullying character education programs recently initiated in their schools. Interview using



open-ended questions were the primary data source (see Appendices D, E, & F). A tape recorder using cassette tapes was used to record data offered through the participants' own words. None of the participants objected to the use of a tape recorder and they did not appear to be uncomfortable with its use. All tape-recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim.

### *Data Collection*

According to Patton (1990), a general interview guide can be used to provide a common set of topics from which the data were collected to determine exact wording or sequencing of interview questions. The qualitative approach offered flexibility to pursue emergent themes through open-ended questions. During the interviews, participants were offered many opportunities to provide thick descriptions. A tape recorder was used to record interview sessions on cassette tapes. I used a journal to make notes after each interview regarding participants' body language and for jotting my thoughts and impressions. All observations and participants' interview sessions were included in the data collection.

### *Data Analysis*

Each individual interview was tape recorded and later transcribed. A procedure known as inductive analysis was used in analyzing data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This type of analysis offers stability when the purpose of the study is exploratory (Huberman & Miles, 1994). Transcribed interviews were gathered and coded into the Non-Numerical Unstructured Data Indexing Searching and Theory (NUD.IST) software. According to Creswell (1998), NUD.IST helps researchers by providing a system for storing and organizing files, searching for themes, crossing themes, diagramming, and creating a template.

### *Ensuring Trustworthiness of the Data*

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), trustworthiness for qualitative studies must follow the constructs that confirm reliability and dependability. To ensure trustworthiness of the study, all interview questions were piloted and a small group of principals, teachers, and parents were asked to determine if questions were appropriate. These pilot sessions took place in the educational leadership department at East Tennessee State University with a master's level cohort. Throughout the study, I kept the names of schools, teachers, administrators, and parents confidential. All names of persons and places have been replaced with pseudonyms to protect the privacy of participants and to assure their continued anonymity.

Peer debriefing was used to ensure that personal bias did not exist from the collected data during the research. Peer debriefing was provided by the school principals who consented to serve in this capacity at each of the individual schools. All principals who served in this role had many years of administrative experience and were very familiar with school discipline practices as well as data collection. All principals assumed a role in challenging ideas and stimulating suggestions concerning the strategic inquiry.

Member checking was conducted with each participant either by a follow-up meeting, a letter (see Appendix H), or by email. Participants were allowed to review their transcripts, if requested, to assess for accuracy. Principals were instrumental in helping to set up member checking opportunities.

An inquiry auditor was the technique used to establish the trustworthiness of the data (see Appendix G). The auditor is referred to as having the responsibility for ensuring that transcripts are accurate, as well as checking the data for accuracy (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). All data and instruments were released to the auditor. The auditor chosen for this study was selected because of his experience and expertise in educational leadership and in working with doctorate students.

## CHAPTER 4

### PRESENTATION OF DATA

The purpose of this study was to investigate common threads of effective Bully-Free School Zone character education curriculum practices as perceived by administrators, teachers, and parents in five middle schools in Western North Carolina. I attempted to determine if the views of 54 participants aligned with the published literature on the impact of anti-bullying programs in middle schools. This study focused on middle schools offering grades five through eight.

Multiple participants at each site engaged in qualitative open-ended and indepth interviews. I designed and pilot tested general interview questions with administrators, teachers, and parents at an area middle school. No additions or deletions to the original interview questions were necessary after pilot testing. Pilot testing took place in April of 2004; on-site interviews took place in late May and throughout June of the same year.

The interviews with administrators, teachers, and parents took place during end-of-year school events and inservice system-wide staff development sessions. A two-week break occurred between the end of the school year and the beginning of summer school; thus, no students were in the buildings during the interviewing process.

In optimizing the results of the study, snowball sampling was used to provide direction in seeking participants with expertise in anti-bullying character education practices (Gall et al. 1996). I contacted the superintendent of schools to receive permission to contact principals. After permission was granted, I called each middle school principal to get his or her recommendations of teachers who were involved in the anti-bullying program and who would represent a maximum variation of perceptions. Developing a list of parents who would be agreeable to participate in the study was a concern that was simplified by the efforts of each

school's principal. Often during the interviews, participants would make suggestions of persons to contact who could add information and might be willing to participate. This snowball method provided many productive interviewees who were not on the initial list of participants.

In developing interviewee lists, principals selected participants who would likely offer rich descriptions of anti-bullying practices and who might have suggestions as to how to enhance these practices. All participants seemed excited to be a part of the study and all were willing to offer their insights and views concerning anti-bullying character education practices. The participants offered flexibility concerning the length of interviews and did not seem to be in a hurry to end our time together. Most teachers and parents' interviews lasted from 10 to 25 minutes each. Interviews with administrators lasted longer as I tended to interact more with them during those interviews. I felt very comfortable with the principals I talked with and I found the central office staff very accommodating as well.

A slight difficulty occurred in accommodating parents' schedules for interview sessions. Some chose to take time away from work at their own expense to come and share their views; however, the majority stated that their workplace allowed them time to participate in the study. This was a strong indicator that positive community-school relations existed in the system. All parents shared a great deal of interest in their children's schools and were eager to offer their perceptions and ideas.

The principals' interviews were longer and more detailed. My interaction with them during the interviews usually resulted in excellent and informative sessions. All principals were willing to offer in detail how they have seen discipline practices change over the years and the impact that bullying has had on aggression and violent occurrences. I was impressed with the principals who participated; they were obviously caring and compassionate people who loved their work. They also were involved and active in their schools and considered their role was to provide instructional leadership. They stated that as instructional leaders, their first priority was to do all they could to provide a safe school environment.

The principals' interviews took place in their offices, guidance counselors' offices, faculty lounges, and libraries. A tape recorder was used to record interview sessions on cassette tapes. None of the participants objected to the use of a tape recorder and they did not appear to be uncomfortable with the procedure. I used a journal to make notes after each interview regarding participants' body language and for jotting my thoughts and impressions.

Throughout this chapter, I have presented perceptions and noted the emergent themes resulting from interviewing selected principals, teachers, and parents of students in five Western North Carolina middle schools. The focus of the study was on middle school students from fifth through eighth grades in two different North Carolina school systems. All of the schools within the past two years had implemented a Bully-Free School Zone character education program.

### *Participants*

The objective for this study was based on my concerns as a school leader about the negative impact of bullying on a school's climate. It was also my intent to examine the role of bullying in aggressive and violent acts. In-depth interviews that lasted from 15 to 30 minutes were conducted with 54 participants: 14 administrators, 22 teachers, and 18 parents. All participants and schools were given fictitious names for the purpose of protecting those involved while providing anonymity in the study.

During the summer of 2003, Dr. Kerry Flanders assistant superintendent of schools in Hurleyville County, contacted me concerning an interest in learning more about our school's anti-bullying character education program. He indicated a strong desire to implement Bully-Free School character education programs in his system. Dr. Flanders reflected on his own experiences with bullying as an elementary-school student while also sharing how aggressive behavior affected his own position. It was his objective that these programs be initiated in the prekindergarten and elementary grades then followed through in the middle schools. He invited me to present to his elementary and middle school principals the procedures we had followed at

Rockman Middle School in providing a Bully-Free School Zone environment. Dr. Flanders was instrumental in making this research a possibility by his initial interest in our school's anti-bullying program.

The three assistant superintendents interviewed were very interested in the action research shared during my presentation. They all had responsibilities within their positions that mirrored the importance of a Bully-Free School Zone approach. These responsibilities were structured such as: school safety director, drug and alcohol free director, prevention of school violence, and school safety coordinator. At the time of the interviews, all assistant superintendents from Hurleyville County were in the process of developing an anti-bullying system-wide committee to further research this growing school problem.

The assistant superintendent who had first looked into our bully-free program and invited me to Hurleyville County Schools had recently retired in December of 2003. This retirement followed an outstanding 30 plus years of service as a teacher, principal, and assistant superintendent. One of his last duties was initiating this program and developing an anti-bullying task force for the elementary- and middle-grade schools in Hurleyville County. After his retirement, his replacement continued to work with me in developing this policy while assisting with my research. I am very appreciative of the support and assistance from all the central office administrators in Hurleyville and Maxton Counties in making me feel welcome in their school system.

The principals' experience in administration and teaching ranged from 10 to 32 years. One participant had just completed his first full year as a principal while another had completed his 31st year and was considering retirement. In different ways, each principal helped to make this data collection research a smooth process. One principal in the study had earlier this year completed all requirements for a doctorate in educational leadership at an area university. His study was qualitative in nature and very similar to my approach. His understanding of my research was very helpful in planning and scheduling participants' interviews.

The 22 teachers interviewed had a wide variety of educational experience ranging from 2 to 32 years. The teachers seemed excited and were helpful in providing information about their perceptions of the impact of anti-bullying programs in their schools. They were eager to share their suggestions and thoughts concerning ineffective and effective discipline practices they had experienced or administered. They also helped in identifying barriers to the effectiveness of implementing the program while providing descriptive personal definitions of bullying. All teachers involved in the study expressed a love for teaching and a concern for making their school climate more encouraging, supportive, and caring.

The 18 parents were helpful and cooperative even though they were somewhat limited in detailed knowledge of school discipline practices. They were parents of children who were currently in the fifth through eighth grade. All but four of the parents interviewed took time off from work to participate in this study. Of the 18 parents interviewed, 8 had other children who had also attended the participating school. They were very opinionated and quick to elaborate on their experiences and their children's experiences regarding the impact of the anti-bullying character education program.

One parent was a board of education member who had children in two of the system's schools. She was articulate, very aware of the school's discipline policies, and committed to the anti-bullying program. Her involvement and understanding of school practices was impressive and helpful to this study. I spent nearly an hour talking with her in a very informative session. She informed me that her mother had initially talked with Dr. Flanders about looking into this program. Her mother had seen a local news station telecast a segment about the positive impact the Bully-Free School Zone program had made on Rockman Middle School. After she met with me and discussed our school's program in detail, she shared the information with Dr. Flanders.

### *Time of the Study*

Overall, the participants were patient, knowledgeable, and insightful in sharing their views concerning this research focus. I feel this was a result of timing in that these interviews occurred during the end-of-year inservice sessions taking place in the Hurleyville school system. All end-of-grade testing and scoring had been completed. Students were enjoying the beginning of their summer break while teachers and administrators busily closed out the school year. Inservice training sessions were taking place in our centrally located school and teachers were obviously enjoying seeing and working with cohorts from their county. It was a hectic time but also one that required reflection on the past year while planning for the upcoming school year fewer than two months away.

One important note about the schools involved in this program is that unofficial end-of-grade test results indicated that all had achieved their academic goals or higher for the 2003-2004 school year. This was ample reason for all involved to feel good about their work throughout the past school year. I could not help but think that the announcement of these test scores enhanced the energy level of all participants involved in this research. It was obvious that everyone who participated in this research was in a good mood and feeling positive about their schools.

### *Hurleyville County Schools*

My study took place in the Hurleyville County Public Schools, the second largest school system in Western North Carolina. In the Hurleyville school system, 21 schools are in operation, serving over 12,000 students and feeding into three large high schools. The Hurleyville system is divided into four districts: Hurleyville City, North, West, and East. The Hurleyville City district is located in the center of the county and surprisingly has smaller enrollments than the more rural schools in the system.

Administrators, teachers, and parents at four of these schools participated in the study by examining the impact of their recently implemented anti-bullying programs. Each student,



parent, and teacher in the Hurleyville system is provided a student code of conduct offering student behavior guidelines. On the cover of the 12-page packet is the motto of the Hurleyville Public Schools: “Where Tomorrow Begins!” Information pertaining to student infractions from incidences of assault or violence to cheating and plagiarism is defined in detail. An additional section concerning hazing, harassment, or bullying behavior has been added to the Hurleyville County Public School’s Code of Conduct (see Figure 9) and was stated in section II, page 5 of the manual for the 2004-2005 school year. Administrators, teachers, parents, and students are given copies of the Hurleyville School’s Code of Conduct and are required to sign a form stating they have read, understand, and will agree to the information provided. As shown in Figure 10, an anti-bully committee in Hurleyville County created a plan of action in developing a system-wide bully-free program.

Open lines of communication appear to exist across the system and in individual schools in Hurleyville. The Hurleyville County Public Schools have an updated, comprehensive, and user-friendly web site that is frequently visited. The individual schools have web sites that offer information, calendars of events, updates, objectives, and opportunities for communication. Newsletters are used system-wide as well as each individual school's offering of appropriate and current information. In all publications, an emphasis is placed on students, teachers, and schools for academic excellence and accomplishments. Throughout these publications, it is evident that great pride and interest is given to athletics in the Hurleyville system as they have a great tradition of excellence in sports.

## Hurleyville County Public Schools Code of Conduct

### II. OTHER STUDENT INFRACTIONS, GRADE K-12

“The following student infractions have consequences that are at the discretion of the school principal. The include In-school-suspension (ISS), Out-of-school suspension (OSS), recommendation of a Baxtor Educational Center placement (Alternative School), and/or long-term suspension with the concurrence of the Central Office level administration (p. 5).”

#### B. HAZING, HARASSMENT, OR BULLYING

“Hazing or harassment of any type is unacceptable. Harassment, or hazing, is defined as using any method to intimidate or cause discomfort. Bullying is defined as targeting an individual, over time, with repeated negative action. No group or individual shall require any student to wear demeaning dress or costume on campus, injure emotionally or physically another student by playing abusive tricks him/her, frighten, beat or harass him/her. Students shall not use verbal methods of harassment (p. 5).”

#### Hurleyville Student Behavior Guidelines

“The student behavior guidelines objectives listed in the Hurleyville Code of Conduct are to ensure the safe, secure, and orderly operation, while maintaining an atmosphere conducive to teaching, learning, and quiet study, creating a major responsibility of school administrators, teachers, parents, and students. Each school campus will operate by a mutual “Code of Respect.” This “Code of Respect” states: 'All students will have respect for self and respect for one another and their rights. All students will respect the diversity of others. All students will not cheat or engage in any other inappropriate activity. Students will use appropriate language. All students will dress appropriately. The principal at each school will determine appropriate dress, but students are not permitted to wear/display symbols or other items that would be perceived to be disruptive. All students will contribute to a safe and positive climate (p. 1).”

The assistant superintendents' responsible for initiating an anti-bullying system-wide policy shared with me the initial proposal and processes they followed in developing a plan of action for Hurleyville Public Schools.

*Figure 9. Hurleyville County Public Schools' Code of Conduct (Rockman Middle School Manual, Where Tomorrow Begins!).*

**Hurleyville County Public Schools  
Plan of Action  
Creating Anti-Bullying  
Character Education Programs**

**POLICY AND PROCEDURE**

- Define and describe bullying in Code of Conduct
- Include definition in student agenda
- Write and use bully-specific referral forms and parent letters

**WHOLE SCHOOL INTERVENTION**

- Hold a anti-bullying assembly and student-parent pledge
- Promote climate change via slogans, etc.
- Include bully-specific information on parent nights
- Conduct staff in-service
- Monitor and adjust according to discipline and survey data

**CLASSROOM INTERVENTIONS**

- Form and schedule advisement sessions
- Use *Bully-Free Classroom: Over 100 Activities, Strategies, and Tips for Teachers for K-8 Teachers* (Beane, 2000), and assigned to grade levels.

**INFRACTION INTERVENTIONS**

- Develop curriculum and pacing guides to offer program
- Use current referral procedures, per Code of Conduct
- Assign individual, peer and group counseling
- Form and employ student relationship team

*Figure 10.* Hurleyville County Public Schools' Bully-Free Plan of Action (Rockman Middle School Manual, *Where Tomorrow Begins!*).

Good relations existed in all areas of the study. People wanted to share with me good things that were taking place in their schools. In all schools a professional atmosphere existed as evidenced in the way people described their feelings and perceptions concerning their school and personnel. During my visits and follow-up meetings, few negative comments were made about other personnel, the schools, or the systems. Participants were quick to point out that they did not want to be linked to negative talk about their schools because they had great pride and strong ties to the schools and desired to promote them in a positive manner. A positive and energetic climate permeated the buildings of all schools. It also appeared that an excellent working relationship had been developed with the central office staff and the board of education in the Hurleyville system, making the future bright for all concerned.

I was impressed with the Hurleyville Public School System. It was located in a gorgeous area in the mountains of Western North Carolina with well-maintained and beautiful schools. Strong leadership existed in each of the schools that I visited, with principals who were knowledgeable, visible, accessible, and who actively participated in events at their schools. From my experience, I found it to be a school system where people cared for one another, solved differences peacefully, and where children were the primary focus in decision-making. Throughout my research, I was treated with kindness, respect, and concern for the success of the research project.

#### *Administrators' Interviews*

The principals interviewed appeared eager to share their perceptions about the impact of their schools' anti-bullying character education programs. Several discussed strategies and activities that were being used in their schools to strengthen their anti-bullying programs. They also wanted to share new books and journals on the topic of bully-free schools they had recently read. All these principals presented great energy and a strong desire to make improvements to their anti-bullying programs for the upcoming school year.

## *The Impact of Bullying*

In examining the views of administrators concerning the implementation of an anti-bullying program, it became important to define bullying and its impact on the school's climate. While focusing on this topic, all principals agreed that bullying behavior was definitely a problem and tended to create reoccurring problems. Mrs. Morrison, an assistant principal from Fairview Middle School offering grades six, seven, and eight with an enrollment of 768 students, related that she felt bullying behavior played a role in just about every belligerent incident. Mrs. Morrison stated, "It has been a long time coming that this behavior is finally being addressed." She added:

Bullying to me is a person or person's systematic attempt to make someone feel bad or threatened. I feel that this type of behavior leads to all kinds of problems in our school. Some days it is more than others but on the average at least half of my day is spent with discipline or behavior issues that usually come back to someone bullying another. I mainly do eighth grade discipline and what I see is a lot of different misbehaviors, from the hallway, from the lunchroom, and physical education classes. Most of the time bullying behavior occurs in places where we do not supervise as closely as we probably should. I have also noticed that this behavior tends to get a little worse as the school year goes on, with the exception of this year. I believe that is attributed to our bully-free teachings and work we are now doing to place more focus on these type of problems.

Mr. Richards, who had been a principal for 15 years, discussed bullying and its impact on students at Pleasant Gardens, a middle school with an enrollment of 803 students. He related his definition of bullying:

I think bullying is anything that has to do with kids stepping on the feelings of other kids whether it be physical, verbal, or written. It carries a lot of weight in its impact to others. This may be loud, boastful talk aimed at a classmate that everyone is aware of or it could be quieter in nature in excluding someone from the group or leaving them out purposefully. Deciding to leave someone out of the group tends to snowball into more serious problems.

Mr. Richards continued to speak of the negative impact of bullying behavior:

This type of behavior usually leads to irate parents' inclusion as well. The impact of bullying is awesome in that it can completely stop learning in the classroom, it can keep kids from coming to school, and it can cause a lot of problems with parents who are always quick to blame school officials for not doing anything to help the problem.

When asked about parental involvement, Mr. Reedy said he felt that those relationships had improved since the inception of the anti-bullying plan at his school. He added, “Parents are now saying that they are glad for the bully-free school zone policy and they feel that their kids are safer and better taken care of and the teachers are listening more.” Mr. Reedy said he thought that those relationships would only improve as the program matured.

Dr. Pate, a principal from Hurleyville Middle School located in the city district with an enrollment of 450 students in grades six, seven, and eight, explained a unique problem in his school:

Our school has broadened the definition because of a particular group of girls that we have in the building. They have the ability to create an unbelievable amount of trouble while keeping their “hands clean.” They are also girls that you would not think would be involved in this type of activity. So our school’s definition of bullying is when someone tries to deliberately make another person feel unsafe. Bullying has changed in nature, now we see our biggest problem we deal with is from a particular group of girls who seem to initiate most of this negative behavior off campus that finds its way into our schools.

Dr. Pate gave an interesting illustration of "high-tech" bullying:

A good example is that probably 75% of our students have Internet capability at home and they are active with their computers. With instant messages and chat lines a lot of our problems usually start with negative messages posted bad mouthing someone else. To make this problem even more difficult to deal with is that these girls are usually from prominent families in our community.

He went on to make a point about how the perspective of parents had changed regarding the responsibilities of schools:

We have another group of parents who tend to clump all inappropriate behavior into the bullying category. That is a hard process to put into place and administer. How do you discipline when a child says you can’t sit with me. Parents are asking the schools to do much more than we are capable of when they begin to ask us to control everything that is said between children.

Dr. Pate continued this thought by saying, “All we can do is try and teach our children to resolve these types of problems that are not classified as bullying necessarily.” He added, “We are already seeing a difference in how students deal with one another when problems arise. I really feel that is directly attributed to the teachings of our Bully-Free School Zone character education



program.” Dr. Pate recently fulfilled all requirements for a doctorate in educational leadership at an area university.

Mrs. Peterson was a principal from Fairview Middle School. This was a beautiful rural school containing grades six, seven, and eight with an enrollment of 768 students. Mrs. Peterson said she believed that bullying played a “huge” role in aggressive and violent behavior. Mrs. Peterson admitted that “horseplay that turns ugly or gossip that continues to grow and get nastier as it is spreads” was the biggest bullying problem she faced. She continued by saying, “Bullying brings nothing but negative to the school and nothing good comes from it.” Mrs. Peterson, who was a first year principal, defined bullying as “any type of harassing, verbal, psychological, or emotional mistreatment.” Mrs. Peterson added, “Forty percent of my day is dealing with the same students causing the same problems over and over again, which can be very frustrating to attempt to deal with.” This first-year principal indicated it was her hope that the school’s new anti-bullying program would help remedy those reoccurring discipline problems:

We have not at this time implemented the bully-free program into our curriculum but are in the planning stages to begin this during the 2004-05 school year. We have formed an anti-bullying committee that is putting together a plan of action for beginning this new character education program. This year leading into our bully-free program our goal was to improve the relationships of teachers and students and that was our focus throughout with our current character education program. With our anti-bullying committee developing plans for next year, the focus will be on improving student relationships.

Mr. Heflin was an assistant principal from Rockman Middle School with grades five, six, seven, and eight and an enrollment of 222 students. He said he had seen a dramatic change occur with the school’s climate since the implementation of the bully-free program. He described the distinction:

Before the implementation of the anti-bullying program two years ago, I feel a large part of the day was disturbed by not only bullying behavior but more from the fallout affecting all the other students. Prior to the program, bullying behavior was never really dealt with effectively so it was a constant source of our discipline problems. Since the start of the program and with everyone’s participation level high here at our school –

disruptive behavior because of bullying is almost non-existent. Of course, let us stop and take time to knock on wood.

Mr. Heflin illustrated this improvement by sharing a story that had a good ending:

A good example of this improvement is our first physical fight of the school year took place on the Wednesday before Thanksgiving break when two boys bumped heads in gym class and came up swinging. In the old days, we probably would not even consider this a fight. Both boys were sent to the principal's office. When the principal approached the boys, they both stood up and said, "We realize we are wrong, we are ready for our punishment, but we want you to know that we have made up and this problem will not reoccur." To me this is conclusive evidence this program is working when kids can solve problems together and without always having the inclusion of an adult.

Mr. Heflin added, "Our anti-bullying goal is to teach our children to treat each other with respect, resolve conflict, and look out for one another in reporting inappropriate behavior responsibly." Mr. Heflin also offered his perception concerning the reduction of aggressive and violent behavior since the anti-bullying program began:

Before the program, bullying played just about 100% of a role with aggressive and violent behavior. The verbal bullying and trash talking started it every time. Now after two years with the Bully-Free School Zone program, the only physical fights we are seeing is a result from a collision in P.E. or something accidental that leads to a fight. There is not a lot of premeditated aggression anymore.

From a central office administrative perception, Dr. Sanders, Superintendent of the Maxton County Schools, looked back to his days as an elementary-school student who stayed far away from the school bullies. He explained his experiences:

When I think back about bullying back in elementary school some fifty plus years ago, I can still remember the fear that existed because of two good old South Carolina boys named Ted and Elroy, who ruled the school with an iron fist. I learned at an early age that you stayed far away from these two roughnecks. I noticed even at a very young age that the fear they created controlled the school. In other words, they ran the roost.

Dr. Sanders continued and gave his definition of bullying:

Bullying to me is when someone desires to have power over another. Usually these are weaker individuals who have a hard time defending themselves. Bullying to me would be defined pretty much as someone who is trying to control someone else by intimidation or strategy by the most part.



As superintendent of schools, Dr. Sanders said he felt that bullying was even more difficult to understand as an adult. It also created a real problem in his job especially when dealing with parental complaints about bullying in schools. He reflected on bullying behavior and how it affected him as a superintendent of schools:

You would be amazed at how many times during the course of the year that parents call me to say that their child has been pushed around on the bus, mistreated in a bathroom, or bullied in unsupervised area and they complain that no one is doing anything to help. I don't necessarily believe that; I feel we have a great group of principals and teachers that are doing everything they can to provide a safe school environment.

He continued by relating how the situation affected him personally:

It is a helpless feeling as a school leader to not be able to comfort or help these parents in a more helpful way. One school in our district initiated an anti-bullying program two-years ago and I cannot help but notice I do not get complaints about this type of behavior from that school. Throughout the year, I probably received up to 30 calls concerning bullying behavior.

The assistant superintendent from the Hurlerlyville School System, Mr. Hall, agreed that parental concern about bullying behavior had created a need to be proactive in dealing with it. Mr. Hall stated, "Last year alone I probably received over 100 phone calls complaining about inappropriate activities taking place in schools, on buses, after-school events, and in areas that are difficult to supervise." Such concern has led to a system-wide policy concerning bullying behavior. Mr. Hall added, "A system-wide policy lets parents and community members know that we are serious and that bullying behavior will not be tolerated."

Mrs. Bailey, who served as assistant superintendent in the Maxton County schools, stated, "Bullying impacts the entire student body. I think that students who are bullied by others tend to not want to come to school and this is reinforced by parents who are saying nothing is being done to help." Mrs. Bailey continued by saying, "As an educator and as a parent, I feel that it is the responsibility of the individual school to do everything they can to provide a safe school climate." Mrs. Bailey, with over 25 years of school experience, said she had seen over the years "more attention about bullying and the problem that it has become." She added, "In

many schools, programs have been developed which involve educating students as to what options they have when they find themselves in an aggressive situation.”

### *Ineffective and Effective Discipline Practices*

The administrators had used and experienced many discipline practices that focused on encouraging positive student relationships and discouraging negative ones. It became obvious that all administrators felt that this aspect of their position was crucial in providing a safe environment. They also agreed that they set the tone for how people treated one another in their schools. All administrators were encouraged and seemed excited about the positive impact that their schools' anti-bullying programs had on the overall climate of the school. Parents' involvement and communication became an emergent theme from the interviews with administrators. The administrators were serious in reflection, open and straightforward, and provided thick details from their years of experience in various forms of school discipline practices.

*Ineffective Discipline Practices.* In examining ineffective practices and barriers that cause discipline procedures to be unsuccessful, several principals mentioned belligerent parents who come to the school with no other thought than to protect and defend their children. Another common theme was poor communication that tends to exist in some schools. Dr. Pate, from Hurleyville Middle School, discussed problems with parents and communication deficiencies:

With a small percentage of parents, it is obvious when meetings begin in some cases that the parents' only objective is to shift the blame and point fingers. Most of the time, they point their fingers at administrators and teachers who become the object of their anger. I do not know if I will ever get used to that attitude.

However, he continued in a more positive tone and told of a noticeable improvement in the attitude of parents after a short time of using the anti-bullying program:

After six months with our anti-bullying program, we are already seeing a difference in parents' perceptions and reactions to discipline infractions. It is our hope this will

continue to improve. It is a constant goal for our school to have an open a positive line of communication with parents; this is something we aim to work harder on in the future.

Mrs. Morrison was from Fairview Middle School with an enrollment of 768 students.

She had just finished her third year as an assistant principal. Mrs. Morrison stated that her biggest mistakes had always been in not communicating in a timely manner with parents. She elaborated:

There have been incidences in which I wished that I had communicated quicker with parents. I have learned that it is much easier in dealing with discipline issues if you make the first contact with parents. The most upset parents I have ever dealt with have come to the building angry because we haven't contacted them yet. As a parent, I can understand that, but there are many things going on during the day.

She said that she anticipated improvement in relations with parents:

We do have great parents who are very supportive. But, we have had some students whom their parents have encouraged them to fight, because their child was the victim or the bully. It did not matter what we said, it is those parents who contribute to a bullying problem. It is our hope with our new anti-bullying policies and procedures that this will help improve relations with some parents.

Mr. Heflin, who served as an assistant principal from Rockman Middle School, discussed problems with inconsistencies in school-wide enforcement. He explained that those problems had caused some discipline policies to become ineffective:

. . . inconsistencies with enforcement from some teachers in the building. Some problems exist in every classroom and they need to be documented by everyone. When some teachers do not document inappropriate behavior about a particular disruptive or aggressive behavior, discipline policies do not work as well. When everyone participates and documents this behavior it is more positive when working with parents, especially angry parents. In situations like that, they tend to begin pointing fingers at teachers if they give the impression they are not working together in enforcing discipline policies.

Dr. Pate, a principal from Hurleyville Middle School with 450 students, gave his opinion as to how discipline programs could be ineffective, stating, "[It is] when they are so strict, stringent, and detailed that they go overboard with procedures. Programs like this tend to paint you in a corner in making discipline calls." He related details from a personal experience:

I worked for a principal once who had a long career in the military and he had a discipline policy that had up to 11 procedural steps for various kinds of behavior. Trying to work through that system and adhere to the procedures of the policy took out my

ability to use my professional judgment. I did not like that policy because I do not believe you can treat every case the same way. We have to be fair but we cannot treat everyone the same.

Superintendent Sanders stated that he considered "adult modeling" to be a very important component in overcoming barriers to discipline policies and procedures. He iterated:

I think some of the most ineffective things we do are when we look at not modeling good behavior, as a teacher, or principal, might be corporal punishment, which still exists in our school system. I think teachers who have a tendency to lash out and overreact at children sometimes can create problems that are hard to fix on down the line. This type of behavior is also hard to explain to parents who may be upset at the way their child was disciplined. I feel that when adults act belligerently and out of control, that sends a strong message to students and may lead to further problems.

He added what he considered to be a solution to the problem:

Modeling is the key. As professional educators, we have to constantly monitor the way we react no matter what type of situation we find ourselves in. We are accountable for our actions and that is an awesome responsibility that we must accept as educators and hope that positive interaction will trickle down to our children.

Mr. Dressler, a principal from Baxter Middle School with an enrollment of 816 students, had over 30 years of experience in public education. He said that the problem with ineffective discipline policies was caused, in part, by poor communication, "I feel it comes back to ineffective communication. Parents need to be informed and involved with discipline practices in the school." He continued by explaining how his school had made improvements in communication by using the school's student handbook:

Orientation of the student handbook is a big help in getting everyone on the same page. We spend some time every day for the first two weeks of school going over things in our student handbook. Our counselors and teachers do a great job in teaching our handbook and reinforcing those practices throughout the year. Poor communication is the "kiss of death" for administrators in dealing with parents. We feel that positive parental interaction is crucial in an effective discipline policy.

Mr. Gatton was an assistant principal from Fairview Middle School with an enrollment of 768 students. He discussed the value of "educating parents" in discipline procedures, stating:

We have meetings at different times of the day twice a year inviting parents to the school to discuss the handbook and placing an emphasis on how we deal with consequences. The staggered schedule in meeting with parents lets them know that we respect their work schedules and we are making every effort to communicate with them. We usually

offer refreshments and attempt to make it an informal, enjoyable, and informative meeting. We have a lengthy question and answer session that helps us have better understanding of what information needs to be emphasized. We are very procedural in how we do things and I think that helps with the everyday running of the school.

Mr. Thomas, an assistant principal from Baxter Middle School, reinforced his principal's views on ineffective discipline practices, saying, "Sometimes it seems all we do is dwell on discipline and how our policy will be administered." He continued in a positive tone of voice:

A belief system that we have at Baxter Middle is the 2 R's – Respect and Relationships. I feel that when you reinforce good behavior and point that out, it can become contagious throughout the school. During our exploratory classes, we look at the "2 R's" and do activities that reinforce positive relationships, such as writing something good about another, doing a random act of kindness, and using our quilt work in listing positive character traits.

Dr. Flanders, who was a recently retired assistant superintendent of schools from Hurleyville County, brought up the importance of teaching respect to students:

The key to an effective discipline plan starts with respect. Children must learn what it means to be sympathetic and empathetic to others. It is our responsibility as educators to teach them these life-long concepts. We must do all that we can to build communities from within for our children--understanding that for the majority of our students, the best part of their day occurs when they walk into our school building. We have to give them our best and love them the best we can. We have to do everything we can to love the unlovable--parents included.

*Effective Discipline Practices.* The administrators listed several practices that had proved to be effective throughout their educational careers. Attributes of consistency, positive parental and community involvement, and high standards for student achievement were constant themes from the interviews with principals, assistant superintendents, and superintendents who participated in the study. A positive student-and-teacher relationship based on respect and concern was also mentioned several times throughout the interviews.

The assistant principal from Fairview Gardens Middle School, Mrs. Morrison, said she thought the most effective practice "starts with consistency in the way we do things at our school, with all involved having the same ideas and values for our kids." Her fellow assistant principal, Mr. Gatton, reinforced Mrs. Morrison's opinion by adding:

I believe that our discipline write-up policy offers added meat to our anti-bullying program. The beauty of this program is that it offers documentation to parents with students' explanations concerning their discipline infractions. More than anything, it is the heightened awareness of bullying and what it is. All parts of it from the gossip, to the backbiting, and to nasty talk that can take place. We must model appropriate behavior and teach our students that bullying comes in many forms. We cannot fall into the trap of mistreating people for pleasure or seeking popularity.

Mr. Heflin, from Rockman Middle School, had completed his first full-year as an assistant principal. The school had experienced its second year as a Bully-Free School. Mr. Heflin described conditions in the school prior to implementation of the bully free character education program:

Our anti-bullying policy has changed an environment from one that was volatile; the tone of the day seemed to be dictated by the biggest bully in the school. Fighting was the norm--nasty notes, ugly talk, gossip, disturbing letter writing--it goes on and on. Three years ago, we had several assaults that took place in the boy's bathroom and fights broke out in the library and lunchroom.

He continued by describing an improvement that he had noticed concerning students' behavior:

Over a two-year period, we just do not see that type of behavior anymore. Usually when fights take place, most are stopped by the participants themselves before someone has to intervene. Because of this program, our kids kind of police each other and monitor how people treat one another.

He finished by detailing some "left-over" concerns:

The problem we seem to be dealing with now is the gossip problems and problems from home that are always a constant problem. I hate to say this but the only bullying problem that we are experiencing now is girls who like to intimidate and bully others. This usually spills over into our boys, creating problems for them. Our boys tend to react physically toward each other because of verbal bullying or trash talking that takes place with many of our girls in the building.

### *Barriers to an Effective Anti-Bullying Program*

The assistant principal from Fairview Middle School, Mrs. Morrison, stated that in some cases the greatest barrier to an effective discipline program came directly from the student's home environment. She detailed:

I think many kids watch way too much unsupervised television while at home. This is not healthy at all. Everything is so violent and sexual in content. Kids receive mixed

messages from what they are seeing on television. Many of our kids also live in violent environments where they see that type of action on a daily basis by their loved ones. When they see dad and mom being violent and belligerent in their actions then it is hard to reprogram students to follow the anti-bullying philosophy. For the majority at Fairview Middle, we have excellent parental support but some refuse to hold their children accountable. It is all about who can we blame. How do we shift the blame off of our child and somehow blame the school personnel. That has a negative effect as well on the parents who try to work with us in tough discipline situations.

Mr. Richards, a principal from Pleasant Gardens School, expressed his concern with time constraints and efficiency by stating:

I wish we had more time to spend on the program. I believe we are doing a good job of being consistent with our offerings of this material but there is so much more we want to do with the program. Time constraints are due to the staggering responsibility created by federal and state legislation that emphasizes more accountability on end-of-grade testing. Spending too much time on anything other than academics during the school day makes everyone a little uneasy. However, I think everyone is seeing the positive effect our anti-bullying program is having and is actually offering us more quality instructional time. Still, scheduling is a nightmare and that is why I am glad to see teachers incorporating our bully-free philosophies into their subject areas.

Nevertheless, he described how teachers were overcoming these barriers by relating bully-free philosophies to their subject areas:

A good example of what our teachers are doing is in our language arts classes. Much of the adolescent literature intertwines with bullying behavior. I remember one teacher talking about the novel *Holes* and *The Outsiders* and how it related perfectly with our character education program.

Dr. Pate, a principal from Hurleyville Middle School, said he was looking into develop strategies that would involve more parents with the bully-free program:

I believe we need to do a better job of involving parents in the issues related to bullying. At this time of year when school is out for summer and you have a visit from a parent you have not even met yet, you know that they are here to give you a hard time. We deal with a small percentage of belligerent parents but they have a lasting effect and sometimes because of those negative interactions, we are a little hesitant to invite them in all the time. When angry parents do come to the building, I think it is important to give them a chance to say what they came to say. Let them get it all out. I believe it is my role to affirm that parent and assure them that I think it is their job to advocate for their child. I feel it is their perfect right to be at the school and looking into any matter concerning their child's school.

Mr. Dressler was a principal at Baxter Middle, a sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade school with an enrollment of 868 students. Mr. Dressler was concerned by a lack of personnel. He explained how this lack could create problems in dealing with bullying behavior:

Sometimes we have a problem with teachers being at the right place at the right time to avoid problems that occur between students. We are human and teachers are nurturing people. That means that they are good family members. That means, "I have to take my daughter to the dentist, someone is sick and I have to go home early." These things happen. When that happens, it creates an area in the building not supervised because someone had to take care of something nonschool related. As a school leader, we have to be understanding but also realize that it may weaken you in areas that are important to supervise, especially when large groups of students are together, such as before and after school, bus loading, and cafeteria time. Sometimes, strength in numbers is important and powerful during the organization of your day. When that is weakened because of someone's absence, then it can get you in trouble, especially with 850 plus students like we have at Baxter Middle.

Mr. Heflin, an assistant principal from Rockman Middle School, said that cohesiveness with school personnel was critical in providing an effective discipline policy that is supported by parents and effective with students. He expounded:

I feel that some teachers and students who do not take their roles seriously in the discipline policy can create problems with enforcement. Classroom management and documentation is part of a teacher's responsibility. Some do not think like that and that is where the problem is created. Cohesiveness is essential in support of the program. Many problem parents are looking for a loophole, and when one teacher documented the misbehavior of a student while another did not take the time, then that creates problems and mistrust.

He continued by describing the importance of all stakeholders showing support for the discipline programs at the school:

It is also important to show support for the anti-bully or discipline programs. If some teachers are working hard to teach the curriculum and some are not, that sends a mixed message to our students. The supervision and interaction in the hallways during a break is another huge component of the anti-bullying program and some teachers hesitate to make this effort. I think that is sad. I feel like if we are educators that in a way we have followed a calling. I know that sounds corny, but I believe I am here for more than a paycheck and I hope to be a positive difference-maker in the lives of our students. I wish all of our teachers felt the same way. If that were the case, this program would do even more good things for our students and school climate here at Rockman Middle School.



Principal Patterson, from Fairview Middle School, was in the process of implementing a Bully-Free School Zone that would start during the 2004-2005 school year. He gave an interesting opinion about bullying behavior pertaining to "not understanding the culture" of some ethnic groups. He explained his perspective:

Many parents are having growing concerns about bullying and gang-related activities especially focusing on certain ethnic groups. Many times we do not understand the mindset and thinking of some student groups and parents. The talk can be very ugly and many times creates more problems because of the negative reaction to how we deal with these problems. We are learning a lot from other cultures and sometimes we overreact to issues too harshly because of our fear of the unknown.

The principal from Pleasant Gardens School, Mr. Richards, said that one particular barrier to an effective anti-bullying program could be caused by perceptions of bullying behavior by school personnel. He added that "respect" played a big role in successfully implementing a character education program:

Bullying is not about stealing someone's ice-cream money, or threatening someone, or holding someone hostage to make someone act a certain way; it is more about being disrespectful to others. We are 20% minority and we emphasize that respect is not earned; you get respect automatically; when you enter the door, you are respected. In return for that respect, we expect respect in return. We grew up learning that we were to respect our elders but we now also expect our staff to respect the child. If teachers do not respect their students then that disrespect will come back as a classroom issue or parental issue. That is something that teachers need to be more aware of and practice in their treatment of students.

The assistant principal from Fairview Middle, Mr. Gatton, stated that "adult modeling" was a major factor in the success or failure of anti-bullying programs or discipline policies implemented in the schools. He went on to tell a story of how two teachers and one principal used "adult modeling" in a less than desirable manner:

I worked in one situation on the high school level where two teachers got into a physical fight. Believe it or not, they were home economics teachers. Apparently, it started with a loud argument that followed with punches thrown. In dealing with the problem, the principal's solution was to build a wall between the two teachers. A physical block wall was built to separate these two professionals. To me that is ridiculous. We have to provide a mature model for our students.

Mr. Gaton also spoke of the importance of promoting the positive events that occurred at schools, stating:

I think it also important to promote the positive things that are taking place at our school. We have so many people throwing negative stones at public education that if we do not support what we are doing internally then who is going to?

Mr. Gaton recalled a past-professor's words and the advice he was given on how to handle situations when negative comments are made about public schools. He related:

I had one professor in my graduate studies that taught us repeatedly that when someone trashes public education, it is our responsibility to defend what is taking place in our schools. He used to say that if he was at a cocktail party in the middle of the night and someone said something derogatory about public education that he was going to defend it to them.

He ended on a positive note, stating:

One last thought is that we encourage our students when they get home to tell the ones they love the most the good things that took place during their day. Sometimes we cannot help but go home and tell the people we love the most the worse things that happened to us during the day. Then that upsets their parents and gives the perception that school is a bad place.

### *Impact of Anti-Bullying Programs*

Mrs. Morrison, an assistant principal from Fairview Middle School, optimistically stated her belief that positive changes would occur at her school after implementation of the anti-bullying policy that was being planned for the upcoming school year. She explained her expectations:

I believe we will see a change in our attendance, which I was a little disappointed in this year. It was down slightly. So, I am curious to see how this will change over a year's time with the new program. With our focus on student and teacher relationships, I feel a lot of groundwork has been laid for making holistic change with our school climate. We have already done a lot of activities that will correlate with the bully-free thinking. I feel our kids are already showing signs of treating each other with more respect and attempting to work out problems. I am really excited about the changes that will take place in our school due to the initiation of this well-needed program.

From a central office administrator's perspective, Superintendent Sanders from Maxton County Schools said that the impact of anti-bullying programs had proved to be a deterrent to

aggressive and violent behavior. Dr. Sanders indicated that a strong principal-presence was important in the effectiveness of any type program and especially in providing a safe school climate. He added:

I think strong principal leadership is the keystone to a solid school system. If you have hard working, confident, and positive principals in place then you will have a good school system. I feel programs such as the study of this program are excellent resources in giving principals more time to provide instructional leadership in the schools. Bullying creates a lot of what I call “nit-picking” problems that can clutter up much of the time of our school leaders. Any program [is good] that allows principals more time to do the things they need to be doing in providing progressive leadership in the school. I think a tremendous impact of the anti-bullying philosophy is in the total focus on being more involved in the lives of students. Principals, teachers, and support staff that is visible and accessible is an attribute of healthy schools.

From the impact perspective concerning anti-bullying character education programs, Dr. Sanders added that he had seen much of the following:

I think, impact-wise, you will have students throughout the school system feeling better about being in school. They are going to feel safer, more confident, and feeling better about their contribution to the school. I feel that we are all social animals to some degree. We tend to react to how people treat us and how things are going around us. As educators, we are responsible to give these kids our best. That means teaching them adult responsibilities in interacting with each other and getting along.

Dr. Sanders went on to describe the impact of a bully-free program on one school in his system-- a school that had successfully implemented the program:

The one school in our system that has started a bully-free program--I know that people feel good about that school and say good things about it. These type student safety programs only provide more community support and confidence that the school is doing all it can to provide an excellent educational setting. One other thought is the awareness level of a bully-free program and in making this a school-wide statement. Awareness makes everyone a little smarter and gives people an opportunity to make better decisions. I am proud and appreciate the efforts of our administration and teachers who are working hard to make anti-bullying programs a vital part of our kids' day.

Mr. Richards, a principal from Pleasant Gardens Middle School, said that parents' perceptions and relationships with parents had improved because of the new discipline program. He added:

Parents have made many comments about their appreciation of our Bully-Free School Zone character education program. They have said on several occasions that they feel

their child is safer and they appreciate the extra effort by school personnel. I believe they appreciate how we have expanded the definition of bullying and are spending more time dealing with mental and psychological mistreatment between students. There is not the fighting here that there once was and parents have taken notice to that. It also seems that more positive talk holistically is taking place. I am glad to see that. Fighting that does take place usually is quickly broken up and does not reoccur.

Among other improvements that Mr. Richards mentioned were student relations:

I am seeing good things taking place between students. Many more of our kids are more responsible and more aware of other's feelings. I have been very proud of the change that has taken a good school environment, to what I believe, is slowly becoming a great school climate.

With over 30 years of public education experience, Mr. Dressler, a principal from Baxter Middle School, shared his opinion about changes that had taken place in his school since the implementation of the anti-bullying character education program:

The awareness and comments coming from the kids and parents have all been so positive that you kind of want to stop and pinch yourself. It is obviously a better atmosphere. Our children are getting along better while realizing they have friends and that people are not putting them down. One great improvement due to the program is in how it is stressed to offer students procedures to report inappropriate or bullying behavior. This has improved relations with teachers and students as well as with the school and community.

Rockman Middle School's assistant principal, Mr. Heflin, also mentioned changes that had taken place in his school because of the new program. When asked to elaborate, he enthusiastically replied:

Outstanding! It has changed student interaction, student and teacher relations are much better, and the community seems to appreciate the school's efforts. I think the positive media coverage has been a good thing as well. Our school has had several favorable television newscast segments and newspaper articles, which highlighted our school positively. I know I have a better job because of it. Less time is spent on negative actions while more focus can be given to academic success. I think our school staff gets along better because of the program as well. We take our modeling responsibility very seriously and I know that many times we watch what we say and how we treat each other. We have a climate of respect now, when it used to not be like that.

Dr. Pate, from Hurleyville Middle School, stressed the importance of ongoing education with the program and involving parents in the process. He explained why it was vital for students to understand their options:

Educate kids, parents, and teachers. Educate kids to know what is okay in terms of how you treat people, and also teach them what is not okay in making someone feel unwanted or unsafe. This program helps to equip students with the understanding they have options and choices when it comes to bullying behavior. If we can convince our kids that they do have choices and options then we are going to be okay. If a school can do those two things it will let that kid grow and mature in a nurturing environment then it will increase the chances that these kids will make good choices.

Mrs. Patterson, from Fairview Middle School, reinforced Dr. Pate's suggestions by adding, "Education is the key with all involved providing a framework of real, firm, and specific procedures with high expectations."

### *Emergent Themes From Administrators' Interviews*

The administrators were glad to share ideas that could enhance discipline practices and they seemed eager to discuss different discipline-program procedures used in other schools. A constant theme from all the principals interviewed was that everyone should be accountable if discipline practices were to be effective. The importance of teamwork and internal support was repeated throughout the administrators' interviews. With the bully-free philosophy, it became crucial that all involved with the school should buy into the program and promote it positively. The administrators also emphasized the need for high expectations from all stakeholders. Policies and rules should be discussed and agreed upon by school personnel prior to implementation of any new discipline policy. All principals agreed that their staffs were excited and were looking forward to continued implementation of each school's anti-bullying program.

Another emergent theme from the administrators' interviews was the importance of an open line of communication with parents and community members. Many administrators said it was important to include input from all stakeholders involved with the school in developing school discipline policies. Throughout these interviews, I was impressed with the compassion and concern for students' safety that was shared by the administrators who participated in this study. Their knowledge base, honesty, and openness were a great benefit to this research.

### *Teachers' Interviews*

All of the teachers interviewed eagerly conveyed their desires to make improvements to their schools' anti-bullying programs for the next school year. Several teachers stated that they were looking forward to discussing their schools' anti-bullying programs with me in conjunction with this research. They were eager to share how they had incorporated bully-free concepts into their subject area curriculum. They also wanted to share students' work and activities that had taken place during the school year. It was obvious in talking with teachers that they were innovative and concerned with improving the programs that they already felt good about.

Many of the teachers discussed strategies and activities that were being used to help strengthen their anti-bullying programs. The teachers seemed appreciative of the opportunity to tell about ideas that could better enhance the effectiveness of their bully-free programs. All indicated that they were excited about the future with this program having been integrated into their schools' framework. Very little negative talk was directed toward the schools or schools' personnel.

It was obvious that the teachers who participated in the study were positive and caring individuals who showed great pride in their schools and professions. All teachers listed time constraints as being a problem and stated that they wished they had more time to spend teaching the anti-bullying concepts. They indicated that scheduling was tough to administer with all that is expected of teachers and schools because of tougher testing requirements. The interviews with teachers lasted from 10 to 15 minutes each.

### *The Impact of Bullying*

The 22 tenured teachers shared different perspectives pertaining to the impact of bullying behavior on students and their schools' climates. All agreed that it was a serious problem. They were excited about their schools' stance on not tolerating bullying behavior. They said they felt that the zero tolerance policy that was initiated system-wide had made significant reductions in

aggressive and violent behavior. Many stated that the anti-bullying concepts currently being taught in their schools were offering students information to solve problems.

Mr. Alonso was a music teacher at Hurleyville Middle School with 15 years of experience in public education. When asked for his definition of bullying, he replied that it was "one person or a group of people picking on another person either verbally, physically, or emotionally, such as, stirring things up that causes other problems." Concerning the impact of bullying behavior, Mr. Alonso added some details from his personal experiences:

To me it is sad to hear students say they do not want to come to school. That disturbs me. I can never remember a time when I did not look forward to going to school as a child. I was not the greatest student but I loved the social part of school, the girls, my friends, and all the activities that were taking place. When a kid is bullied repeatedly you can see it all over their face and with their body language. They are unhappy and do not feel that they have anywhere to turn for help. That is my hope for our anti-bullying program that we can reach these students whom in a way have given up on school. We cannot lose any more kids to bullying behavior. As a parent, I could not sleep at night if my child was mistreated at her school. I am really proud of our school for finally emphasizing the importance of treating others with respect, dignity, and making every effort to rid our school of bullies. I am committed to not tolerating this type of behavior anymore.

Mrs. Sinclair, a social studies teacher at Baxter Middle School, had over 20 years of experience teaching. She stated that she "was tired of dealing with petty problems associated with bullying behavior." Mrs. Sinclair defined bullying as "any word or deed that puts someone in a weaker position." This definition was reinforced by Ms. Jenkins, a science teacher at Pleasant Gardens Middle School, through her definition of bullying, "It is any action that hurts another or any attempt to intimidate or humiliate." Ms. Jenkins continued concerning the impact of bullying:

It never has really been dealt with at our school until this year and I think the awareness level has caused children to really think about their actions and words. It has been a long time coming for our school. I really feel that bullying behavior was responsible for 100% of our problems related to fighting and aggressiveness. Bullying will continue to happen until a stop is put to it. Bullies are usually a very small percentage of our school's population but their actions are powerful throughout the building. Even though they are small in percentage, they are large in the problems that they can cause. It creates a climate where people do not trust each other and are constantly looking over their shoulders. Last year I noticed several students that had no one to talk with during the

day. They were like scared rabbits. This year I am already seeing a difference in the way students interact with one another. I do not think as many kids are excluded as they once were, but that is just from my perspective. I totally agree with the Bully-Free School Zone philosophy and look forward to seeing positive changes occur in this school. This is a school that I love with all my heart and I want good things for all involved at Pleasant Gardens Middle.

Mrs. Atkins, a math teacher with 12 years of teaching experience at Baxter Middle School, said bullying was “an action that attempts to make someone feel inferior whether through words or actions.” She continued her thoughts on bullying behavior by stating:

I am really sick and tired of the negative commotion that takes place because of bullying behavior. I do not know if you noticed or not, but bullies do not go away. If we do not deal with them while they are children, we are going to have them come back in here years from now as belligerent and bullying parents. Bullies are everywhere and I am glad our school has finally decided to shine a light on them and their actions. Talking to many of our parents, it is very obvious that the limb does not fall far from the tree. It is my hope that parents will take this program seriously and work with us to teach our students the correct social skills. Fighting has no place in the school building. These are different times in our world and we all have to be more proactive in taking the bullies out of the schools, the churches, and off the board of education--the little league coaches that think they're Vince Lombardi, and the bullying lists go on and on.

Mr. Briggs was a science teacher for 11 years at Rockman Middle School. He said he thought the impact of bullying was very evident in all aggressive and violent acts that take place at schools. He gave a very apt comparative description of the atmosphere a bully creates:

Children are scared when a bully is around. It is like a shark in the water, everyone is looking for it to attack. It creates major tension and chaos that is something bullies are striving for. Everyone is on edge and they completely lose focus on school and academics. All of a sudden when a student is scared, those academic things are not that important.

He continued by giving his personal definition of bullying behavior:

I believe bullying always starts with what is said between individuals or a group of individuals towards another that is usually initiated by one person, who for some reason has some sort of power over others. I know that last year we had several students who had been bullied at other schools before transferring to Rockman Middle. I believe when they first got here, they expected the same behavior to take place. When it did not take place, they were pleasantly surprised and fell in love with our school. Those students and parents are probably our best advocates about our school. I have really enjoyed watching those students enjoy school probably for one of the first times in their young lives. The attitude we have in our school is that bullying behavior in any form is just not cool.



A sixth-grade language arts teacher with 10 years experience at Hurleyville Middle, Mr. Wilson said that he thought bullying had changed over the years. He shared examples of changes at his school:

This year our problem with bullying is more undercover. Girls create much of the problems that go on with our boys. From what I understand and hear from the kids, is that many girls post some pretty dirty things on Internet websites, and others get very angry about it. These girls are great students, involved with cheerleading and sports, they are our popular girls. You would not expect it from them. They do tend to stay out of trouble, but I believe most of the kids are on to them and know they are behind a lot of it.

He continued by speaking of awareness and the need for training children to get along well with others:

Awareness is a big part of improving this situation and putting pressure on our students to do the right things in reporting this behavior. As long as I have been in this business I am still shocked by how mean kids can be to each other. I believe it is important to change that mess as quickly as possible especially since kids have so much more avenues to trash others. The more years I stay in teaching it is more obvious to me that we have to do more on the school level to teach kids how to get along and work things out in the right way.

Mrs. Watson had 26 years of experience in teaching language arts at the middle-school level. She was currently a teacher at Rockman Middle School. She had a very interesting opinion about the long-term effects of bullying on students, stating:

I think bullying creates a problem over the long-term in that students start to lose trust in their school. If they are bullied over and over again and no one helps them in this situation, they start looking at school as a bad place. They do not want to come. We have seen situations in the past when we would call children at home and parents would tell us they just are not going to come. They were having a problem with another kid and they did not want to deal with.

She continued in a more up-beat tone:

That type of thing has really changed with our anti-bullying program. It has stopped it. The communication level is so much better that everyone is aware of problems and we have an opportunity to intervene and help. Bullying no doubt degrades the climate in a way that it is so hard to pinpoint because of so many facets. I feel like the student that is introverted will really go into a shell because of the risk of being bullied. This negative environment creates a non-growth period with some of our kids and that to me is a sad thing. I have never appreciated a program more than our school's anti-bullying plan. We attempt to break down the hierarchal structures that seem to exist in all schools.

Mrs. Otley, who had taught Spanish and language arts for 22 years, was a teacher at Rockman Middle School. She explained her opinion of the effects of bullying behavior on students, saying:

In a school system where there is bullying the kids cannot think, they do not perform well, and academics really suffer. Of all the action research data that our school has produced over the last couple of years, I think the thing I am most proud of is our overall composite scores on end-of-grade testing, which has increased 16% and our state status has changed for the better.

She continued by recognizing her school's achievements since implementing the Bully-Free School character education program:

We have gone from a school that was labeled “Non-Recognized” by the State of North Carolina Department of Public Instruction to a “School of Distinction.” We are doing nothing different with our academic structure or our curriculum. I feel it is because of the positive change with our climate.

She then spoke of the attitude changes in faculty and staff:

I am proud of the way our teachers model good behavior by getting along and supporting each other. Our faculty is like a close team that pulls for each other and is happy when good things happen to each other. Our only bullying problem that we deal with now is the smaller things that are more difficult to see that tends to escalate and becomes a bigger problem. We still have our bullying parent as well, who comes into our school on “attack mode” which is something that is always hard for us to take. As good a program as we have going at Rockman Middle we still have some boys who just like to pick on weaker kids. I think they do it more for approval from others than having a real need to pick on someone. Our kids do a much better job reporting this type of behavior now that we are all very serious about putting an end to bullying at our school.

Mrs. Conner, from Baxter Middle School, had experienced a full-year of implementation of the anti-bullying program. She had taught eight-grade algebra for 13 years. She pointed out an often forgotten victim in the bullying scenario: the bystander. Mrs. Conner expounded:

We feel bystanders who stand, watch, and do not report are guilty of bullying as well. Since the tragedy at Columbine High School, students now do not hesitate to report guns, drugs, or threatening behavior. We believe students at our school have the same responsibility to report the beginnings of a physical problem. That usually starts with name-calling and verbal bashing from one to another. That problem then grows as more kids get involved and they choose sides. If these initial problems are not dealt with quickly and efficiently then sooner or later it will become a real problem.

Mrs. Conner said she believed that small problems needed to be dealt with right away before they became huge ones. She credited her school's program for addressing those circumstances:

That has been a real effective part of our new program in that we are dealing with problems now before they get out of hand. This has made for a much better school climate. In looking at our student surveys the few negative comments we received on an open-ended questions were probably from kids who have been used to being bullies. When you look at a survey of a 180 kids, half of those who answered the open-ended question gave positive responses. I believe the kids really like the program and they have started to believe in it, especially in how they report actions that start aggressive behavior. I believe we had four fights all year and each one we were shocked when it broke out. I think that is a good thing when you are always aware that a fight can happen, but shocked when it does. Does that make any sense?

Mr. Reed was a math teacher at Pleasant Gardens School for 27 years. When asked what he thought had made the biggest impact since the program's beginning, he enthusiastically spoke of a bonus, and, what to him, was a bit of a surprise:

I cannot believe how much more I get done in a day because of this new program! I have been doing this for nearly 30 years and I have always felt that bullying was somebody else's problem. I did not know how to deal with it. I saw it and I knew it was a real school stopper, but I just felt like if I managed my classroom then everything would work itself out. What I did not realize is all the problems taking place in the hall way, lunchroom, gym and other areas of the building were spilling into my classroom and not allowing me to teach the way I wanted to.

He continued by relating details of the "extra time" that the program afforded him:

I can really say that I am getting more done now than I ever have concerning instructional activity, and how far we are able to go into the textbook by the end-of-the-year. It is amazing. Test scores really have shown great progress with something taking place here.

Mr. Ragland, who taught science on the seventh- and eighth-grade level at Hurleyville Middle School, said he felt bullying behavior revolved around a small number of children who created most of the problems. He explained his opinion with more details:

At our school this year we have only a handful of kids, maybe 15 or 25, that create every problem we experience. Usually these students have parents that are natured the same way. These students and their parents are probably responsible for 75% of all discipline-related infractions. I have always felt that bullying behavior is the result of "just allowing it to happen."

Mr. Ragland related experiences from a personal perspective:

My son was initiated on the high school basketball team a couple of years ago and it scared me to death what was done to him. These are not the old days. Initiation, hazing, or anything else that puts children in degrading and unsafe position needs to be done away with. Most problems with bullying are more related to someone starting a problem by putting a bug into someone's ear. I am glad to see fighting is not a normal part of our day anymore, and I believe that will be reduced more and more as we learn how to teach the program more effectively.

He then summed up his thoughts with a positive statement:

One last thought, the 15 or 25 kids who have a problem with our making positive changes to their behavior, are no where near acting out in the off-the-wall way they used to. I believe even a bully does not want to be a bully, and when it is pointed out to him or her, then they usually make a change.

All teachers seemed to echo the same opinion in stating that bullying behavior stops the educational process. They indicated that when bullying goes on unhindered by adult intervention, it will eventually become aggressive or violent. Bullying behavior drains the energy from administrators, faculty, support staff, parents, and students. It also creates tension in dealing with parents and negatively affects the community's perception toward their school.

### *Schools and Parents' Roles*

All teachers who participated in this study agreed the key element in a positive discipline program is an open and healthy line of communication with everyone involved with the school. Most teachers mentioned that problems with parents were frequently related to communication problems or lack of the appropriate information. They considered this problem was being addressed by the bully-free program. Since the initiation of the program, communication has been less of a problem for all schools by offering a better form of community relationships and perception leading to a more positive attitude toward schools.

Another attribute of an effective program that was mentioned several times throughout the teachers' interviews was the importance of positive adult modeling. The teachers stated that everyone tries to follow the parameters of the anti-bullying program in their treatment of others. They said there was a new awareness of how their actions impact others. All teachers showed

support for the bully-free program and said they looking forward to improved relations with parents and guardians.

Mr. Reed was a math teacher from Pleasant Gardens School with 27 years of service who stated that everyone should have a heightened awareness of bullying and the negative effect it has on students' learning, growth, and the overall climate of the school. He expounded:

The main thing we can all do as adults is keep our eyes open and be aware that this bullying behavior has always taken place, is taking place now, and always will. It is important for adults to go ahead and name it when you see it, point it out, and deal with it. Understanding that reacting the same way does not always work, but that each situation needs to be treated differently in handling the problem. Sometimes the situation can be taken care of by a few gentle words, or a principal's announcement reminding everyone of our responsibility to each other, and sometimes we might need to get a little loud in making our point to our bullying students who do not appear to be changing their behavior. Diversity is acceptable.

He continued by speaking of his own role as a parent:

As a parent, I have a mild-mannered child and it was important to feel that my girl was safe when she was here. It is good as a parent as well as a teacher to know that our school is putting a major focus on school safety and dealing with the root of most problems – how we treat one another. This program does attempt to take care of students who have a hard time defending themselves. I believe we should do all that we can to continue to offer adult guidance to our children when we have the opportunity.

Mrs. Connor, an eighth-grade algebra teacher from Baxter Middle School, mentioned the role of adults in the anti-bullying program:

Parent involvement, shared decision-making and our policy of doing a syllabus and student handbook are excellent ways to start the year. We have one or more parents that are active members of our school improvement team, technology team, and safe school committee. Their input is invaluable and it's a good thing in helping other parents buy into what we are attempting to accomplish. When they know a parent is included in some of the decision-making at the school, I feel that sends a powerful message to our community that their opinion is valued at our school. Those relationships are crucial to the success of our school. Nothing can be a bigger deterrent to public perception of a school than parents who take every chance they get to bash the school verbally. We are seeing less and less of that at Baxter Middle and I feel it has something to do with our anti-bullying program.

She continued by talking about the value of dealing with small situations quickly as a preventive measure. She gave details:

One other factor in dealing with bullying is if everyone is on the same page then our awareness level is up and we can deal with problems quicker. Teachers and parents can have a real impact on those little words that are said between students that we become aware of, and hopefully we can direct them in a more positive direction. As a parent and teacher it so obvious that students are not getting the proper direction at home concerning interaction with others and relationships with others. So, I must watch my actions when I am upset or I am not having the best of days. Young people are watching us and waiting to see how we will react.

Mr. Belk, a computer teacher from Rockman Middle School, said it was important to be honest and direct when dealing with school bullies:

Be upfront and tell a student who bullies what he or she is doing, and how that behavior causes problems. I think most kids do not want to be labeled the bully of the school and when they know that is how they are perceived, they tend to change the behavior. I really believe when students understand that teachers, principals, and parents are all working together to put an end to bullying behavior, students get that message quickly.

He also discussed the teacher's role in promoting the program on a school-wide basis:

I think another huge responsibility that I have is to promote this program positively. I cannot grumble and moan about having to sign a pledge, or come to a meeting, or take time on this during our homeroom time. I set the tone for how my class responds to the bully-free philosophy. One of the most important times in dealing with bullying is right at the initial point of bullying. The trash talking needs to be dealt with and we are finding out that when you do, it tends to squash a lot of upcoming problems. I think kids like knowing that we are taking this extra time in working with them to better understand interpersonal relationships.

Mr. Belk then took time to share some of his own philosophy, stating:

My grandmother Roxie always used to say, God bless her soul, "The key to success in life is how you get along with jerks." There is a lot of truth to that and I think what she was trying to teach me is that you're not going to get along with everyone you come in contact with. There are going to be some people that you do not like and they do not like you in return. It is still our responsibility, especially in a work or school setting, to do all you can to work effectively with that person you may not think so highly of. These are concepts that we need to be reminded of throughout our adult lives as well, and I am glad we are taking the time to do it.

Mrs. Otley, a Spanish teacher from Rockman Middle School, said that a large benefit for her over the past two years revolved around procedures for reporting bullying behavior. She gave details:

Young people are natured the same way we are in that we like to know how our day will go. A big part of our system is the procedures that are in place at our school. No

questions should be asked about how something works here at our school. Our principal does a great job in communication with everyone.

She continued by praising the structure of the program and the helpful communication strategies that involve everyone in the school. She explained:

Our faculty handbook, website, and newsletters are extremely helpful in providing information, calendars of events info, and it also celebrates great things taking place in our school with or folks. We have several meetings each year inviting parents into the building to provide more information for them that also gives them opportunities to ask questions. I think the best thing we do is including our students in planning for bully-free classroom activities and we also let them define their own classroom rules in dealing with bullying behavior. It has helped everyone believe in the program and not hesitate to offer suggestions they feel would help the program. Everyone feels like they have an active and important part in making this program work.

She told of an recent negative event in her classroom that, with the help of her students, had a very positive ending:

This year in one of my fifth-grade classes, we had a bullying incident, and we talked about the ongoing behavior to discuss what we as a class could do to help it. What came from this was a type of intervention with a boy who was bullying some of his classmates. What stood out to me was the concern for the bully, as well, in how they presented their concerns to him. It made a huge change with this kid and everyone around him. Nobody embarrassed anyone because the primary objective for the kids was to make sure the bullying behavior stopped. It was not about getting somebody in trouble or getting revenge on the bully. The beauty of it was they wanted help for the bully as well, which I thought was a pretty mature way to deal with the problem.

Mrs. Watson, a language arts teacher from Rockman Middle School, said she believed parental support had completely changed since the inception of the program:

We have an awful good school and system in Maxton County. However, when a fight takes place, the finger pointing begins immediately. This program tends to diffuse the shifting the blame tactic that always takes place when aggressive and violent behavior occurs. While teaching students to be more responsible in reporting aggressive and violent behavior, we also want them to understand what it means to be accountable for your actions. The accountability level is much higher than it once was. Parents do not come into the office with the intention of doing whatever they can to get their child off the hook. Now they look at solving the problem because we have made them a part of the solution. Many times parents are asked what they feel the appropriate punishment would be in a given situation. Our principal has commented several times that parents will usually punish more severely than he would. That is a great sign that people are starting to understand the importance of owning up to what you did whether good or bad.

After praising the attributes of the program, Mrs. Johnson, a social studies teacher at Hurleyville Middle School, pointed out a positive impact concerning parents and their involvement with the school:

With this program, it appears more people are involved with the school. This year we had more volunteers sign up than in any of the six years I have been here. Parents seem to feel better about the school and what we stand for. They are supporting us and you can feel a difference. I have not had one ugly incident with a parent all year.

Mrs. Johnson then said she would like to see staff development activities for teachers and parents. She shared some unique ideas to implement inservice sessions involving parents:

I was talking to some other teachers the other day about how nice it would be if we could have inservice concerning our anti-bullying program with parents. Even allow some parents to do some role-playing or activities with our classes during our bully-free time. This would show a great cohesiveness between parent and student. Many times, you will hear from the students that their parent did not like this about the school or that, and you just do not hear that anymore.

She continued by mentioning the role of guidance counselors saying that a great deal of the material from the character education program fit with the guidance curriculum. She elaborated:

I would also like to see our guidance counselors more involved with this. It seems to me that this is obvious material that should be taught through their curriculum. Sometimes I do not always feel that I have the time or energy to do a good job with our bully-free topic for the day.

Mr. Briggs, a science teacher from Rockman Middle School, said he thought parental relations could be improved in some areas:

I think the parents need to respect and support what our school is trying to do to help their child and provide a safer environment. We still have too many parents that are hostile toward the school, teacher, and administration. That just sends a horrible sign to our kids when they see adults act in a childish manner. Sometimes I feel our kids handle things in a more mature manner than our parents. Some students know how to control anger and others obviously need help. I think this program encourages offering that help to a child who does struggle with their reactions. Listening to children is a huge component of this program and it is emphasized throughout the bully-free curriculum. We also feel very strongly at Rockman Middle that when a child's personality changes dramatically that something is going on that is not good.

Mr. Briggs gave a heartbreaking example of child who benefited because teachers took time to notice and intervene when their student underwent a personality change:



Last year one of our more energetic and bubbly sixth-grade students started acting withdrawn, unapproachable, and mean. We had a couple of teachers who noticed this change and took the time to intervene to find out what was going on. It took a little investigative work but within a pretty quick time we found out the child was sleeping on a bus at night. Apparently, mom had found a new boyfriend who liked to drink and snort cocaine and this boy knew that when this started that was his signal to leave the house. It was in January and the boy slept three nights on that bus. When our principal told us about the little blanket he had found jammed up under the bus seat, he broke down in tears in front of the entire staff. What if these teachers had not taken the time to look into this matter? He would have slept on that bus the rest of the winter. I am glad to be a part of this school in that people care enough to do these type things.

Mrs. Sinclair, an American history teacher at Baxter Middle School, said that racial issues played a role in some bullying problems and that the anti-bullying program does a good job of addressing these very real concerns. She explained her beliefs:

We have a large Black population as well as a growing Hispanic population and in some ways, this is a barrier to the effectiveness of the program. It seems to me there still exists a real mistrust between ethnic groups. This is where a lot of the finger pointing takes place. Racism is still alive and kicking, creating much of the fighting and harassment that takes place in the school. I like the fact that a large focus of the anti-bullying policy is to appreciate and respect the differences that we all have, whether it is color, religion, belief system, etc. Many times the parent perpetuates these problems more than the kids do. Many parents have some rooted belief systems in place that they share with their own children as well. These racist beliefs make for a scary and sometimes volatile atmosphere that you can almost feel in the air. If adults would not put these racist thoughts in a kid's head then they would not be racist. When you see anger in a child about the color of someone's skin, then you know that has been a lifelong teaching offered by that child's family or friends. That is a tough layer to peel off in teaching students the importance of getting along.

### *Barriers to an Effective Anti-Bullying Program*

The teachers' indicated that some barriers existed that have influenced the overall effectiveness of the anti-bullying program. Mr. Reed, a mathematics teacher from Pleasant Gardens Middle, said he felt that many of the barriers were external and did not have much to do with the school. He explained his position:

Television, movies, violent video games, and music really are huge parts of our children's lives. Television for the most part is raising a good segment of our student population. It shocks me when I hear some of the movies and television shows our students are watching. Obviously, these kids are unsupervised a large part of their day.

Our media sends mixed messages about violence, sex, and alcohol and drug use. Even commercials are disturbing to watch. I mean look at what happened at the Super Bowl with Janet Jackson and Justin Timberlake. I let my five year-old granddaughter stay up to watch the halftime show. What a mistake that was. Just things like that, they just do not need to happen. That is the way of the world, we all want to shock people. Some of the video games are very disturbing and saturated with violence. Most of it seems to me unnecessary. I think the media tend to teach kids to laugh at things that should not be laughed at. I think there are a lot of rotten messages being channeled into our kids' heads because of the media, and that is tough to overcome. This is something we need to continue to address and work to overcome in dealing and teaching our students about correct behavior.

Mrs. Connors, an algebra teacher from Baxter Middle School, named time constraints as a huge obstacle that all teachers face whenever their schools implement a program that strays from the core academic curriculum. She maintained:

As teachers, we cannot help but be pretty uptight anytime we are asked to do something outside of our subject area. Testing is such a massive concern and so much pressure is put on us all to prepare our students academically to succeed on end-of-grade testing. Testing, getting prepared for testing is a constant, and that is all we have become programmed to think about. We have standard course assessments that we need to go by that require a lot of planning in teaching the test. Teachers are constantly pulled out of class for staff development and inservice training. All these things take away from quality student time, as I like to call it. I think the best part of my day is spending time with students during informal times of the day. The more time we can spend together like that will only have a positive effect when we are trying to deal with bullying behavior.

Mrs. Otley, a Spanish and language arts teacher from Rockman Middle School, said a lack of unity among school staff in teaching bully-free concepts had been somewhat of a barrier to the overall effectiveness of the program. She gave reasons for her opinion:

We still have some teachers that feel their only responsibility is what is taking place in their classroom. If something bad happens in the hallway, on the playground, or in the lunchroom then that is the problem of the principal and he or she needs to deal with it. They believe that to the point that you will never see them in the hallway talking with kids or other teachers for that matter. This mindset has to go and we all must realize that we are responsible for what takes place in this school on a daily basis. Many teachers let the little things slide by when those small things usually create much larger problems on down the line. We need to make more of an effort to work together when dealing with difficult to deal with children. Some teachers will act like everything is going great in their classes and they are having no behavioral problems at all. I guess it is an ego or pride thing that makes this situation happen.

Mrs. Watson, a language arts teacher from Rockman Middle School, said she was aware of few barriers; however, she mentioned, “the small percentage of students, parents, and believe it or not some teachers who just do not take the anti-bullying program seriously.” A perceivable barrier shared by Mr. Briggs, a science teacher from Rockman Middle School, was with "a small percentage of parents, teachers, and students who refuse to get involved with the program and participate.” Mr. Briggs added another concern about some students who “still do not trust the system and hesitate to report bullying behavior whether it is happening to them or someone they know.”

### *Impact of Anti-Bullying Programs*

All teachers interviewed stated that a positive impact had occurred on their schools' campuses since the implementation of the Bully-Free School Zone character education program. Mr. Reed, a math teacher at Pleasant Gardens School who had over 25 years experience in public education, said that he thought students were really making a strong effort to control their words and actions. He iterated:

Kids are beginning to use their brains in dealing with bullies. No longer are they allowing the meanest kid in the class to dictate how things are going to go. They are taking seriously the role of watching out for one another. This is a concept many of them had never been taught.

He gave details of an interesting class discussion springing from the character education program's "theme for the day," adding:

One day the theme for the day provided by our principal was to discuss what it means to “burn a bridge” and I was amazed at how much information was brought to the attention of the class over a term that I have heard probably a thousand times. Teacher and students' input was incredible during that classroom discussion, and I guarantee when some of these kids are in their forties they will still remember the concept of “burning a bridge with a relationship.”

Mr. Reed continued giving his impressions with an eagerness in his voice:

This is the best year I have had teaching and the reasons for that is I have been freed up from distractions that always seem to revolve around someone mistreating someone else and then everyone gets involved. Kids have the attitude now about their school, let's

learn, lets make this a good school, a school we can be proud of. Our kid's awareness levels are off the roof now and they have a better understanding of the behavior that starts aggressive and violent acts are usually small acts of meanness that people get away with. Our kids are making it tougher to get away with actions like that.

Mr. Belk, a computer teacher for six years at Rockman Middle School, reinforced Mr.

Reed's experience and marveled at the change in students' attitudes:

Student-wise when somebody is being bullied, our kids know exactly what to do and I would think 90% of them do not hesitate to report these actions. All of our students have not completely bought into the program but we have such a large group of kids that have, they compensate for those that do not follow procedures. Kids are really starting to trust administration, teachers, and parents that they will deal with these reports in a way as not to make the matter worse. I am glad I have had an opportunity to see how things were here prior to the program and now two years later it is a completely different climate in which we are living. It is a much better atmosphere where the kids are not afraid and they know people are supporting them.

Mr. Belk attributed much of the success and acceptance of the program to good

communication and media coverage at his school. He gave details:

I really think the positive media coverage has been a good thing in bringing parents and community members on board with this program. We have had several news stations do excellent segments on our school and program and that has helped parents appreciate more what we are attempting to do with the program.

Mrs. Otley, a Spanish teacher at Rockman Middle School, said the biggest change, from her perspective, was in the students' attitudes. She described a new sense of school pride that had been missing:

Students are showing more pride in their school. They have realized in our second year of the anti-bullying program that it is for real and we are staying with it. The students' know that they do not have to worry about survival here. Our fifth graders who come to the school, of course, are scared to death. They realize very quickly that they are cared for and people are concerned for them. They know they are protected, cared for, and for many of our students our school provides them safety that many do not even have at home.

She continued by giving concrete details of the new sense of concern and respect found in the students at Rockman Middle School:

Here at our school, a theme of respect is played everyday and you see it more and more in how kids interact with each other, and the positive treatment of bus drivers, substitute teachers, custodians, guests, and our special-needs children. Field trips are no worries

anymore because we know our kids are going to be respectful, courteous, and mannerly. Three years ago we had a bus problem everyday. Now that does not happen because even our bus drivers are provided bully-free training. This is a great place to work and go to school.

Mrs. Watson, a language arts teacher at Rockman Middle School, said that one barrier to an effective anti-bullying program occurs when, “a very small percentage of parents do not take the program seriously which creates problems with parents who do support the program.” Mrs. Johnson, a Hurleyville Middle School social studies teacher, stated that another problem was attributed to poor parental support and “creates a domino effect with their children not taking the program seriously either.” Overall, the teachers agreed that these barriers were currently being addressed within their schools.

#### *Emergent Themes From Teachers' Interviews*

The teachers were glad to share ideas that could improve their school's anti-bullying character education program. They also were eager to share successes and failures that they had experienced during their school years and to point out their goals for the future of the program. There was one constant theme from all the teachers interviewed: If the program is to be a benefit to students, everyone involved must work hard. Other themes throughout the interviews consisted of: positive modeling, improving teaching strategies to better enhance the program, open lines of communication with parents, and increased involvement in the lives of students. The teachers also emphasized the need for high expectations from all stakeholders. They agreed that policies and rules should be discussed and agreed upon by school personnel prior to implementation of any new discipline policy. All teachers seemed enthusiastic and said they were looking forward to the continued implementation of their schools' anti-bullying programs.

#### *Parents' Interviews*

The parents interviewed were very cooperative in scheduling as we met early in the morning, during lunch, and late in the afternoon in order for them to participate in this study.

They all appeared to be very comfortable with the interview approach and did not seem to be rushed for time. Many of the parents had taken time off from work and some mentioned that their workplaces encouraged them to participate in the study. They all readily shared their thoughts and seemed to have a strong knowledge base about the discipline practices at their children's schools.

Their children were in the fifth through eighth grade in five middle schools that served as the focus of this study. Most parents only had one child in the school at the current time, but some had other children who attended the school as well. One parent had six children who had or would be attending the participating school. Discipline and school safety seemed to be topics that parents enjoyed discussing. All parents expressed pride as well as concern for their children's schools. They stated that they felt great things were taking place in the schools but also suggested that many discipline issues could be addressed in a more effective manner. All parents were positive in their reactions to the questions asked during the interviews. Their experiences varied but all were obviously involved and active in their children's schools.

### *The Impact of Bullying*

Mrs. Calhoun, a parent from Hurleyville Middle School, pointed out that she perceives bullying as a reflection of society's problems:

Most problems that I have encountered with bullying are usually just about a total lack of respect for others. I would define bullying as a lack of respect for another person. I think it is great that finally we are attempting to define what bullying is because it is such a widespread problem that is shown in many forms. So many of today's bullies do not follow the typical description of what a bully looks like or even acts like.

Mrs. Calhoun, as had the teachers and administrators, also mentioned the problem of "high-tech" bullying practices:

We have had a huge problem with kids starting problems over the Internet on chat line postings, letter writing, and phone calls in trashing another classmate. It forces children to choose sides and that is where the real problems begin. I think taking a look at how problems are originated are things that we need to take more time in dealing with as

adults. Bullying is not a new problem and it is not just a problem with Hurleyville Middle. Bullying in schools has been taking place as long as we have had schools.

Mrs. Chance, a mother of four children from the Hurleyville Public Schools, stated that she believed bullying created problems that continued to reoccur throughout the school year, saying, "Bullying causes a chain reaction. If one student is allowed to get by with bullying others then this causes a real problem." She quickly turned the conversation to the role of parents and seemed to hold them accountable for many of the problems associated with a child's bullying others in school. She explained:

What I have seen as a parent is most kids get away with bullying because their parents bully the administration into changing how they discipline in these situations. We have as many bullying parents as we do children. When parents act badly in confrontations with others, why should we expect our children to react any differently? This has always bothered me that most parents are extremely supportive and helpful while some parents come to school only to attack and trash everything about it. I just do not understand that mindset. I really feel as a parent it is my responsibility to help in any way that I can and to be supportive of teachers and administration and the entire school system.

Mrs. Burns was a parent with children at Pleasant Gardens Middle School. She talked about the outcome of bullying behavior on the victims:

Bullied children lose interest in school. They just simply do not want to go. They are scared. As a parent, I cannot think of anything sadder than to think your child just does not want to go to school because they are scared. We have also noticed a reluctance in students to speak out about bullying.

She gave a perception of what bullying meant to her:

My definition of bullying is when someone picks on someone who is different, or not doing what is expected by others, or who is just weaker physically/mentally. When bullying is allowed to happen, nothing good will come from it. I am really sick of hearing about school problems that become violent and are usually always tied into bullying behavior that is allowed to take place.

Mrs. Swillen was a parent with children in Rockman Middle School. She said that bullying played a significant role in aggressive and violent acts and described the effects of bullying behavior on her daughter:

I think bullying plays a huge role in any action that becomes physical or violent. I think when kids are bullied they want to hurt back or go after them. Most of all violence usually leads back to bullying behavior. I know that my daughter has wanted to hit back

or something like that because of how she is treated. My daughter has been physically, verbally, and psychologically harassed because she has a learning disorder. She is obsessive compulsive--that makes her not fit in with most normal children. I have had to do a lot of intervention, I have had to call the school a lot, and they have been very good to work with and listen. The counselors tell me much is being done to change the behavior in the school. Most of the harassment seems to come from kids from good families. Sometimes as a parent, you cannot help but think these kids are given better treatment than others. I keep working with my daughter in telling her to keep her head up and start looking at the good things taking place during her day. I think us being able to talk about her day and how we can do things differently is making a big difference in her happiness level.

Mr. Greene, a father of three from Baxter Middle School, predicted that bullying left unattended would eventually become violent. He detailed:

I think there is a lot of bullying going on and it is bad. It is bad for the kid's confidence level and in how they view school. If they feel like they have no help in sight then they will begin to hate school and give up on it. Concentration cannot take place in the classroom when bullying is going on in the school building. I feel that repeated aggressive and violent behavior by a small percentage of kids is an indicator that these same children will keep acting this way. To me that is the black eye of public education in that you have some very violent and aggressive children in the school and not a lot is being done to change this behavior. You may have 25 kids in a class that want to learn and improve, while you have one kid who is only concerned with hurting others. They are out-of-control wherever they are in the school or out. These kids many times need help that our schools are not capable of giving. I think we have been so concerned about the needs of the one kid that the other students are forgotten about.

Mrs. Greene, a parent from Rockman Middle School, considered that every problem at the school concerning aggressive behavior was a result of someone's bullying another. Mrs. Helms, another parent from Rockman Middle School, maintained that bullying was evident everywhere--in schools and in society. She stated:

I am a parent who knows bullying exists everywhere. I know the focus of this study is school-wide bullying, but, my goodness, we deal with bullies as adults. They are everywhere. Spousal abuse, bosses, coworkers who are bullies, and in my case, bullies even exist in our church. I wished the entire community followed bully-free rules; it would make for a much better world. I know that bullying plays a major factor in negative relations for kids as it does for adults in the same situations.



### *Schools and Parents' Roles*

All parents interviewed pointed out that better communication could and should exist in their children's schools. They did not necessarily consider this as a problem with the schools; they were willing to take some blame for not paying more attention to information made available. Mrs. Calhoun, a parent with two children at Hurleyville City Middle School, shared, "Parents need to take more time in understanding policies and information offered by the school; but, sometimes materials are not read." Mrs. Chance, a mother from Baxter Middle School, reinforced this concept by adding her thoughts about parental responsibility in understand school policy:

The parents who do not take the time to read and understand discipline policies and other information about the school are usually the ones who end up creating problems. I have heard parents make misinformed statements about how the school handles discipline issues and it is just not correct. I feel our principal does a great job of communication and if you take the time to read all the information that comes from our school you would never have a question about anything. With our new anti-bullying policy, it is very important that all parents are involved with the school and actively trying to make our school safer. I cannot understand any parent who does not want that for their child's school.

Mrs. Burns, the mother of a sixth-grade son from Pleasant Gardens School, considered that it was the responsibility of the parents to be involved in their children's school experiences and to communicate, especially if they felt there was a problem that might affect the safety of their children. She explained her consideration:

Anytime the school opens the doors, I am going to make every effort to be there. That is my responsibility to be there. Sometimes it is much easier to drop an email to a teacher instead of expecting them to communicate with me. These teachers are all overloaded and I know it has to be very tough for them to take time to communicate. I have learned that if I initiate communication with teachers that they will always respond. That makes me feel good about our teacher's involvement with our kids as well. I work full-time and it is awfully convenient to communicate with my child's teacher over the Internet. That is a great tool that we have that we all need to utilize more.

Mrs. Swillen, the mother of a boy and girl from Rockman Middle School, said that parents have the crucial role in helping their schools with an effective anti-bullying program. She added:

Parents have to back the school. We need to get back to the days that when a child misbehaves at school, especially when they are aggressive with another, they get it worse when they get home. We have way too many parents who believe their children do no wrong. We need to get over that. If children are held accountable and taught responsibility, then they will be a much better person in the long run. Parents need to be open-minded to the fact that their child might have made a mistake and messed up.

Mrs. Swillen stated her appreciation for the handbook that is provided by her children's school:

We do get a handbook of all the procedures at the school that we all sign off to show that we understand and agree to it. We need to all follow what we agreed to do. Our school would be a much better place for everyone if we all followed what we said we would.

Mr. Greene, a father of three children at Baxter Middle School, had some good advice for other parents. He said, "They need to turn the television off and spend more time talking to their children." Mrs. Cook, a Hurleyville School board member and mother of two, said it was everyone's responsibility to make the anti-bullying program work--to help it become a program that makes a positive difference for schools. She added:

We have to understand that we all play a great role in making a positive difference in making our schools better and safer. We must provide a positive model in the way we as adults solve problems and work together. The bully-free concepts are as important for adults to be aware of than our children. It is tough to be a parent and it is much easier when good relations exist with their schools. We all must be more informed, communicate more, and be more actively involved with our schools and in the lives of our children. We need to talk to our kids and stress to them the importance of education and in how they treat others. We have a great school system with wonderful people who care, but sometimes we need to all redirect our energy into a positive focus. I appreciate the fact our schools are making a commitment to improving safety by attempting to build a community from within instead of overemphasizing rules and regulations. My kids who have passed through this system had great experiences but I cannot help but believe my other child will be in a safer and healthier school climate. As a parent and a board member, I want to do all I can to make our schools the best they can and I think this program has been great for our kids. We all need to stay committed to this and see what a difference it makes over the next couple of years. I know that bully-free policies have recently become a state legislative mandate and needs to be addressed immediately.

### *Barriers to an Effective Anti-Bullying Program*

The majority of parents made many positive comments concerning their child's school; however, several had concerns. Mrs. Calhoun, a mother with children at Hurleyville Middle

School, said she felt that “inconsistencies with enforcing policies fairly is always a concern with parents and is discussed frequently.” Mrs. Chance, a mother from Baxter Middle School, stated that a child's behavior sometimes reflects his or her parents' personal behavior at home:

Many of our students come from violent home lives. They see crazy behavior everyday. They see terrible things take place and parents who react violently and aggressively toward others. Many parents encourage violence and aggressive behavior because they are violent and aggressive. That is a very hard attribute learned by a child for a school to overcome. I believe that you have to give kids a chance but if they are habitually violent we have got to get them out of our schools. That is why people look down on public education sometimes because we feel like they are not safe. Sad but true. Parents have to be positive role models, care about their kids, and support their schools. It is an ugly thing when adults fight and argue.

Mrs. Burns, a mother from Pleasant Gardens School, said that she thought schools “fear lawsuits and overwhelming paper work when dealing with threatening parents.” Mrs. Swillen agreed that fear was a factor at some schools when dealing with bullying behavior. She explained further:

Teachers' hands are completely tied when dealing with out-of-control children. Some parents fly off the handle and threaten lawsuits and all kinds of crazy things just to get their child out of trouble. When kids see their parents act like that then I am sure schools lose complete control of those kids. Parents can be great verbal bashers of schools and we all have to start being more positive in how we let people know how we feel about our schools. I think when parents react badly toward their school that tends to stop teachers from wanting to communicate with them.

Mr. Greene, a father from Rockman Middle School, solemnly pronounced, “Adults need to be adult in how we act and react; many times I see horrible behavior.” Mrs. Cook, a board member from Hurleyville Public Schools, agreed, saying, “Adults must provide support and be concerned for their child’s school.”

### *Impact of Anti-Bullying Programs*

All parents interviewed agreed that students were showing more respect for each other as their schools' anti-bullying program evolved. Mrs. Cook, a board of education member and mother of children at the Hurleyville Public School, maintained that their anti-bullying program

was already making positive changes. She elaborated by telling of a humorous use of "bully-free" thinking during a school board meeting:

I notice people reminding each other about being bully-free. Several times during board meetings that get heated, someone will say maybe we need to be bully-free during our sessions. That always gets a laugh but it also makes you think about the responsibility we have as adults. We have not had any horribly violent acts take place in the schools this year with the exception of a few minor things. I am looking forward over the next couple of years to see the impact it has with our attendance rate, and students' perceptions, and the occurrences of violent acts taking place.

She applauded a little-mentioned aspect of the bully-free program: the concept of learning social skills that could be useful throughout life. She described this impact:

I love the philosophy of the program in teaching our children life-long social skills that will always be so important to them. If they can learn these concepts taught through our bully-free program, then I am confident that these children will turn out to be solid adults. I know as a parent I feel safer and more secure about my child's safety, well being and health. As a board member, I am proud that our school is putting in the extra effort to provide a character education that impacts students in such a good way.

Mrs. Calhoun, a mother from Hurleyville Middle School, explained that different and better relationships seemed to exist "between students and students but also with students and teachers as well." Mr. Greene, a father from Baxter Middle School, laughingly stated, "I am not hearing the same old moaning and groaning from my kids--that they cannot stand their teacher." Mrs. Chance, a mother from Baxter Middle School, reinforced this by stating, "When teachers set the tone by showing respect and concern then it changes the climate completely."

#### *Emergent Themes From Parents' Interviews*

All parents interviewed considered that discipline issues in school should be the most important objective addressed by personnel. Many parents indicated that a deterrent to school violence over the last several years had been the system-wide implementation of the zero-tolerance policy. The majority of parents interviewed emphasized the importance of administration and teachers reacting quickly and appropriately to behavior that could lead to

violence and aggression. This, they stated, was a prime responsibility of all stakeholders in the schools.

Parents mentioned that many problems that are violent in nature were usually only with a small percentage of students. They suggested that it is important to offer more counseling services for students who habitually display these types of behavior. Other solutions offered by parents included improved mentoring, tutoring, and focused intervention for students who acted out violently or aggressively. Several parents mentioned the importance of consistency in teaching appropriate social skills while quickly handling inappropriate behaviors so they did not escalate. Another aspects parents agreed on concerned the importance of having high expectations for student learning, offering a high-level of instructional activities, and creating a safe and caring school environment.

All parents were excellent participants and brought a great energy to all interviews conducted. They seemed eager to share their thoughts and perceptions concerning their children's schools. The main theme echoed throughout these interviews was the need for a policy that is well communicated, agreed upon, and supported by all involved. Mrs. Burns, a mother with children who attended Pleasant Gardens School, added a summation to which all parents agreed, "We want our children feeling good and proud of where they go to school, and focused on learning."

## CHAPTER 5 ANALYSIS OF DATA

### *Findings of the Study*

This research established the common threads of effective anti-bullying character education programs by administrators, teachers, and parents in five Western North Carolina middle schools. Specifically, the study focused on views of administrators, teachers, and parents of middle school students in grades five through eight, examining perceptions of the impact of bullying on students' safety. Participants shared their concerns about barriers to discipline programs and how school personnel and parents can contribute to a safer and more productive environment. I also attempted to determine if the perceptions of administrators, teachers, and parents were consistent with published research concerning violent and aggressive behavior associated with bullying.

Most research literature related to bullying behavior reinforced the need of active parental participation in their children's educational lives. Most findings indicated that when parents, students, and community members have a positive presence in the school, there is a safer and calmer environment. Instructional activity attains a higher level when all involved with the school take more pride in helping to enhance an effective anti-bullying character education program. This research is timely because of the recent attention shown by the American public in ensuring the safety of students and teachers in schools. In the state of North Carolina during the time of the data collection for this study, the state legislature mandated that all schools approve an anti-bullying policy in their system-wide codes of conduct. Recent violent events leading to tragic endings associated with bullying behavior have brought attention to this increasingly serious problem taking place in our school settings nationwide.

### *Research Question #1*

What are the views of administrators, teachers, and parents concerning the current implementation of a Bully-Free School Zone character education program?

#### *Administrators' Perceptions*

All administrators who participated in the study agreed that bullying creates holistic problems in the school. They stated that bullying is being redefined and branches out to several areas of inappropriate behaviors. All administrators agreed that bullying that is masked under the guise of initiation or hazing must no longer be allowed to exist. They repeatedly stated that bullying behavior negatively impacts learning and the amount of quality time given to instructional activity. Principals stated that almost every problem they deal with related to aggressive, violent, and disrespectful behavior is a result of bullying behavior.

Administrators stated throughout these interviews that verbal harassment many times leads to aggressive and violent altercations. They pointed out that verbal bullying initiates all problems and creates a negative school climate. Administrators stressed that a primary objective of their schools is changing how students interact and communicate with one another. The principals evidenced a great understanding that bullying has many avenues with the technological opportunities students now have the ability to utilize. These thoughts followed a constant theme that bullying is being redefined from year to year.

Principals stated that any bullying not quickly and efficiently dealt with has the ability to escalate to violence. This physical aggression also creates the possibility for long-term emotional and psychological damage to victims and bystanders involved in bullying. All administrators interviewed demonstrated great excitement about their schools' anti-bullying programs.

### *Teachers' Perceptions*

All teachers who participated in this study stated their belief that bullying plays a large role in creating a negative school climate. Many teachers verbalized the same concerns that administrators did about the impact bullying has on aggressive and violent behavior. They seemed to understand that students involved with bullying, whether in the role of victim or bystander, cannot focus on academics. All teachers involved recognized the barrier bullying places on instructional activity in the classroom. Mrs. Connor, an algebra teacher at Baxter Middle School, pointed out that learning has the tendency to stop a bullying environment:

I have enough experience to know when something is not right in my classroom. I know learning is not on my students' minds, you can see it in how they act and interact with one another. I can either ignore it or try to make a difference by intervention. Sometimes when kids know that adults are aware that bullying is taking place and are watching for it, they tend to stop it. That is my responsibility to make a difference with these kids.

Many teachers voiced the same understanding as administrators that bullying is being redefined. One reason for looking at bullying differently is the technological advancements that students now have available. Teachers also credited violence on television, music and video games as having a desensitizing effect on young people concerning aggressive behavior. Many teachers pointed out that many students come from abusive and violent home environments, which tends to create problems at the school. They stated that violent and demeaning stimuli occurring at home is difficult for educators to overcome during the limited amount of time they have to work with students.

According to Mrs. Watson, a language arts teacher at Rockman Middle School, it is difficult to overcome what many students are learning from home:

Most bullies that I have encountered during my experience as a middle-school teacher usually are a result of an aggressive home life. This is tough for teachers to attempt to deal with. When fathers and mothers model aggressive, violent, and belligerent behavior when dealing with others then it should be expected their child would react similarly. I also believe many children who are physically or mentally abused at home bring that to the school as well. It is almost like many kids act out here so someone might help them



at home. Sometimes these children are bullies and sometimes they are victimized here too.

Mrs. Connors, an algebra teacher from Baxter Middle School, mentioned that many children whom one would not consider bullies are currently acting out in that manner:

Our biggest problem of the year occurred because a group of girls in our school started several false rumors over chat lines on the Internet. These problems spilled out into the building creating a couple of situations that became violent. What we discovered was that these rumors sent by a couple of girls ignited a problem that branched out to several students and families. Everyone involved was out-of-control and impossible to deal with. The physical altercation took place on campus but the problem initiated at home on an unsupervised computer. Another funny thing that came from this is that the only two students that were not disciplined were the girls who originally started the rumor on the chat line. These types of behavior lead to all involved looking at defining bullying differently. I feel understanding bullying shows its ugly face in many different forms will be helpful for us all in the future.

### *Parents' Perceptions*

All parents interviewed had many of the same concerns about bullying that administrators and teachers had stated. Parents shared information of bullying incidences that had taken place at their children's schools that had given them reason to be concerned about overall school safety. According to Mrs. Calhoun, a parent of a sixth-grade girl at Hurleyville Middle School, bullying plays an important factor on the overall experiences students have at their school:

I know of only one period of time my daughter was having trouble with another group of girls in the building. My daughter was being bullied by one girl that branched out to a group of girls giving her a hard time all around the school. It was a miserable time for her, and these girls did not do anything that would get them in trouble with the school's discipline policy. She really had nowhere to turn and that was the real problem for her. She kept this to herself and felt like she couldn't confide in anyone. I am very supportive of our schools efforts to stop all kinds of bullying.

Mr. Greene, a father from Baxter Middle School, stated that when bullying is ignored it leads to further problems:

We have got to pull our head out of the sand. Bullying takes place everyday in our school and the more we ignore it, the more it will happen. A thought that sticks out to me is how most violent encounters at school that have taken place in our country began with someone being bullied. That has got to stop. It is my role as a parent to talk with my

child and see what is going on in his life. I need to do a better job of knowing how he is doing in school and keep what I like to say a “heavy thumb” on his social life, making sure he focuses on what he needs to be. We have got to be parents and love our kids and do the right things for them.

### *Research Question #2*

What factors, as perceived by the participants, play a role in a well-organized Bully-Free School Zone character education program?

#### *Administrators’ Perceptions*

All principals agreed that the zero-tolerance policy for violent behavior has helped a great deal in curbing the occurrences of physical forms of aggression. They stated that written discipline policies are effective as well because of the documentation that is provided. Several times administrators mentioned the importance of an open-line of communication with all stakeholders in the school. Trust and cooperation were also attributes that all agreed must be reinforced consistently for safe and bully-free schools. They all acknowledged that as school leaders they play a critical role in a well-organized anti-bullying program.

#### *Teachers’ Perceptions*

Teachers considered that all stakeholders should be involved in creating and developing a school-wide discipline policy. They agreed all groups affected by a discipline policy or character education program should be participating in its creation. Communication with students and parents was a constant theme from teachers throughout interviews. Teamwork and consistency were primary factors cited in an efficiently organized discipline policy. All teachers agreed good relations need to exist with administration including an open-line of communication between the classroom and the office.

### *Parents' Perceptions*

All parents agreed that their systems' zero-tolerance policies have been helpful and offer assurances that aggressive students will be removed from the school. The systems codes of conduct have helped answer parental questions concerning all types of inappropriate behavior. Strong school leadership that is visible and accessible and promotes a climate of high standards and expectations were also cited several times by participants. Mr. Greene, a father from Rockman Middle School, said he believes students must be motivated to do their best work and positive pressure is important:

I had a coach back in my college days that we used to say was the meanest man God ever strung a gut through. He cussed us, he demeaned us, he tried to hurt you with what he said to you. I am sure if you talked to him now he would still believe he was doing the best he could for all of us. What it did was make us paranoid, scared, and we played with no confidence at all. It was a miserable time because of one person who never changed his behavior. I told myself then that if I ever coached, I would be different. I am. Kids today cannot be treated like that--it does no good. We have to change how we talk to kids and how we treat them. They will remember that treatment. I believe in creating an environment that positive pressure is applied in a supportive atmosphere.

Parental involvement and participation were other factors cited several times throughout the interviews. Parents stated that adults must provide mature and positive models for students to witness. Parents acknowledged they must be involved, actively participating, and supportive of their children's schools in helping to improve their discipline policies. A number of parents mentioned the importance of school personnel attending after-school functions in a participative role, not just a supervisory one.

### *Research Question #3*

What aspects are perceived as barriers to an effective Bully-Free School Zone character education program?

### *Administrators' Perceptions*

All administrators agreed that inconsistency in following procedures and a lack of faculty cohesiveness in administering discipline policies can be barriers to an effective plan.

Administrators pointed out that teachers and principals must work together to provide an anti-bully plan that makes a difference in the lives of students. Parental support was another aspect that administrators deemed critical in the future success of an anti-bullying character education programs or with any type of disciplinary policy. Principals suggested that the problems that come from home could be neutralized with better parental involvement in their children's schools.

### *Teachers' Perceptions*

Teachers agreed that time constraints create a barrier to the overall effectiveness of the anti-bullying program in their schools. With state and federal legislation requiring more accountability at the local level, academic time on task is a primary objective in all schools. The teachers also stated that lack of consistency in their efforts in working together can create barriers to overall effectiveness. Violent home lives were cited as a problem that was hard to solve. Mrs. Watson, a language arts teacher from Rockman Middle School, was concerned about what some students were experiencing away from school, explaining, "Many children live in abusive, violent, and uncaring homes and never do they hear a kind word while there." Mrs. Daley, a guidance counselor from Rockman Middle School, pointed out that educators need to understand, "We offer the best part of the day for a large majority of our children, we need to constantly remind ourselves of that fact."

### *Parents' Perceptions*

All participants mentioned poor communication between parents and school personnel as a major barrier to an effective anti-bullying program. A perception also existed with some

parents that a double standard sometimes occurs in discipline practices by the schools. Unclear information about discipline policies at the school was cited as an area that created problems with the overall effectiveness of discipline plans. Parents mentioned several times that many problems are related to overcrowding in our schools. They pointed out that recent building construction projects should help alleviate this problem. As mentioned by administrators and teachers, parents also agreed that a violent home life for some students is another factor that creates problems in the school building.

#### *Research Question #4*

What changes have occurred with attendance, aggressive/violent occurrences, and perceptions toward school safety by administrators, teachers, and parents since the implementation of a Bully-Free School Zone?

#### *Administrators' Perceptions*

With the exception of Rockman Middle School, no concrete data were provided pertaining to attendance and aggressive and violent occurrences. Many of the findings concerning this research question were based on administrators', teachers', and parents' perspectives. The principals did notice that attendance percentages were slightly higher than the year prior to the implementation of their schools' anti-bullying programs. They also stated that the number of aggressive and violent incidences in their schools had decreased and that the level of intensity was not as vicious during physical altercations that did take place during the year. All schools participating in this study had received unofficial notice that they had met all state standards for end-of-grade testing.

### *Teachers' Perceptions*

Many of the teachers participating in the study indicated that they felt a calmer environment existed at their schools. Teachers stated that students were more aware of the importance of monitoring what they said and did when interacting with others. Teachers stated several times that students had mentioned throughout the year that they felt safer and more comfortable since beginning the anti-bullying program. Teachers also said they felt that a higher level of consciousness concerning respect for others was prevalent in their schools.

Teachers cited that instructional activity and time-on-task had been improved since the year before as well. They admitted that they spent less time dealing with behavioral problems of a bullying nature. Teachers reported having a higher awareness level of what bullying is and how it impacts everyone in a negative manner. All teachers indicated that they perceive their new bully-free program as producing needed changes in the overall climate, especially in how students perceived their schools.

### *Parents' Perceptions*

Several parents interviewed for this study stated that their children seemed to feel the new anti-bullying program was helping to provide a safe school environment. Mrs. Calhoun, a mother with children who attended Hurleyville Middle School, discussed that from her experience students appeared to be taking more pride in their school:

I have noticed a change in how my son talks about his school. He just seems happier and is taking more pride in what is taking place in school. He is much more involved in what is going on, he does not miss anything anymore. He goes to games, dances, after-school picnics, and last month he even went to cleanup day on a Saturday. My boy loves his school and that is a great thing to know as a parent.

### *Research Question #5*

What ideas can administrators, teachers, and parents contribute to enhance the effectiveness of a Bully-Free School Zone character education program?

### *Administrators' Perceptions*

All school leaders interviewed for this study demonstrated a strong commitment in providing direction to further enhance their schools' anti-bullying programs. They pointed out that positive change was taking place in their buildings and they were observing improved relationships with all school groups. Most principals indicated that they were aware that their actions and attitudes set the tone for their schools, students, and personnel. They all seemed positive about the future of their schools' anti-bullying character education programs.

Administrators offered several suggestions for future improvement to their schools throughout the interviews. A unanimous suggestion was improved communication with all school personnel and parents. Positive adult modeling was another attribute of effective character education programs cited several times by administrators. Administrators stated that an early awareness of students' problems, especially those that have the tendency to create aggressive and violent conflicts, needs to be continually addressed. Central office administrators commented several times about how timely this research was in view of recent state legislation in North Carolina that placed local responsibility on schools for developing bully-free codes of conduct.

### *Teachers' Perceptions*

All teachers participating in this study indicated a desire to have more time to spend on the anti-bullying behavior programs in their schools. All demonstrated an understanding of the complication of developing schedules that offer time for nonacademic courses; however, they stated it was worth the extra effort. Mrs. Daley, a science teacher from Baxter Middle School, agreed that the positive impact resulting from the anti-bullying program was worth the time and effort in scheduling:

Because of this program, we are spending more quality time on academic courses. It has been a big change in what we are able to accomplish because of the changed behavior of the student body. I have never had a better year with what I call TTW. That acronym stands for Total Time Wasted dealing with disruptive behavior. I feel the more we spend

on this program the better behavior will be, which equals more quality time on task. I am sold on our anti-bullying program because I have seen such a big change in the classroom.

Another issue addressed by participating teachers was the importance of a collaborative effort between parents and schools' personnel. According to Mrs. Daley, a guidance counselor from Rockman Middle School, "When parents and teachers work together to help student growth then good things will take place in that child's life." A common theme throughout the teacher interviews was the importance of all involved working together to promote a climate of respect and appreciation toward others. It was the stated hope of all interviewees that improvement would be made in the characteristics of the school climate.

### *Parents' Perceptions*

The parents agreed that good relationships need to exist between the schools and communities. Parents showed an appreciation toward their schools' administrations in their efforts to intervene and change bullying behavior. They made references about feeling good that their school personnel were attempting to teach students with behavioral problems self-control skills and giving them the opportunity to observe their own behaviors. Some parents mentioned the need for their schools to strengthen their peer-mentor tutoring programs that could possibly assist misbehaving students.

### *Research Literature Comparison*

Participants in this study were in agreement with Sergares (2001) who pointed out that schools should start initiatives; the best way is when students are kind to others while not empowering bullies. According to Pollack and Shuster (2000), students perform heroic acts by helping others avoid bullying; in addition, they may make new friends. Sergares acknowledged the importance of bystanders learning that their popularity should not be based on the expense of



another. Teaching students how to responsibly report harassing and bullying is a major key to changing violent and aggressive behavior in schools.

Students who are habitually violent or display criminal behavior play a major role in defeating behavioral goals and often make schools an unsafe place to be. Throughout this study, a common theme emerged that the majority of bullying was usually of a noncriminal type. Everyone who participated in this study agreed that noncriminal problems might not directly threaten personal safety. They do, however, negatively affect the school climate and learning environment.

In today's society, there is a growing concern about bullying behavior that has the tendency to become violent. For many years, bullying behavior that fell under the category of initiation or hazing was not considered a serious concern. As perceptions have changed concerning bullying behavior, schools around the country have begun to reevaluate their current discipline practices. Most participants agreed with the work of Beane (2000) who pointed out if children fear for their safety, they cannot learn effectively. According to Olweus (1995), all students have the right not to be humiliated or harmed by classmates at school and in society.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSIONS, STAKEHOLDERS' RESPONSIBILITIES FOR PRACTICE, AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

#### *Conclusions*

Throughout this study, the research has made clear that high expectations for learning and appropriate behavior are the responsibility of administrators, teachers, parents, and students. Without clear guidelines for students' conduct and without a disciplined atmosphere, instructional activity suffers and children cannot learn effectively. Any successful discipline policy or character education program cannot succeed without all stakeholders actively participating. The schools have an awesome responsibility for developing and initiating effective safe school plans and dealing proactively with aggressive and violent behavior. This is an impossible task without support and positive involvement from parents and community.

Effective anti-bullying character education programs emphasize social skills such as the following that are lifelong and appropriate for productive interpersonal relationships:

1. showing respect and dignity for others,
2. appreciating and respecting differences in others,
3. reporting harassing and bullying behavior responsibly,
4. following the Golden Rule,
5. looking out for one another, and
6. working together to promote a positive school environment.

#### *Stakeholders' Responsibilities*

##### *Schools' Responsibilities*

Administrators and teachers are the first link in providing the leadership and direction for a successful anti-bullying character education program. They have the ability to provide positive

and mature role-modeling in teaching students how to interact with one another. Administrators and teachers agree that in order to provide a school environment that is safe, calm, orderly, and bully-free, they need to demonstrate the following practices:

1. develop clear school and classroom policies regarding bullying;
2. offer staff development for school personnel in teaching bully-free practices;
3. adopt and develop a curriculum that teaches students about bullying;
4. teach students about all forms of bullying: verbal, emotional, psychological, and emotional;
5. work to create an environment of trust, stressing inclusion;
6. establish peer-helper programs and improved counseling opportunities for students who have self-control behavior problems;
7. develop an open line of communication with parents and community members;
8. offer avenues for students in need to report bullying;
9. provide a positive and mature model for students to witness; and
10. follow a staff credo of being active, alert, and involved in the lives of each student.

Even though scheduling can be very difficult, more time needs to be offered to teachers and counselors for working with students regarding bully-free concepts. Teachers have shown the ability to integrate academic subject areas with bully-free practices; they must be more innovative and creative in teaching these important social skills to school-age children.

### *Parents' Responsibilities*

Parents are stakeholders who can play a crucial role through their awareness and support of the school-wide anti-bullying program. Parents who help promote the program display certain characteristics. They:

1. stay informed with school policies and procedures;

2. work in partnership with the school to encourage positive behavior, valuing differences and promoting sensitivity to others;
3. talk regularly with their children about their feelings about school, friends, and relationships;
4. inform faculty of changes in their children's behavior;
5. alert administration if bullying is taking place;
6. provide role models for their children; and
7. are involved in the lives of their children.

Parents should work to be more involved in their children's daily school lives and reinforce concepts of the anti-bullying program describing acceptable behavior and what is expected at their school. Parents must be direct and essential partners with school personnel in helping all stakeholders to have experiences that are more positive.

#### *Recommendations for Further Research*

The following recommendations for further research are based on my personal experiences of 21 years in public education and in the findings from this study. These suggestions for an effective anti-bullying character education program follow common themes that emerged from interviews with administrators, teachers, and parents in five Western North Carolina middle schools:

1. Effective discipline school practices or character education programs require teamwork and consistency.
2. All administrators, teachers, and parents should be expected to follow the same discipline procedures that students are practicing.
3. School staff should work together and promote the school and each other positively in every avenue.

4. Special attention should be given to the communication of safe school policies and procedures during emergency situations.
5. High behavioral expectations should be maintained. Effective schools share high expectations for student learning as well.
6. School-wide emphasis should be placed on the importance of learning and intolerance toward bullying behavior.
7. Clear and well communicated procedures should be in place for discipline processes. Rules, sanctions, and procedures are developed with input from all stakeholders and are communicated timely to parents and community members.
8. Evaluation and assessment should be ongoing and new strategies should be offered to enhance the anti-bullying character education program.
9. A nurturing, caring, and supportive school climate should be promoted.
10. Strong leadership that is visible, encouraging, knowledgeable, and supportive should be modeled. Administrators should be a strong presence in the schools and in the community.
11. Teachers should be caring and concerned about holistic student well-being.
12. Specific procedures for student misbehavior should be shared with all stakeholders. Consequences for bullying, aggressive and violent behavior should be clear and consistently administered.
13. Zero tolerance policies in dealing with aggressive and violent behaviors should be continued.
14. Bullying behaviors of any type should not be tolerated.

This study supports the hypothesis that well disciplined and productive anti-bullying programs are not the product of good luck or chance; they result from efforts made by caring administrators, teachers, parents, and students. All stakeholders should have an interest in changing behaviors that lead to aggression and violence. Recognizing the need to put in the

extra effort required to minimize disruptions and provide safer schools requires a team effort in working toward a common goal: Students will enter the building each day excited, enthused, and looking forward to their school day.

Early in my doctorate school experience, a popular professor stated to our class that the most interesting and meaningful dissertations are the result of a passion or a true interest in the subject by the author. My experience as a middle school principal facing problems related to aggressive behavior during my tenure led me to the topic of bullying for this dissertation. This has been great for our overall school climate and for me professionally. I have had the opportunity over the last two years to present to over 2,000 concerned and caring educators as to how we have initiated this outstanding character education program into our school's curriculum. The reception I receive is always heartwarming and I cannot help but notice how stakeholders appear starved for this type of character education program in their schools.

I have seen outstanding things taking place in our school since the implementation of our anti-bullying program and I am excited for the future. Student-student, student-teacher, and school-community relationships are all better and continue to improve on a daily basis. Less time is spent on the problems associated with bullying behavior and instructional activity is now the primary focus in our classrooms. The awareness level is much higher and the perception of bullying has been redefined. Students have more pride in their school and understand that they can make a positive difference through their contributions.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Informed Consent Form

Page 1 of 3

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

East Tennessee State University  
Veterans Affairs Medical Center

INFORMED CONSENT

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Richard A. Spurling

TITLE OF PROJECT: The Bully-Free School Zone Character Education Program: A Study of Impact on Five Western North Carolina Middle Schools

INTRODUCTION: This study is attempting to provide common threads found in effective anti-bullying character education programs as perceived by principals, teachers, and parents of students in western North Carolina middle schools. Interviews using open-ended questions will be the primary source for data collection. Participants are free to stop the interview at any time they choose for whatever reason.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this study is to examine common threads of effective Bully Free School Zone character education programs in 5 western North Carolina middle schools as perceived by principals, teachers, and parents. The study will detail views of the participants toward the anti-bullying program, what factors they believe contribute to the overall success of the program, and barriers that are perceived to its effectiveness. The study will also look at changes in attendance, aggressive/violent occurrences, and perception toward school safety since the implementation of the anti-bullying program. The participants will be selected by contacting principals, teachers, and parents in western North Carolina after securing permission from the superintendent of schools in that system.

DURATION: The interview session that will be conducted with teachers and parents will take 10 to 20 minutes. The 5 principal interview sessions will be in greater depth requiring 40 to 50 minutes. A follow-up meeting will be set up to provide participants an opportunity to judge the accuracy of their statements made in the initial interview session. These follow-up meetings should not exceed 10 minutes.

Version: March, 2004

Subject's Initial \_\_\_\_\_

PROCEDURES: Open-ended questions will be asked to participants by using a general interview guide. Participants will not be rushed in answering questions or pressured to answer all components of the interview. A tape-recorder will be used with the expressed permission of each participant. The participants will have control over the tape recordings and can stop recording at any time of the interview. Participant's names will not be used, but each will be coded with a number that is strictly to permit matching interviews to the correct participant in the study. In no way will the identification of the participant be made available. Copies of transcribed data will be available upon request of all participants.

POSSIBLE RISKS/DISCOMFORTS: Some questions may be hard to answer due to the lack of knowledge of the particular subject or amount of experience of the participant. Participants are free to stop the interview at anytime. Every effort will be made to help the interview session as comfortable as possible for the participants.

POSSIBLE BENEFITS AND/OR COMPENSATION: No participant benefits or forms of compensation are included in this study.

CONTACT FOR QUESTIONS: If you have any questions, concerns, or suggestions, please contact Richard A. Spurling (XXX) XXX-XXXX or Dr. Russell West (XXX) XXX-XXXX at East Tennessee State University. You may also contact the Chairman of the Institutional Review Board at (XXX) XXXX-XXXX for any questions you may have about your rights as a research participant.

CONFIDENTIALITY: Confidentiality for the participant will be a primary concern for this research. All records will be stored in a locked file cabinet in my home for at least 10 years at the conclusion of this research. Cassette tapes used during interview sessions will be destroyed after notes have been transcribed and these transcriptions have been verified. The results of this study may be published and/or presented without naming the participants.

COMPENSATION FOR MEDICAL TREATMENT: East Tennessee State University (ETSU) will pay the cost of emergency first aid for any injury that may happen as a result of your being in this study. They will not pay for any other medical treatment. Claims against ETSU or any of its agents or employees may be submitted to the Tennessee Claims Commission. These claims will be settled to the extent allowable as provided under TCA Section 0-9-307. For more information about claims, call the Chairman of the Institutional Review Board of ETSU at (XXX) XXX-XXXX.

VOLUNTARY PARTICPATION: The nature of this study has been explained to me and I am knowledgeable of the nature, demands, and the benefits of its findings. Furthermore, I know that I have the ability to ask questions and withdraw from the project at any time. I have read and fully understand this consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A signed copy will be given to me upon request.

\_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_  
SIGNATURE OF VOLUNTEER PRINCIPAL, TEACHER, DATE  
OR PARENT

\_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_  
SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR DATE

\_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_  
WITNESS DATE

Version: March, 2004

Subject's Initial \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX B

### Letter to Superintendent of Schools

Month Day, 2003  
Dr. XXXX XXXXXX  
XXXX Street  
XXXXXXXXXXXX, XX XXXXX

Dear Dr. XXXXXX,

I hope this letter finds you doing well and having a great school year. I am presently serving as principal at Rockman Middle School located in Rockville, North Carolina and a part of the Maxton County School System. I am currently pursuing a doctorate degree at East Tennessee State University in the department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis. This spring I would like to conduct research within your system with the intention of acquiring valuable information that may be used to better serve your students.

My dissertation topic proposal centers on effective anti-bullying character education programs and practices. At Rockman Middle School we are currently in our second year utilizing a Bully-Free School Zone character education program in our school. Since its implementation we have seen a tremendous positive impact in our school and community. This study will provide guidance or recommendations toward formulation of the most effective anti-bullying program that allow children the safest environment in which to learn.

I would like to conduct open-ended interviews with principals, teachers, and parents concerning the recently initiated anti-bullying character education program in middle schools in which they are involved. This study hopes to gain views regarding this new Bully-Free School Zone character education program and its overall effectiveness in their schools.

I am seeking your permission to communicate with principals, teachers, and parents concerning perceptions of anti-bullying programs in their schools and what ideas they can offer for future development. Please, feel free to contact my doctoral advisor, Dr. Russell West at (423) 439-xxxx. If you have any questions, you may reach me at (828) 765-xxxx. Thank you for considering my request.

Sincerely,

Rick Spurling

## APPENDIX C

### Letter to Principals

Month Day, 2003  
Dr. XXXX XXXXXX  
XXXX Street  
XXXXXXXXXXXX, XX XXXXX

Dear Mr. XXXXXX,

I hope this letter finds you doing well and having a great school year. I am presently serving as principal at Rockman Middle School located in Rockville, North Carolina and a part of the Mitchell County School System. I am currently pursuing a doctorate degree at East Tennessee State University in the department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis. This spring I would like to conduct research within your school with the intention of acquiring valuable information that may be used to better serve your students.

My dissertation topic proposal centers on effective anti-bullying character education programs and practices. At Rockman Middle School we are currently in our second year utilizing a Bully-Free School Zone character education program in our school. Since its implementation we have seen a tremendous positive impact in our school and community. This study will provide guidance or recommendations toward formulation of the most effective anti-bullying program that allow our children the safest environment in which to learn.

I would like to conduct open-ended interviews with principals, teachers, and parents concerning the recently initiated anti-bullying character education program in middle schools in which they are involved. This study hopes to gain views regarding this new Bully-Free School Zone character education program and its overall effectiveness in their schools.

I am seeking your permission to communicate with teachers, and parents concerning perceptions of anti-bullying programs in their schools and what ideas they can offer for future development. Please, feel free to contact my doctoral advisor, Dr. Russell West at (423) 439-xxxx. If you have any questions, you may reach me at (828) 765-xxxx. Thank you for considering my request.

Sincerely,

Rick Spurling



## APPENDIX D

### Interview Guide for Administrators

1. What part of the day is interrupted by student misbehavior that creates a problem for you? Teachers? Parents? Students? Would you please give an example?
2. In your estimate how much instructional time is wasted because of discipline problems?
3. Currently in your school what is the policy concerning aggressive and violent behavior?
4. Over the last several years what do you feel has been an effective discipline policy/procedure concerning aggressive and violent behavior?
5. Over the last several years what do you feel has been an ineffective discipline policy/procedure concerning aggressive and violent behavior?
6. How does your school define bullying behavior?
7. In assessing aggressive and violent acts in your school what is your opinion of the role bullying plays in this activity?
8. How do you perceive the role of parents and community members in the school discipline policies and procedures?
9. How do you feel bullying affects the overall school climate?
10. What impact has the school's new anti-bullying character education program had on the students, school's climate, and parent/community relations?
11. What impact do you feel that bullying behavior has on your students?
12. How can bullying be avoided?
13. What can principals, teachers, and parents do to change bullying behavior?
14. What have been barriers to the overall effectiveness of the new anti-bullying policy in your school?
15. What do you feel could be added or deleted from the current anti-bullying character education program that would enhance its effectiveness?
16. Since the implementation of the new anti-bullying character education program what changes have occurred with attendance, incidences of fighting, suspensions as a result of fighting, and End-of-Grade test scores?

## APPENDIX E

### Interview Guide for Teachers

1. In your own words describe your schools current policy concerning aggressive and violent behavior?
2. Over the last several years what do you feel has been an effective discipline policy/procedure concerning aggressive and violent behavior?
3. Over the last several years what do you feel has been an ineffective discipline policy/procedure concerning aggressive and violent behavior?
4. In assessing aggressive and violent acts in your school what is your opinion of the role bullying plays in this activity?
5. How do you perceive the role of parents and community members in the school discipline policies and procedures?
6. How do you feel bullying affects the overall school climate?
7. What impact has the school's new anti-bullying character education program had on the students, school's climate, and parent/community relations?
8. Tell me what you think principals, teachers, and parents can do to change bullying behavior?
9. What have been barriers to the overall effectiveness of the new anti-bullying policy in your school?
10. What do you feel could be added or deleted from the current anti-bullying character education program that would enhance its effectiveness?

## APPENDIX F

### Interview Guide for Parents

1. In your own words describe your schools current policy concerning aggressive and violent behavior?
2. Over the last several years what do you feel has been an effective discipline policy/procedure concerning aggressive and violent behavior?
3. Over the last several years what do you feel has been an ineffective discipline policy/procedure concerning aggressive and violent behavior?
4. In assessing aggressive and violent acts in your school what is your opinion of the role bullying plays in this activity?
5. How do you perceive the role of parents and community members in the school discipline policies and procedures?
6. How do you feel bullying affects the overall school climate?
7. What impact has the school's new anti-bullying character education program had on the students, school's climate, and parent/community relations?
8. Tell me what you think principals, teachers, and parents can do to change bullying behavior?
9. What have been barriers to the overall effectiveness of the new anti-bullying policy in your school?
10. What do you feel could be added or deleted from the current anti-bullying character education program that would enhance its effectiveness?

## APPENDIX G

### Auditor's Letter

Richard Bales, Secondary Supervisor  
Johnson City School System  
100 East Maple Ave.  
Johnson City, TN 37601

July 7, 2004

Rick Spurling, Assistant Superintendent  
Mitchell County Schools  
72 Ledger School Rd.  
Bakersville, NC 28705

Dear Mr. Spurling,

I hope this letter finds you and your family having a great summer. I would like to congratulate and commend you on your hard work in completing your data collection for your research project, "The Bully-Free School Zone Character Education Program: A Study of Impact on Five Western North Carolina Middle Schools". After reviewing your materials, and after meeting with you to discuss in detail your research objectives, it is obvious that your work is reliable and complete. It also is apparent that this research project is valid and verifiable and I have seen evidence that this study was conducted in an ethical and professional manner. This was an interesting topic for me because at the current time we are looking at implemented this type of character education program in the Johnson City School System. I trust we will work together again in the future concerning this important topic in public education.

Your interview questions were concise and clear in its objective to the focus of this study. The review of the literature was very detailed and thorough and tied in appropriately with your presentation of data. As your auditor I took time to investigate your adherence to the qualitative research method standards. I also took time to review your audio tapes, transcriptions, and field notes which was conducted with principal, teacher, and parent participants during your data collection.

I discovered that your findings were organized and followed the procedures of a qualitative research study. I was impressed that your research design detailed the constant comparative method of data analysis offering you flexibility to change the direction of your research if necessary. After our discussions it occurred to me that you have done a good job in balancing member checking and peer debriefing to lessen the chance of bias while ensuring triangulation.

I felt your research showed the perspective of an outstanding former middle school principal. I congratulate you on your promotion to the central office as assistant superintendent of schools in

Mitchell County, but it is also evident that your system has lost a school principal who was a positive difference maker in the lives of children. I appreciate your commitment to providing fellow educators information concerning your former school's anti-bullying character education program. I feel that your work experience brought a unique perspective to this study and a deeper insight into this research topic.

It has been a pleasure to work with you and I am honored to be associated with this research study. I wish you good luck in your continued pursuit of a doctorate in educational leadership at East Tennessee State University and your professional career. Thank-you for your efforts in completing this important project that will be helpful to any school personnel interested in beginning a Bully-Free School Zone character education program.

Sincerely,

Richard Bales  
Secondary Supervisor  
Johnson City Schools

## APPENDIX H

### Follow-up Letter to Participants

June, 2004

Dr. XXXXX XXXXX  
XXXXX XXXXX School  
XXXXX XXXXX Street

Dear Dr. XXXXX,

I hope you are having a great summer. I wanted to write and let you know how much I enjoyed my time with you in your school. It is obvious that XXXXX XXXXX School is an outstanding school with strong leadership and caring teachers. Thank-you so much for your kindness, time, and effort in setting-up my interviews during my time with you. It is my hope that this research will show the positive benefits to student achievement as a result of anti-bullying character education programs. The objective for this dissertation is to provide a guidebook for educators who are interested in initiating a Bully-Free School Zone.

I am sending copies of transcriptions of our interviews. I hope you can take some time to review these for accuracies. Please, let me know if you would like to add or delete any information offered throughout these interviews.

I appreciate you allowing me to spend time with your staff in discussing our current program at Rockman Middle School. I am always glad to share the good things that are taking place in our school as a result of this positive change with our school and community. I am so impressed with what is taking place in your school and the compassion for children that exists. Please, thank your teachers and support staff who were all so helpful to me in conducting this study. Hope to see you soon and have a good break. Take care.

Sincerely,

Rick Spurling

VITA

RICHARD ALAN SPURLING

Personal Data:

Date of Birth: February 24, 1961  
Place of Birth: Knoxville, Tennessee  
Marital Status: Married

Education:

East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, TN;  
B.S., Industrial Arts—Secondary Education Degree,  
Minor -- English  
1984

East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, TN;  
Masters of Education  
Administration and Supervision  
1993

East Tennessee State University, Johnson City  
Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis, Ed.D.  
2004

Professional  
Experience:

Teacher, Harris Middle School, Spruce Pine, North Carolina;  
1984-1987 (Vocational Education)

Teacher, Mitchell High School, Bakersville, NC;  
1987-1996 (Drafting, Architectural/Mechanical Drawing,  
Computer-Aided Drafting CAD)

Head Football Coach, Mitchell High School, Bakersville, NC;  
1996-1998

Head Baseball Coach, Mitchell High School, Bakersville, NC;  
1986-1996

Assistant Principal, Mitchell High School, Bakersville, NC;  
1996-1998

Principal, Bowman Middle School, Bakersville, NC;  
1998-present

Instructor, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, TN;  
January 2004-present

Assistant Superintendent of Schools-Mitchell County, NC;  
July 2004-present

Honors and  
Awards:

All Tri-State (Tennessee, Alabama, Georgia) Football/Baseball,  
Madisonville HS, *Chattanooga Times*, 1978.  
TN. All-State Football Team, *Knoxville News Sentinel*, 1978.  
Fort Loudon Electric Regional Essay Winner, 1978.  
Football Scholarship East Tennessee State University, 1979-83.  
Player of the Week vs. Western Carolina and Furman, 1982.  
Big Brothers of America, 1984-1988.  
Mitchell County Special Olympics Committee, 1984-1997.  
Western NC Special Olympics Games Director, 1991-1996.  
Western Highlands Conference Coach of the Year, 1995-1996.  
Wachovia Principal of the Year – Mitchell County, 2000.  
Board of Directors Mitchell County Health Advisory Council,  
Board of Directors Mitchell County Group Home, 2003-present.

Professional  
Presentations

*Bully-Free School Zone Character Education Presentations;*  
Henderson County Schools, June 20, 2003, central office staff,  
principals, DSS/juvenile court reps, 29 participants.  
NC Summer Leadership Conference, July 15, 2003,  
Great Smokies Holiday Inn Sunspre, Asheville, NC,  
"No Leader Left Behind" – state-wide administrators, 67 participants.  
Yancey County Schools, October 16, 2003,  
Mountain Heritage High School, central office staff, principals,  
Assistant principals, teachers, 22 participants.  
East Tennessee State University, October 2003,  
ELPA Department, Johnson City, TN, master / doctorate level  
educational leadership students, 42 participants.  
4<sup>th</sup> Annual Medical Society Alliance, October 18, 2003,  
McKinnon Center, North Carolina State University,  
"Symposium Focusing on Girls in Crisis" - 400 participants.  
Alamance-Burlington School System, December 10, 2003,  
"Initiative: Reduce Violence and Bullying Within Our  
Schools", Burlington, NC, (am/pm sessions), superintendents,  
principals, assistant principals, lead teachers, 136 participants.  
Mosheim Elementary/ Middle Schools, January 19, 2004,  
"Bully-Free In-Service Dual Staff Training" – Mosheim, TN,  
principals, teachers, support staff, 75 participants.  
Chuckey Doak Middle School, January 19, 2004,  
"Initiating a Bully-Free School Zone In-Service" – Greene  
County, TN, principals, teachers, support staff, 35 participants.



Washington County Schools, April 30, 2004,  
“Bully-Free In-Service” – Jonesborough, TN, principals, teachers,  
support staff, 79 participants  
Henderson County Schools, June 5, 2004, “End-of-Year  
InService” – Hendersonville, NC, teachers, 184 participants  
Tennessee Exceptional Children’s Conference, July 13, 2004,  
Knoxville, TN, counselors, administrators, teachers,  
school personnel, and central office staff, 174 participants.  
Washington County Schools, August 6, 2004,  
Jonesborough, TN, administrators, 28 participants.

Publications: *Johnson City Press, Asheville Citizens Times, Mitchell County News  
Journal, Avery Journal, Avery Post, December, 2004  
Developing a School-Wide Bully-Free Program, Alan Beane, 2004*

Newscast: *WLOS (Asheville, NC), WJHL (Johnson City, TN), October 2003-04*

Internet: [www.bullyfree.com](http://www.bullyfree.com) Dr. Alan Beane’s web page