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A CALL FOR PROTECTION AND PLANNING: A CASE STUDY OF VULNERABLE POPULATIONS AND SCHOOL SHOOTINGS

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A CALL FOR PROTECTION AND PLANNING: A CASE STUDY OF VULNERABLE
POPULATIONS AND SCHOOL SHOOTINGS

By

JASON E. COVARRUBIAS

A doctoral dissertation submitted to the
College of Education
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree Doctor of Education
in Organizational Leadership

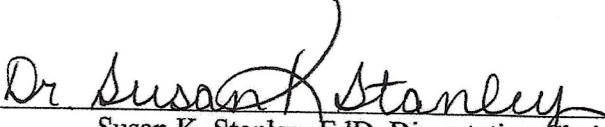
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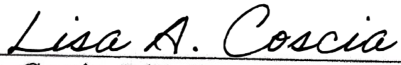
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Lisa A. Coscia, EdD, Dean, College of Education

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my wife and three children. I hope that my dedication to the necessary work has inspired you never to remain silent when you need to speak up; I love you all dearly and am grateful for your encouragement along the way. To my mother, whose work ethic inculcated a strong desire to persevere through adversity. I often wanted to close my computer and walk away from this study, but I was constantly reminded of your example of perseverance. To Stephen Denny, Clayton Watson, and William Brooks for walking through this doctoral journey with me; I could not have done it without the Zoom calls and laughs. Finally, to every educator and student, both abled and disabled, who stepped foot into a school building, this dissertation was written to bring awareness of safety and security oversight. I love you all. I hope that your voices will be heard.

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First and foremost, I would like to thank God for loving me and instilling a passion for others. I would also like to thank all of the brave and passionate educators of the great state of Texas for loving children and leaving a lasting impression on American youth, especially those educators who took the time to participate in this study. To my dissertation committee members, this research study would not have been possible without you. In particular, I am most grateful for my excellent dissertation chair, Dr. Susan Stanley, who, from the beginning, loved my proposal idea and encouraged me to pursue a complex study because the need was so great. Thank you for encouraging me not to fret but to “get it done” and never giving up on me. I am incredibly grateful to my methodologist, Dr. Janet Deck, for providing support and direction through my dissertation journey. Finally, I want to give a special thanks to Dr. Amber Bowen, her support and editorial work helped make this dissertation a reality.

Abstract

School shooting prevention has become a priority for educational leadership for nearly twenty years. The brutality and significant loss of life distinguish the attacks at Columbine High School and Sandy Hook Elementary School (Jonson, 2017). However, lawmakers encounter difficulty with the wide range of behaviors, program initiatives, and risk management efforts involved to ensure the safety of all children (Cowell & McDonald, 2018). Coincidentally, a national model for school-based emergency plans has not been identified, which leaves many school districts inadequately fit to keep the student population safe in the event a school shooting were to occur on a campus (Stough et al., 2018). With the unprecedented increase in school shootings, the revamping of school-wide procedures and emergency plans must encapsulate the needs of all students, including those individual students with significant disabilities (Embury et al., 2019). Programs (e.g., special education) need to include drafting school safety plans and preparation due to the complexity of limitations and severity of disabilities possessed by many students on campuses. The purpose of this case study was to describe the statewide policies that address safety measures and the limited considerations for vulnerable student populations regarding an active school shooter scenario on a campus. Following within-case and cross-case analysis of interviewees' data and active shooter protocols provided by the Texas Education Agency, three themes emerged: procedures, preparation, and population. In the present study, thematic findings indicated a weakness in the current generalized safety plan, and improvement is necessary to increase the provision of campuses' severe and profound populations. Therefore, the present study's findings have practical implications for school safety awareness for educational leadership to consider.

Keywords: case study, school shootings, disability, school administration, school crisis.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Dedication	iii
Acknowledgments.....	iv
Abstract	v
Table of Contents	vi
List of Tables.....	x
List of Figures	xi
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
Background of the Study	1
Litigation in Education	1
Education of All Handicapped Children Act	2
Shift in Momentum: School Shootings.....	3
School Safety Procedures Measures	5
Tradition Lockdown.....	6
Multi-Option Approach	7
School Safety Procedures Involving Vulnerable Populations	8
Theoretical Framework	9
Problem Statement	10
Purpose Statement.....	13
Overview of Methodology	13
Research Questions.....	14
Research Design	14
Data Collection	15
Procedures.....	15
Overview of Analyses	16
Limitations	17
Definition of Key Terms	17
Significance.....	18

Summary	19
II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....	20
The Achilles Heel of the American Education System: School Shootings Crisis	21
School Shootings	21
Are Schools Safe or Not?	22
Lack of Systematic Data Collection	24
Analysis of U.S. School Shootings	26
The American School Shooting Study.....	28
Plan to Protect	29
Lockdown Recommendations	30
Traditional Lockdown	30
Multi-Option Approach	31
Implementation	32
Vulnerable Population Preparedness.....	35
School Crisis Planning for Students with Disabilities	36
Behavioral Skills Training	39
Individual Emergency Lockdown Plans.....	41
Summary	42
III. METHODOLOGY.....	44
Description of Research Design.....	44
Participants	45
Role of Researcher.....	46
Measures for Ethical Protection.....	47
Research Questions	48
Data Collection	48
Instrument(s) Used in Data Collection	48
Methods to Address Validity and Reliability	49
Validity	49
Validity of Triangulation.....	50
Reliability	50
Reliability of Addressing and Clarifying Potential Biases	51

Procedures.....	51
Methods to Address Assumptions of Generalizability.....	51
Data Analysis	53
Summary	54
IV. RESULTS.....	55
Sample Characteristics	55
Data Collection and Management.....	57
Data Analysis Strategies.....	58
Themes	60
Theme 1: Procedures	61
General Procedures.....	62
Biggest Assets.....	64
Theme 2: Preparation.....	65
Weaknesses	65
Better Preparation	66
Improvements	69
Theme 3: Population	70
Overlooked	70
Severity of Disability.....	72
More Consideration	74
Evidence of Quality	76
Summary	77
V. DISCUSSION.....	78
Methods of Data Collection	78
Summary of Results	79
Discussion by Research Question.....	81
Research Question 1	82
Theme 1: Procedures	83
Theme 2: Preparation.....	86
Research Question 2	89
Theme 3: Population	89

Study Limitations	92
Implications for Future Practice.....	92
Recommendations for Future Research	94
Conclusion	94
References	96
Appendix A	105
Appendix B	106
Appendix C	107
Appendix D.....	108

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
Table 1: Participants' Professional Information	45
Table 2: Demographic Characteristics of Bounded Sample	55
Table 3: Codebook Process Map.....	59
Table 4: Major Expanded Codes Identified	60

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
Figure 1: Search and Screening Process Results	38

I. INTRODUCTION

This dissertation explores a case study of a school district's active shooter preparation and protocols for students with severe disabilities. This study was based primarily on interviews, and Texas Education Agency (TEA) provided documents used by several North Texas school districts. The first chapter of this dissertation presents the background of the study, specifies the problem of the study, explains its significance, and presents an overview of the methodology used. The chapter concludes by noting the delimitations of the study and defining special terms.

Background of the Study

Litigation in Education

Disability is a natural part of life; however, society has developed barriers that identify physical or mental differences (Blanck, 2019). For decades, Americans with disabilities have faced discrimination and exclusionary practices in education (Kirby, 2017). In the early 1900s, students with disabilities were denied an education. An example of educational discrimination can be found in the 1919 litigation hearing of *Beattie v. Board of Education* (1919). The Board of Education petitioned for students with disabilities to be prohibited from attending schools with their peer group, and the court agreed that the students' presence would impede the education of others (*Beattie v. Board*, 1919). However, in the case of *Beattie v. Board of Education*, the courts adversely concluded that other students' education should not be affected by the presence of a person with a disability. These unjustifiable allegations, being a detriment to other students and

an inability to benefit from education, had become a barrier with exclusionary force (Kirby, 2017).

Years following the *Beattie* case, an important advancement in inequality for students and a major shift in American educational policy transpired through the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) case. *Brown v. Board of Education* was a class-action lawsuit filed by Oliver Brown, whose daughter was denied entry into a Topeka, Kansas, all-White elementary school. The court ruled that the practice of racial segregation in public schools was unconstitutional (Howard & Noguera, 2020). Although *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) focused on racial discrimination and inequality, the case played a pivotal legislative role in the advancement of the Civil Rights Movement by providing a merger between race and education (Blanck, 2019). From housing to transportation, from voting rights to employment practices, the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision established the legal precedent for eliminating racial discrimination throughout American society, and for that reason alone, the ruling is widely seen as the linchpin for ending what could rightfully be described as America's version of apartheid (Howard & Noguera, 2020).

Education of All Handicapped Children Act

Although the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in favor of Brown that unequal, racially segregated schools were unconstitutional (*Brown v. Board of Education*, 1954), the progress of change continued through the end of the 1960s, as social movements pointed out the disparity between disability and social structure (Bernal & Roca, 2016). This disparity continued until 1975, when the exclusion of special education students in public education was lifted with the passage of the Education of All Handicapped Children Act (Blanck, 2019). This equity-fueled era drove lobbyists to rise up against educational discrimination and for equality nearly 20 years after the Civil Rights Movement. Similar to *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), the Disability

Rights Movement fought for the rights of individuals with disabilities (Krewson, 2016). The Disability Rights Movement lobbied, “Whether it is on the basis of race, ethnicity, or language, exclusion from education or participation in the inferior and separated education can reinforce societal barriers” (Kirby, 2017, pp. 175-176).

The Disability Rights Movement was formed to eliminate separation and, in 1975, influenced the passage of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) or Public Law. This law was passed as a result of the *Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Citizens (PARC) v. Pennsylvania* ruling that questioned the exclusion of students with intellectual disabilities (Kirby, 2017). The EAHCA was written to protect students with disabilities and mandated special education in public schools (Ivery & Endicott, 2018; Krewson, 2016). The EAHCA’s emphasis was to force education into becoming an inclusive endeavor by educating students with disabilities within general education classrooms (Kirby, 2017). The mandate paved the way for people with disabilities to be educated with their non-disabled peers.

Shift in Momentum: School Shootings

Mass killings, including school shootings, are not a foreign concept to Americans; rather, they have become more of a common occurrence than a rarity. The moral panic and sense of urgency surrounding mass murder have been fueled by various claims that mass murder, and mass shootings, in particular, are reaching epidemic proportions. According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the United States experienced 50 active shooter incidents in 21 states in 2016 and 2017, as opposed to 40 in 20 states in 2014 and 2015. Within those 50 active shooter incidents in 2016 and 2017, the death total was 943 casualties, excluding the shooter, compared to 2014 and 2015, with 231 casualties (Clark et al., 2019). Many of these incidents were “ruminated upon and planned in detail” (O’Donnell, 2015, p. 475) and resulted in extensive

destruction, injury, or death, creating an unprecedented community disruption and individual trauma (Sloan et al., 1994). Incidents such as school shootings, regardless of magnitude, alarm the public because of the unwavering expectation that children will be physically safe from harm when sent to school.

The polarizing moment for school shooting prevention came in April 1999, when two high school seniors at Columbine High School committed what was, at the time, the most severe mass school shooting to occur on American soil (Jonson, 2017). The unfortunate challenge for lawmakers, law enforcement, school personnel, and families is that the relative rarity of violent school attacks, coupled with the complexity of each incident, makes it difficult to draw comparisons between events and test precautionary measures for deterring such violence (Gibbs, 2014). Subsequently, the threat of emergency crises calls for educational institutions to develop school safety security plans to prevent or mitigate crisis events. Despite the undeniable need for plans to prevent and prepare, lawmakers and the United States Department of Education had only recommended and not mandated emergency management plans (Rinaldi, 2016).

Rinaldi (2016) discovered that “no federal agency, central authority, national policy center, information clearinghouse, center for model practices, research center, or educational institution was dedicated solely to school campus safety and security” (p. 4), placing the onus upon states and district leadership to design safety plans and protocols. In 2007, the U.S. Government Accountability Office (USGAO) issued a national survey and discovered that 64% of states had instituted their own laws or policies necessitating K-12 institutions to have some form of an emergency management plan, and a number of these plans did not provide procedural recommendations (USAGO, 2007a; USAGO, 2007b). The survey further pin-pointed that school emergency management plans contained various and sundry content, many plans did not address

the safety needs of special needs students, and a significant number of schools elected not to train alongside first responders nor provide proficient training to implement the safety management plan regularly (Rinaldi, 2016).

School Safety Procedures Measures

In the summer of 1999, shortly after the Columbine High School incident, the U.S. Department of Education partnered with the U.S. Secret Service to address issues related to violent school attacks. The study was titled *Safe School Initiative* (2002, as cited in Vossekuik et al., 2002). A key feature of the Safe School Initiative was its focus on “targeted” school violence and the study’s adaptation of earlier assassination research conducted by the U.S. Secret Service, examining incidents of school-based attacks. The term “targeted violence” was a term that evolved from the Secret Service’s *Exceptional Case Study Project* (1992, as cited in Vossekuik et al., 2002), the five-year study focused on the behavior of individuals who attempted or carried out lethal attacks on prominent public figures or public officials (Vossekuik et al., 2002). The Exceptional Case Study Project defined targeted violence as any incident of violence where a known attacker selects a specific target ahead of their violent onslaught (Fein et al., 1995).

The Safe School Initiative’s objective was to search for information that could have been obtained prior to an attack and then analyzed and evaluated to produce an accurate, factual target school attacks knowledge base (Vossekuik et al., 2002). The knowledge was used to help American communities formulate policies and strategies aimed at preventing school attacks. The U.S. Secret Service and the U.S. Department of Education, in tandem, released the study’s results in a document titled “The Final Report and Findings of the Safe School Initiative: Implications for the Prevention of School Attacks in the United States” (Vossekuik et al., 2002). The collaborative work between the two government agencies identified 10 key findings that held the

greatest value for strategy development to address the problem of targeted school violence:

1. Incidents of targeted violence at school rarely were sudden, impulsive acts.
2. Prior to most incidents, other people knew about the attacker's idea and/or plan to attack.
3. Most attackers did not threaten their targets directly prior to advancing the attack.
4. There is no accurate or useful "profile" of students who engaged in targeted school violence.
5. Most attackers engaged in some behavior prior to the incident that caused others concern or indicated a need for help.
6. Most attackers had difficulty coping with significant losses or personal failures. Moreover, many had considered or attempted suicide.
7. Many attackers felt bullied, persecuted or injured by others prior to the attack.
8. Most attackers had access to and had used weapons prior to the attack.
9. In many cases, other students were involved in some capacity.
10. Despite prompt law enforcement responses, most shooting incidents were stopped by means other than law enforcement intervention (Vossekuik et al., 2002, p. 11-12).

Tradition Lockdown

Nationally, most states and school districts have been applying either one of the two competing paradigms of active shooter drills: traditional lockdown and multi-option response (Jonson et al., 2020). The first approach, traditional lockdown, is where students, faculty, and staff are relocated into a locked classroom or other secured locations. Once secured, the individuals follow a five-step procedural plan:

1. Turn off lights.

2. Move to an area farthest from doors and windows.
3. Minimize physical exposure.
4. Keep calm and quiet.
5. Remain for an all-clear from a credible source.

After the Columbine incident, traditional lockdowns had become the nation's most commonly used practice.

Multi-Option Approach

The second paradigm in response to an active school shooter, the multi-option approach, began to draw national attention from school leaders as federal, state, and private organizations precariously evaluated many school shooting events. Jonson et al. (2020) revealed that these agencies, in tandem, recommend a multi-option approach over the traditional lockdown response (Jonson et al., 2018, 2020). The findings from their study provided three essential recommendations authorized by “the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, International Association of Chiefs of Police and Bureau of Justice Assistance, Ohio Attorney General School Safety Task Force, U.S. Department of Education, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, and Office of Safe and Healthy Students, New York City Police Department, and ALICE Training Institute” (Jonson et al., 2020, p. 155). The recommendations were

1. Flee the scene, if at all possible.
2. If unable to flee the scene, barricade in a room or area with surrounding items (e.g., desks, tables, chairs) to prevent access of the populated area from the shooter.
3. As a final resort, distract the shooter by throwing objects and/or bevy the gunman (Jonson et al., 2020).

A highly utilized multi-option plan, ALICE (Alert, Lockdown, Inform, Counter, and

Evacuate), was issued by the ALICE Training Institute in response to the 1999 Columbine High School shooting (Jonson et al., 2020). The preparatory plan was created by former police officer Greg Crane and his wife, Lisa Crane, a former school principal, in 2001 (Jonson et al., 2018). ALICE's national growth transpired after the 2012 massacre at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut. According to Jonson et al. (2020), the plan has been utilized in about 4,000 school districts and 3,500 police departments. Greg Crane, ALICE's creator, believed that schools place all children in danger if they teach them to be static targets. Contrary to traditional lockdown methods, which recommend simply locking the classroom door, ALICE encourages barricading the room. Barricades formed with items such as tables, desks, shelves, and chairs make the room more difficult for the assailant to enter, forcing them to move on and, ultimately, saving many lives (Jonson, 2017).

School Safety Procedures Involving Vulnerable Populations

The emotional impact of the Sandy Hook Elementary massacre was intensified by the promptness of the news reports, as local news reporters and cameramen exposed the vulnerability and helplessness of elementary-age children who were being safely evacuated from the embattled school building. Although the addition of active shooter scenario drills to the regimen of traditional safety drills (e.g., fire, tornado) may be an appropriate approach to the threat of school shootings, small-scale data are available to indicate fewer fatalities, improved preparedness, or the reduction of unmeasurable emotions (e.g., fear, panic) among students and staff (Moore-Petinak et al., 2020). Through the lens of a preventative scope, districts have transitioned from the traditional campus-level practices of natural disaster drills (e.g., hurricane, tornado, fire) to more of an incident-specific student protection routine—shelter-in-place, perimeter lockdowns, and intruder drills—because natural disasters do not occur specifically to

kill people but active shooters do (Worthington et al., 2021). Unfortunately, these improvements were not created from a campus perspective. However, as researchers Embury et al. (2019) explained, “because school-wide and district general emergency plans may not take into account individual learning needs, physical differences, medical, or emotional needs of individual students, students with significant disabilities are at a greater risk in the event of a serious emergency at school” (p. 3). By excluding the campus-level voice, districts have developed a blanket provision to protect all children without the consideration of its special education population.

Theoretical Framework

Two theoretical frameworks are the foundation for this study: disability theory and critical theory. The first, disability theory, has been interpreted and defined through recent scholarship within several different models. For the purpose of this study, the dissertation was framed by two models: medical and social (Siebers, 2011). In Sieber’s (2011) research, the medical model focused on physical differences (i.e., blindness, deafness, the inability of extremity use) with the intent to normalize society. Bernal and Roca (2016) articulated the medical model as a tool to categorize disabled individuals as pathological and incomplete, who, over time, become social deviants by biological determination. For decades, the medical model suggested that people with disabilities could contribute to society but only to the extent that they had been successfully rehabilitated by normalized standards. The normalization process of the 20th century was conducted within the confines of isolated institutions where people who had been diagnosed were viewed as mere medical objects (Bernal & Roca, 2016).

Contrary to the medical model, Great Britain developed a model that seemingly focused on the environmental barriers naturally created by disability, i.e., the social model (Bernal &

Roca, 2016; Dokumaci, 2019). In Kirby's (2017) study, the social model acknowledges that many people with disabilities are wheelchair-bound but emphasizes that wheelchair-bound individuals need access to more ramps to participate successfully within society. Considering the social model through the framework of education, classrooms and school buildings should be identified as societal environments, and according to the mandate within the All-Handicapped Children Act of 1975 and the Individuals with Disabilities Act of 1990, schools are required to provide education to students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment and through the support written within the student's individual education plan (IEP; Idol, 2006).

The second theoretical framework utilized in this study was critical theory. Critical theory is a portion of a worldview that advocates imperativeness for both self and others (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2002). Patton (2002) described critical theory as a construct of the "orientational framework," which centralizes how injustices and experiences shape an individual's conception of reality and not merely attempts to study and understand society but also attempts to critique and change society. The goal of this study is to analyze recommended safety procedures and protocols provided to school districts through the scope of the disability theory.

Problem Statement

America experienced 50 active shooter incidents across 21 states in 2016 and 2017 (Clark et al., 2019); unfortunately, law enforcement has not been able to predict or prevent these traumatic incidents from occurring. School safety has become a priority for educator leadership for quite some time. However, the difficulty that lawmakers encounter is the wide range of behaviors, program initiatives, and risk management efforts involved to ensure that all school children can achieve their full potential in the safest of environments (Cowell & McDonald,

2018). Coincidentally, a national model for school-based emergency plans has not been universally identified, which leaves many school districts inadequately fit to keep the student population safe in the event a school shooting were to occur on campus (Stough et al., 2018).

The increase in school shootings ought to be a subsequent warning sign to school officials that school-wide procedures and emergency plans ought to be revisited and likely revamped to encapsulate the needs of all students, including those individual students with significant disabilities (Embury et al., 2019). Programs (i.e., special education) need to be included in the drafting of school safety plans and preparation due to the complexity of limitations and disabilities possessed by many students on campus. Disabilities can be categorized into four subgroups: intellectual, physical, mental illness, and sensory disabilities. Many, if not all, can be found on nearly every campus across the country (Stankovska et al., 2015) and, at the state level, should be considered when developing a campus safety plan.

This safety concern can be traced back to the Disability Rights Movement (Kirby, 2017), which fought for students with disabilities to be educated with the general population to the fullest extent possible. The movement may have inadvertently increased a school district's liability with the lack of procedural preparedness. Accounts from the Columbine High (Colorado), Santa Fe High (Texas), and Sandy Hook Elementary (Connecticut) school shootings have gripped American headlines for the past 17 years. These three mass shootings, which resulted in a combined loss of 71 innocent lives, riveted the country and forever changed the educational landscape in the United States (Martaindale & Blair, 2019). Strengths from the researcher's findings included legal mandates to educate students with disabilities through the work of the Americans with Disabilities Act (Blanck, 2019) and the leading school action plans that districts employ in a good faith attempt to function safely. Research shows that the

reconsideration of both a school's safety protocols and action plans by state legislatures occurs as an antecedent to a school tragedy (Stough et al., 2018). These action plans include two responses to school shootings: traditional lockdown (e.g., shelter-in-place) and multi-option (e.g., ALICE). These two action plans have been implemented across the country (Kupchik et al., 2015).

The two historical cases that laid the foundation for the rights of students with disabilities, *Brown v. Board of Education* and *Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Citizens (PARC) v. Pennsylvania*, mandated schools to allow school-aged children, regardless of disability, to gain access to education with their peers (Kirby, 2017) and have subsequently placed them in harm's way. The safety of all children must be the school district's priority, with specific preparations made for students with significant mental and physical disabilities. Federal education policy, school boards, and campuses continue to develop the normalcy of special education within the school system; however, a government-issued survey addressing public school safety plans did not identify any school safety plans that included specifications for students with disabilities. Ironically, statutes issued by the state refer only to plans at the school district level and do not require districts to produce individualized emergency plans (Elliott, 2015). Campuses nationwide leave their special education population vulnerable in the event of an active shooter (Ponsford, 2016). Although tragedy has not struck a campus that involved special-needs students, schools must become proactive to anticipate the challenges that only intensify when disadvantaged and vulnerable individuals are involved.

The lack of guidance necessitates a study that considers the safety and well-being of the campuses' most vulnerable populations. However, there are individuals on campus that work directly with the special-needs population who alter district-designed plans to meet the disabled individual's needs, and their safety adjustments should be documented for future safety

consideration. The work will make school leadership at all levels aware of their current campus's safety plans regarding school shootings and earmark the deficiencies identified by special education teachers that could compromise the safety of the special-needs population. School leaders should make immediate adjustments to rectify any potential pitfalls identified within the campus's adopted safety plan. The lack of preparation, albeit unintentional, does not negate the fact that students with disabilities require specialized actions on the part of the campus safety plan.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this case study was to describe the statewide policies that address safety measures and the limited considerations for vulnerable student populations in regard to an active school shooter scenario on campus. The intent was to discover what transpires within a school building and classroom setting and what additional procedures special education teachers and campus administration implement to protect students with severe disabilities during active shooter drills. At this stage in the research, the safety and well-being of the campuses' most vulnerable populations will be generally defined as students with severe disabilities (Kay, 2019).

Overview of Methodology

Active shooters and shootings on school grounds have become a topic of interest for qualitative research studies. The expanse of qualitative research methods allows investigators to develop studies through survey, experimental, and correlational research designs to test varied hypotheses and establish relationships between variables across populations (Mills & Gay, 2019). Furthermore, Creswell and Poth (2018) identified bounded qualitative case study research as an approach that provides research designers with a multi-faceted exploration of complex issues in their real-life settings. Bounded qualitative case study research offers descriptions of

sampled populations' perceived experiences through in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observations, interviews, and documents), reports a case description, and identifies case themes. This section briefly outlines the research design, research questions, data collection, and procedures utilized to explore school teachers' and campus administrators' safety planning for students with disabilities regarding an active school shooting.

Research Questions

The central research questions guiding this bounded case study aided in eliciting information from special education teachers and campus administrators who have first-hand experience with the district and state-provided safety procedural plans. To examine interviewees' data on school safety preparation for students with disabilities, two theoretical frameworks, disability theory (Bernal & Roca, 2016; Siebers, 2011) and critical theory (Patton, 2002), served as the model to inform researchers about what was being studied and operationalize research questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Mills & Gay, 2019). More notably, connecting this qualitative research study's central questions to theoretical frameworks supported the researcher's discernment of participants' revealing data through a lens that substantiated the explored phenomenon. Therefore, the central research questions that contributed to exploring school shooting safety plans for vulnerable populations for this qualitative research study comprised the following: How do active shooter preparedness and emergency management plans differentiate for students with severe disabilities? and What modifications to the broad-based safety plan are special education teachers making to keep their students safe?

Research Design

In this study, the intent was to discover what transpires within a school building and classroom setting and what additional procedures both special education teachers and campus

administration implement to protect severely disabled students during active shooter drills. The goal of this qualitative case study was to uncover a possible understanding of the central questions. Participants in this study from several different campuses within one mid-size school district in North Texas were involved as participants in this study. The study's volunteer subjects were special education teachers and administrators from elementary, junior high, and high school levels. The data consist of interviews and archival documents, such as district-level emergency protocols already established related to the case. Data were analyzed in the form of a narrative text that described the subjects' experiences with state-level policies adopted by their campus for disaster preparedness and emergency management regarding active shooters.

Data Collection

All data gathered from participant resources were collected with permission from participants and in full compliance with Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines. Purposeful sampling for the case study included emergency protocols already established (e.g., district-provided safety documents, campus-based safety documents) and interviews. Nine interviewees participated in the study—six special education teachers and three campus administrators—to generate primary data on the implementation of current school shooter safety plans and the ability or inability to protect students with severe disabilities on campus.

Procedures

The dissertation featured several mid-to-large size North Texas school districts as the subject of the study. Participants included nine individuals from five separate districts: special education teachers and campus administrators from the four educational levels (elementary, intermediate, middle school, and high school) embodied the study's sample size.

In accordance with qualitative research procedures (Creswell & Poth, 2018), multiple data sources were collected. Data utilized in this dissertation consisted of interview data consisting of nine thirty-minute audio semi-structured interviews. The interview data were triangulated by the following: (a) participant archival documents or campus-provided safety procedural documents (safety handbooks, safety signage, and safety training manuals), observation of a special education teacher through an active shooter drill, and field notes (a minimum of two fifteen-minute field-based observations); (b) district-provided safety procedural documents; and (c) state and federal safety procedural guidelines.

The semi-structured interviews were conducted in a distraction-free locale that is more advantageous for the interviewee. The interview was audiotaped and transcribed into a digital interview transcript and provided to each participant for authenticity review. The researcher utilized an interview protocol to assist with clarity and cohesiveness. Handwritten notes were taken throughout the interview to extend questions and as the researcher's personal notes for further investigation.

Overview of Analyses

Data analysis was conducted following Creswell and Miller's (2000) recommendations to ensure the data set's reliability and validity. Before becoming immersed in data analysis, the investigator examined interviewees' transcripts for accuracy during data collection, which were verified for accuracy by the participant. The investigator reviewed transcripts for emerging themes by reading and rereading each transcript with fidelity before utilizing open coding to identify relevant themes associated with the studied phenomenon. Three themes emerged following multiple open coding trials using within-case and cross-case analyses and a debriefing

review of thematic analyses with this study's methodologist. Lastly, the researcher developed a completed codebook outlining data associated with the studied phenomena.

Limitations

This study has distinctive limitations. One limitation of this bounded case study was the limited sampling available for the study. During the purposeful sampling process, the investigator attempted to locate school districts willing to participate in the study. The researcher contacted several school districts in the North Texas region; however, due to the nature and severity of the school shooting phenomenon, no school district would agree to participate in the study. Consequently, interviewees selected to participate in the study were educators, special education teachers, and campus administrators, either known by the researcher or referred to by an associate of the principal investigator. Most notably, all participants represented several metropolitan school districts in North Texas and may have been similar in regards to gender, age, and educational experience when compared to other schools in Texas. The results may not necessarily be generalizable to the field of school safety for vulnerable populations in all other schools.

Definition of Key Terms

The following words and phrases are key terms for the study:

- **armed assailant:** an armed person who attempts to use deadly force on others, typically in a confined and populated area (Blair & Schweit, 2014).
- **active shooter:** An active shooter is an individual who aggressively engages in killing or attempting to kill people in an area of a reasonable population with the use of a firearm (Blair & Schweit, 2014).

- **disability:** a physical or mental impairment that subsequently limits an individual from participating in major life activities (Kay, 2019).
- **emergency operation plans:** An emergency operation plan is a system of procedural guidelines utilized by school-appointed agents (administrators, faculty, and staff) in the event of a major crisis situation (Hughes, 2019).
- **individualized education plan (IEP):** an individualized educational program designed to meet the child's unique needs (Krewson, 2016).
- **mass shooting:** a multiple-homicide incident involving four or more victims murdered by firearms within a single event and in one or multiple close proximity locations (Jonson, 2017).
- **medical model:** "Individual defect lodged in the person, a defect that must be cured or eliminated if the person is to achieve full capacity as a human being" (Siebers, 2011, p. 3).
- **school crisis:** a sudden, uncontrollable, and drastically negative situation that has the potential to burden the entire school community (Steeves et al., 2017).

Significance

The proposed case study examines the comprehensiveness of a school district's emergency plans and includes the accounts of special education teachers' adjustments to the policy in order to meet the needs of the campuses' most vulnerable populations. Though there have been many anecdotal national reports from states on emergency planning and preparedness in the event of an active shooter, such reports have relied primarily on surveys of administrators and teachers, but few consider the individual needs of disabled students. Since the early 2000s, several studies have been conducted after the Columbine High School shooting (Hawkins et al.,

2004); however, there have been no case studies reported in the literature that focus on modifications made by special educators to the broad-based emergency plans for children with disabilities. These current protective measures could potentially serve as a proactive and resourceful update to the universal safety protocol currently used by school districts that disregard the individual needs of students with disabilities.

Summary

In this chapter, the researcher discussed the background of the case study of a school district's active shooter preparation and protocols for students with severe disabilities. The chapter highlighted historical litigation cases that helped guide and advance the American education system to include students with disabilities through the Education of All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 and further discussed the shift in momentum caused by the school shooting crisis. The chapter briefly included the intricacies of the study through its discussion of the theoretical framework, problem statement, purpose statement, methodology, and analytical approach of the researcher. Chapter 2 will review studies of school shootings and response plans.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this case study was to describe the statewide policies that address safety measures and the consideration of vulnerable student populations regarding an active school shooter scenario on campus. The intent was to discover what transpires within a school building and classroom setting and what additional procedures special education teachers and campus administrators implement to protect severely disabled students during active shooter drills. At this stage in the research process, the safety and well-being of the campuses' most vulnerable populations, defined as students with severe disabilities, must be reconsidered (Kay, 2019).

The researcher critically reviewed the published literature concerning school preparedness response to emergency events plans. In this chapter, the researcher has provided a brief overview of the school shooting crisis in America, including research analyzing data from school shootings and the lack of systematic data collection, followed by a literature review of research and the current state of America's plan to protect students and staff in schools across the country from active shooter scenarios. The final section of the research literature review summarizes research associated with safety procedures that specifically address the needs of vulnerable campus populations and students with disabilities within the overarching safety initiatives.

The Achilles Heel of the American Education System: School Shootings Crisis

School safety and the response to school shootings have become the new crises in American schools. According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the United States experienced 90 active shooter incidents in 21 states between 2014 and 2017 (Clark et al., 2019). Between the years of 2016 and 2017, there were 50 active shooter incidents with 943 casualties (221 deaths and 722 wounded) compared to 2014 and 2015, which had 231 casualties (92 deaths and 139 wounded), but the data did not include the shooters (Clark et al., 2019). Incidents, such as school shootings, regardless of magnitude, alarm the public because of the expectation that children are physically safe while they are at school.

School Shootings

In April 1999, two high school students from Columbine High School, outside Denver, Colorado, perpetrated one of America's deadliest school massacres. Unlike prior school shootings, the Columbine High School event was broadcast nationwide; the live footage showed children evacuating the scene, SWAT officers canvassing the school, and victims fleeing the scene (Jonson, 2017). Nearly 15 years following Columbine, Adam Lanza committed a mass shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary in Newtown, Connecticut (Wombacher et al., 2018). The massacre resulted in 26 deaths, 20 of whom were elementary-age children. Ultimately, Lanza took his own life by turning the gun on himself in one of the classrooms. Reports indicated that Lanza entered the building armed with handguns, extra ammunition, and access to other firearms in his vehicle parked outside the school (Wombacher et al., 2018).

However, another notable mass school shooting occurred in the small Texas town of Santa Fe at Santa Fe High on May 18, 2018. Dimitrios Pagourtzis, a disgruntled 17-year-old Santa Fe High School student, attacked students and teachers in two separate classrooms within

the campus's art complex at approximately 7:40 a.m. (Martaindale & Blair, 2019). Witnesses indicated that he taunted victims before shooting them, shot through closet doors where students hid for safety, and systematically progressed between the two classrooms and a ceramics lab. The shooting left 10 people dead and 13 others wounded (Martaindale & Blair, 2019).

The majority of the nation's attention has been focused on the response at the federal and state levels; however, the fact remains that schools directly feel the pressure from local stakeholders (e.g., parents and community members) to respond swiftly to these types of events. The public views campuses as having the autonomy to make changes to security policies and procedures in the wake of nationally prominent school shootings (Curran et al., 2020). The unfortunate challenge for lawmakers, law enforcement, school personnel, and families is that the complexity of each violent school attack makes it difficult to draw comparisons between events and test precautionary measures for deterring such violence (Gibbs, 2014). Subsequently, the threat of emergency crises calls for educational institutions to develop school safety and security plans to prevent or mitigate crisis events.

Are Schools Safe or Not?

Despite the increasing number of school attacks reported, the probability is low of an incident occurring; however, school shootings have become a significant source of stress and concern for millions of educators, parents, and children living in the United States of America (American Psychological Association, 2019). Previous studies and surveys on the phenomenon of targeted school shootings have focused on federal and local agencies' attempts to understand what target violence is and how to predict and stop the catastrophic event prior to occurring (Rinaldi, 2016). Following several school shootings (e.g., Columbine High, Sandy Hook Elementary), calls for changes in school district safety policies became more prevalent. School

officials swiftly acted by hiring armed officers, installing metal detectors, restricting school building access, and training individuals within and outside the school building to respond to active shooters (Jonson, 2017).

However, many of the implemented safety decisions were not evidence-based, and Jonson (2017) sought to test the effectiveness of safety measures by examining the empirical evidence surrounding standard safety measures. School security (e.g., school resource officers [SROs], metal detectors) is an expensive undertaking for school districts to endure and risk the potential of educational program cuts to offset the rash decision. Unfortunately, Jonson claimed that these measures are irresponsible investments and are not evidence-based decisions. Taking a proactive approach to school security and safety requires school leaders to make recommendations that align with evidence-based research to assist in developing policies and procedures that protect schools and maintain an environment conducive to learning (Jonson, 2017).

Curran et al. (2020) studied the linkage of high-profile active shooter events to short-term changes in security approaches at the campus level by exploring the relationship between the Columbine shooting in 1999 and principals' reports of using specific security measures and practices. The study earmarked the Columbine massacre as an impetus for the change in how schools approach safety and security; however, the amount of academic research on the impact of high-profile school shootings on school security is limited. The researchers sought to answer the question, "How do schools' use of security measures and practices differ between the period immediately preceding a high-profile school shooting and the period immediately following such an event?" (Curran et al., 2020, p. 9). Curran et al. took a binary approach to develop a data set from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study–Kindergarten (ECLS-K) administered by the

National Center for Education Statistics Institute for Education Sciences. The study began during the 1998-1999 school year and followed a nationally representative set of kindergarten students throughout their schooling until the eighth grade. Additionally, the researchers administered a school-wide survey as part of the ECLS-K, which was completed by the elementary principal (or their designee), to gain a broader perspective on safety. The researchers utilized ordinary least square regression with a robust set of observable covariates to explore the reporting differences in provisionary measures used at the treatment school. These sets included campuses that completed the ECLS-K survey post-Columbine to the comparison schools versus those who completed the ECLS-K survey pre-Columbine.

The findings in Curran et al.'s (2020) report indicated that both sets of campuses are equal in expectation; schools were more likely to lock the building exits and implement sign-in procedures for visitors regardless if the Columbine incident did not occur. Curran et al. found that following a highly publicized school shooting, much of the public's attention directly focused on the federal and local levels; however, school districts at the local level have implemented changes to their safety plans in response to school shootings. These quick adjustments were the less expensive and only minor procedural adjustments. Data indicated a p-score uptick of .01 in security presence (e.g., SRO) at the campus levels; notably, these changes were not necessarily in response to the particular elements of a recent school shooting.

Lack of Systematic Data Collection

The challenge for street-level bureaucrats (e.g., lawmakers, school personnel, advocates) is that violent school attacks, coupled with the complexity of each incident, make it difficult to draw comparisons between events and test precautionary measures for deterring such violence (Gibbs, 2014). Here lies the juxtaposition: the number of mass shootings has increased, and so

has the number of articles focusing on school shooting incidents—from one article in 1999 to nine in 2018 (Curran et al., 2020). This increased number of polarizing events has led to a rise in publications across research disciplines contributing to the wealth of knowledge. However, with the crossing of disciplines comes a wide range of terminology variation, conceptualization, and differing methods of identifying and collecting data on mass shootings, creating a great deal of confusion and seemingly contradictory facts (Curran et al., 2020; Kim et al., 2021). The inconsistencies across literature have become problematic for the media, as leading experts disagree on the most basic essential element of the school shooting phenomenon—the number of mass shootings.

One challenge facing effective policy solutions to school shootings, regardless of the bureaucratic level, is the limited understanding of the problem. Although research on school shootings has escalated over the years, much of the related literature is challenging to navigate due to variations across data sets and the multiple definitions of a school shooting across disciplines (Freilich et al., 2022, p. 95). As previously mentioned, the magnitude of attention given to the mass violence phenomenon has produced a surge of interest by academics and journalists alike in researching more pressing social issues (e.g., school shootings, mass violence) than ever before (Kim et al., 2021). Since the Columbine School Shooting in 1999, and due to the growth of massacres over the years (Zhang et al., 2016), researchers have treated mass shootings as a phenomenon related to, but also distinctly different from, other types of mass violence. Kim et al.'s (2021) study focused on outlining current trends of published scholarly research on mass shooting articles within the United States between 1999 and 2018.

Kim et al. (2021) systematically reviewed 73 peer-reviewed journal articles on mass shootings and found a drastic increase from one article published between 1999 and 2013 to 19

articles published between 2014 and 2018. These published writings comprised various research domains (e.g., psychology, criminology) to understand the statistical relationships between mass shootings and other variables. However, the data could not argue that the increase in massacres led to more publications resulting in more scholars across disciplines paying attention to mass shootings. Additionally, the researchers found various methods and methodologies throughout the 73 peer-reviewed journal articles examined; over 70% of the publications utilized quantitative methods, and 61% were secondary data analysis projects. Kim et al. found that research on mass shootings tended to rely heavily on secondary data known as open-source, such as newspaper articles, government-issued documents, and other items. The researchers indicated, “This could be problematic, as open-source data are susceptible to reliability issues or conflicting information” (Kim et al., 2021, p. 7). Finally, data from the empirical literature review indicated that 55% of the studies provided policy suggestions and preventative recommendations.

Analysis of U.S. School Shootings

Paradice (2017) constructed a study that analyzed a data set of American school shootings over 175 years. Before this study, no other researcher had undertaken an analytical approach that focused on describing school shootings in an educational setting over a long time. In his search to identify reputable peer-reviewed scholarly publications, Paradice found many articles related to school shootings; however, some articles focused on firearm possession on campus, and others were engrossed in some of the most violent events in U.S. history.

Historically, mass murder and mass shooting are linked; however, Paradice's (2017) study analyzed both as separate entities. The term mass murder event is an event in which at least four people died, and a group shooting is an event in which at least four people were injured or killed (Gerald et al., 2016). A mass school shooting situation is when an intentional plan is developed

and executed by one or more people to injure or kill four or more people with guns on school grounds. These events can occur during the school day or a school-sponsored event on school grounds (Katsiyannis et al., 2018, p. 2564).

The data set created for Paradise's (2017) study included 343 events dating from November 12, 1840, through December 31, 2015. The data set had a thorough list of 27 data items (e.g., number of shooters, shooter's age, related to location, and deaths) for each event. Of the 343 events included, 30 of these events occurred before January 1, 1990, and the majority of shooting events happened in high schools (168 events), followed by university shooting events (77), middle school shooting events (25), and elementary school shooting events (18).

The data set from Paradise's (2017) study included 55 shooting events that transpired at the schoolhouse, a term commonly used in the late 1800s. From the 343 shooting event resulted in 558 shooting injuries and 420 shooting deaths at educational institutions since 1840. Paradise's (2017) study excluded the shooter from all calculations related to deaths or injuries to maintain transparency and an unbiased approach regarding pressing social issues (e.g., gun control advocacy). Within the data set, 20 mass murder events resulted in 180 deaths and 208 injured individuals in total; the researchers noted that, although the number of mass murder shooting events only accounted for 6% of the shooting events, they accounted for 43% of the deaths and 37% of the injuries in the data.

Lastly, a general perception of shooters involved in mass killings ended in suicide; however, in 11 shooter events, only 55% ended when the shooter committed a successful suicide (Paradice, 2017). Another misconception is that the shooter desires a shoot-out with law enforcement, but data showed that only two events ended with responders killing the shooter. The data provided insights into potential underlying factors regarding mass murder events in an

objective manner that policymakers and educational leaders can use when designing school safety measures.

Although high-profile school shootings have sensibly forced a spike in public concern (Hughes et al., 2019), these events are rare at elementary schools, with only two events listed within the data set (Paradice, 2017). Unfortunately, these two events resulted in 31 deaths and 34 injuries; the Sandy Hook Elementary school shooting in 2012, one of the many deadly massacres in American history, accounted for 26 of the 31 deaths (Perkins, 2018).

The American School Shooting Study

The American School Shooting Study (TASSS) was conducted by Freilich et al. (2022) to examine the United States school shooting crisis closely. This study described shooting events at educational institutions in an objective manner. The researchers did not seek to advocate for or against specific policies (e.g., firearm possessions) while also addressing research limitations and contributing to the literature by creating TASSS. This national, open-source database incorporated all publicly known shootings in the United States on K-12 school grounds resulting in at least one injury. The researchers' motivation for the study was to highlight the importance of methodological innovation needed for research of hard-to-reach populations (e.g., vulnerable). The researchers were hopeful the investigation would become a reservoir of information for both policy and decision-makers to utilize wisely (Freilich et al., 2022).

A couple of findings from Freilich et al.'s (2022) study were that mass shootings encompass unprecedented acts that occur on school grounds. The researchers performed a stringent triangulation process to ensure the validity and accuracy of the coding before the data was included in the TASSS. The final coding stage assessed the data through a high rater agreeability using Cohen's kappa coefficient. Freilich et al. mentioned that a 15% sample of

cases quantifies the degree to which multiple independent coders differed in their interpretations of open-source materials and coding instructions. The results indicated that nearly all variables examined in the study contained a high level of agreement ($\kappa = .80$ and above). The researchers found that, although most attacks target high schools, shootings that occur at elementary schools are more deadly. Notably, adults (e.g., parents) were nearly four times more likely than adolescents to target an elementary school. Although the researchers questioned the possibility that elementary school shootings were more deadly due to the vulnerable population present (e.g., age, developmental stage), the results did not indicate that. Data showed that two-thirds of elementary school shootings classify as a workplace or domestic violence, which has premediated or victim-targeting implications. Another recommendation is to move on from the one-size-fits-all approach to school violence prevention, as it has become insufficient in addressing these forms of destructive violence. However, disaggregating the data on school shootings as a response to the threats, harms, types, and locations would be a more practical approach (Freilich et al., 2022). The findings from Freilich et al.'s study can assist in developing more refined and targeted policy interventions for policymakers, schools, and communities.

Plan to Protect

The development and maintenance of a safe environment for students to learn have become priorities for American school districts. Following the Columbine High School massacre, the media attention surrounding school shooting events has grown in coverage, causing escalated fear and moral panic in American communities. The balancing act of awareness, security, and safety is often viewed differently by those affected (e.g., teachers and parents). This reality urges policymakers, legislators, and school administrators to develop and implement safety measures (Jonson, 2017).

In response to the school shooting phenomenon, the U.S. Secret Service and the U.S. Department of Education attempted to address issues related to violent school attacks and provide safety recommendations at the national level through the study Safe School Initiative (Vossekuik et al., 2002). The study's objective was to search for information that could have been obtained before an attack and then analyze and evaluate it to produce an accurate, fact-based knowledge repository on school targets and attacks. The two agencies utilized the information collected to help American communities formulate policies and strategies to prevent school attacks.

Lockdown Recommendations

In response to the school shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary in 2012, where 20-year-old Adam Lanza drove to the nearby elementary school and killed 20 children and six adults (Blum & Jaworski, 2016), the U.S. Department of Education recommended an expansion to the lockdown-only approach for school safety. In 2014, the National Association of School Psychologists and the National Association of School Resource Officers partnered to guide school districts regarding factors to consider when developing safety protocols and plans (National Association of School Psychologists & National Association of School Resource Officers, 2017). The document incorporated input from Safe and Sound Schools: A Sandy Hook Initiative and the ALICE Training Institute, which detailed the nation's top two active shooter drill paradigms.

Traditional Lockdown

Nationally, most states and school districts have applied one of the two competing paradigms of active shooter drills: traditional lockdown or multi-option response (Jonson et al., 2020). In the first approach, traditional lockdown, students, faculty, and staff relocate to a locked

classroom or other secured locations. Once in place, the individuals follow a five-step procedural plan:

1. Turn off lights.
2. Move to an area farthest from doors and windows.
3. Minimize physical exposure.
4. Keep calm and quiet.
5. Remain for an all-clear from a credible source.

It is imperative to note that various levels of protective measures within a traditional lockdown may include a partial lockdown. An example of a partial lockdown is *shelter-in-place*, where outer perimeter doors are locked, and no permitted entry/exit during that time. After the Columbine incident, these forms of traditional lockdowns have become the nation's most commonly used practices.

Multi-Option Approach

The second paradigm in response to an active school shooter, the multi-option approach, began to draw national attention from school leaders as federal, state, and private organizations precariously evaluated many school shooting events. Jonson et al. (2020) revealed that these agencies, in tandem, recommended a multi-option approach over the traditional lockdown response (Jonson et al., 2018, 2020). The findings from their study provided three essential recommendations authorized by (a) The U.S. Department of Homeland Security, (b) the International Association of Chiefs of Police and Bureau of Justice Assistance, (c) the Ohio Attorney General School Safety Task Force, (d) U.S. Department of Education, Secondary Education, and Office of Elementary, (e) Office of Safe and Healthy Students, (f) New York City Police Department, and (g) ALICE Training Institute (Jonson et al., 2020, p. 155).

The recommendations were

1. Flee the scene if at all possible.
2. If unable to flee the scene, barricade in a room or area with surrounding items (e.g., desks, tables, chairs) to prevent access to the populated area from the shooter.
3. As a final resort, distract the shooter by throwing objects and distract the gunman (Jonson et al., 2020).

A highly utilized multi-option plan, ALICE, was issued by the ALICE Training Institute in response to the 1999 Columbine High School shooting. The initial plan was created in 2001 by former police officer Greg Crane and his wife, Lisa Crane, a former school principal (Jonson et al., 2018). ALICE's national growth occurred following the 2012 massacre in Newton, Connecticut, at Sandy Hook Elementary School. The plan is utilized by about 4,000 school districts and 3,500 police departments. Greg Crane believed that schools place all children in imminent danger if they teach them to be static targets. Unlike traditional lockdown methods, which recommend simply locking the classroom door, ALICE encourages barricading the room. Barricades formed with items such as tables, desks, shelves, and chairs make the room more difficult for the assailant to enter, forcing them to move on and, ultimately, saving many lives (Jonson, 2017).

Implementation

As active shooter drills become a normal occurrence in the American education system, the crux for school leaders and street-level bureaucrats is to determine which type of drill is most effective in equipping all potential parties involved (e.g., students, teachers, and staff). The multi-option response, known for the variety of safety options during active shooting incidents, utilizes standard lockdown practices but gives the potential victim various options (e.g.,

barricading, evacuating, actively resisting a shooter) to protect themselves and others (Jonson, 2017). The study conducted by Jonson et al. (2020) compared the two competing lockdown paradigms to determine which one led to a quicker active shooter crisis resolution and resulted in greater survivability by collecting data from active simulations that best emulated an active shooter scenario. Jonson et al. substituted guns with replica Airsoft guns, which shoot plastic pellets through spring-driven pistons using compressed air. The scenario simulated a non-lethal scenario designed by the ALICE Training Institute to produce a real-life school shooting event ethically. The study consisted of 326 mixed-gender volunteers from various professions (e.g., educators, school administrators, first responders) ranging in age from 22 to 69 years, with 43 years as the mean age. The researchers separated the participants into law enforcement (i.e., military, local, state, federal) and non-law enforcement (i.e., business, education, and healthcare).

Jonson et al. (2020) found that the multi-option program, ALICE, was a more effective response for civilian survivability than the traditional lockdown response. They also mentioned that the resolution time was shorter by nearly 3 minutes with the use of ALICE techniques, a key finding due to nationally recognized events lasting multiple minutes (i.e., Columbine 50 minutes and Sandy Hook 5 minutes). “Thus, the simulations resulted in slightly faster times to resolution; perhaps since the shooter was expected by law enforcement, the vast differences between the traditional lockdown and multi-option simulations cannot be overlooked and seem close to reality” (Jonson et al., 2020, p. 162).

Steeves et al.’s (2017) study focused on Louisiana’s rural and urban school districts. The group sifted through the Louisiana state laws related to crisis management and Louisiana’s Revision Statue of 1950, which required all public schools to prepare a collaborative response plan with local first responder agencies and community members (e.g., teachers, parents).

Specific plans should include injury and trauma-preventative strategies for when a crisis occurs and outline school personnel roles during and following the crisis. The state-level statute required at least one practice drill per school year, action plans to be readily accessible to all appropriate personnel, and annual plan revision to ensure compliance and reliability. The study aimed to assess Louisiana public school staff members' perceptions of self-reported knowledge related to their campuses' crisis plan and individual school crisis experiences. Sixty-four staff members from six southeastern Louisiana public elementary schools participated in the 12-question Likert scale survey on school crises. The findings indicated that all six schools had written crisis plans, and each differed in content and comprehensiveness. Steeves et al. (2017) noted that four of the six elementary campuses included in the study were from the same urban school district, and their crisis plans were identical in content and design. School districts often utilize form structure to promote uniformity. However, these identical crisis plans did not include actual school-specific content (e.g., contact numbers and unique evacuation plans) and even included outdated contact information of former district employees. Finally, most staff members could adequately explain their roles in response to a school crisis. Some crisis plans lacked basic recommended details and policy guidelines, "such as specific procedures for evacuating special needs students" (Steeves et al., 2017, p. 576).

In 2016, Tintic School District's superintendent and program director of a small rural school district in central Utah administered the School Stakeholder Survey Regional Report to teachers and staff members (Hughes, 2019). The results revealed that 84% of those surveyed did not feel prepared to keep their students safe in crises, and members indicated a lack of direction from administration and preparation in case of an emergency. Hughes (2019) studied the perceptions of campus-level teachers and staff surrounding security and safety; preparedness for

crises could improve with greater awareness and adjustments to current practices. Thirty-seven members of the Tintic School District completed a pre-test, the School Safety and Security Survey, and a post-test following 6 weeks of training and implementation of the safety initiative between surveys. An external school security consultant implemented a district-wide safety initiative training and operational security plan. The consultant worked alongside the district's school security committee to compose solutions to school security issues, institute policies, reinforce current practices, and collaborate with semi-local first responders in creating emergency operational and reunification plans. The data analyzed showed that post-test perception scores ($M = 8.28$, $SD = 1.386$) for participants significantly ($p < .05$) improved from the pre-test scores ($M = 5.50$, $SD = 2.249$), stipulating a positive and enhanced understanding and engagement for school safety. Findings indicated a vast improvement in participants' overall experience and awareness of school safety and security practices. Finally, Hughes noted that the provided survey responses showed growth in teacher and staff members' perceptions of understanding concerning school safety and greater preparedness to manage crises.

Vulnerable Population Preparedness

The increase in school shootings should be a warning sign for school officials that campus safety procedures and crisis plans should be revisited and likely revamped to encapsulate the needs of all students. Most schools have designed crisis plans to support student safety. However, few safety programs address the campuses' most vulnerable population—students with significant disabilities (Clarke et al., 2014; Embury et al., 2019). Ethically, inclusive programs (i.e., special education) need to be included in the drafting of school safety plans and adjustments made to meet the barriers and limitations students with disabilities may face ensuring they have access to safety (Clark et al., 2019).

In Burton's (2020) study, the researcher sought to identify perceptions from eight campus administrators' lived experiences whose buildings utilized the multi-option approach. Two of the three themes focused on communication and the culture of fear. The researchers found that within the theme of communication, one participant indicated that in preparation for a drill, a campus administrator would provide support to a faculty member who uses a wheelchair by notifying him of the upcoming drill. However, that same campus avoided publicly announcing drills to the staff because one member would elect to stay at home if she became aware of a planned drill. Campus culture is paramount to the easement of fear across the campus. The data collected by the eight principals indicated that active shooter drills generate a culture of fear among the student and staff (Burton, 2020). The participants alluded to the difficult task of changing the culture of fear within a society that has normalized school shootings and adopted state and local level legislature policies to mandate schools to implement active shooter drills in schools where teacher unions are in opposition. In 2017, the American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association argued that active shooter drills, primarily the multi-option approach, are unsuccessful in enhancing school safety and consequently create fear among students and staff.

School Crisis Planning for Students with Disabilities

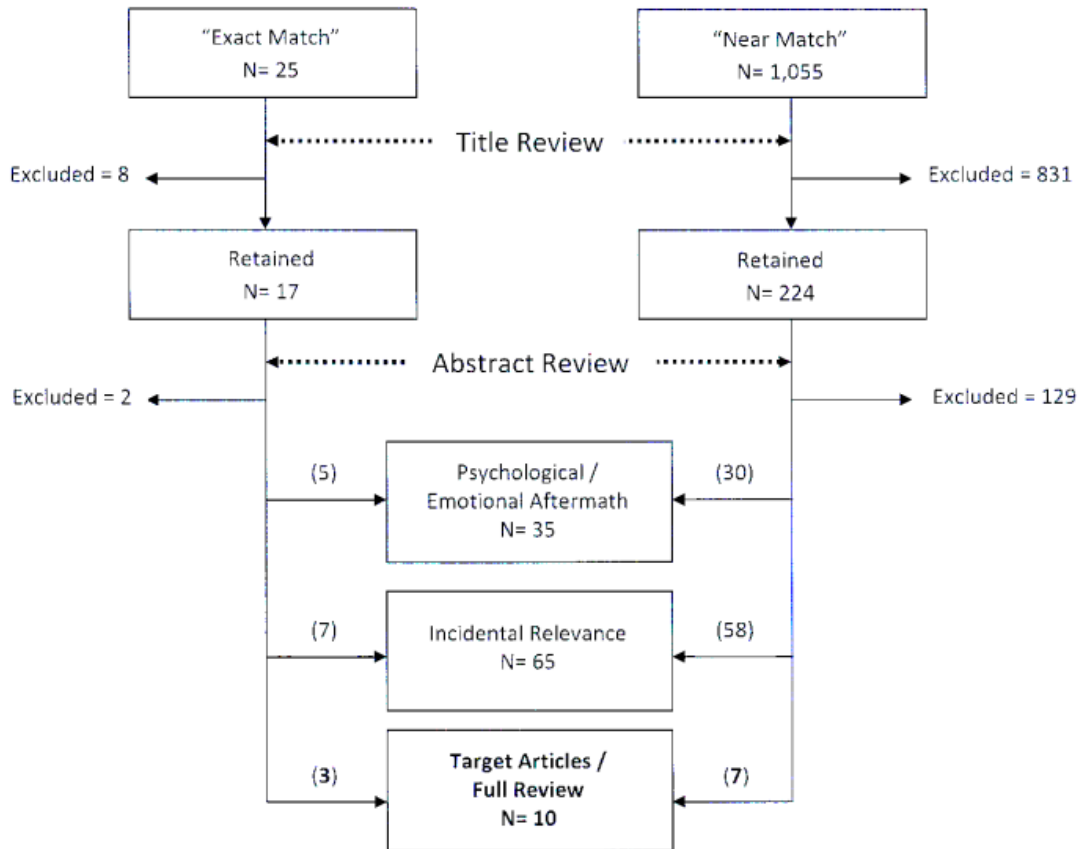
As aforementioned, there needs to be more research conducted on the reliability of school safety plans and protocol implementation, despite the controversy of including students in active shooter protocols having reached the national stage (Jonson et al., 2020). Research on plans concerning the needs of students with disabilities is nonexistent. Regardless of the absence of literature, an undeniable need exists for studies concerning the safety of vulnerable students in U.S. schools. Boon et al. (2011) critically reviewed the literature to examine published peer-

reviewed articles addressing school preparedness for contingency and disaster emergencies induced by climate change. The design of a broad and inclusive literature search utilized four databases: National Library of Medicine (MedLine), Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature (CINAHL), Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), and PsycINFO.

The researchers developed four independent search strategies, specifically designed for each database, to identify subsets addressed through the articles: (a) disasters (man and human-made); (b) policy and planning activities; (c) children with either physical, psychological, emotional, or cognitive disabilities; and (d) schools or other educational institutions. The search found that most schools had well-established evacuation plans, fewer campuses had relocation plans, and even fewer schools had lockdown plans, but no schools had planned effectively for special populations (Chung et al., 2008). Figure 1 shows Boone et al.'s (2011) screening process and results at each step (p. 231). Graham et al. (2006) noted that, of the self-reporting schools, about three-quarters of American schools have evacuation plans that incorporate provisions for children with special needs; however, almost one-third had never conducted a drill. "Our review of the literature demonstrated that whatever investment in preparedness schools have made, the most vulnerable children—those with disabilities—appear to have been neglected in those efforts" (Boon et al., 2011, p. 233).

Figure 1

Search and Screening Process Results



Note. Diagram shows the screening process and results at each step. Boon et al.'s search revealed the nature of the empirical research regarding school disaster planning for children with disabilities. From "School disaster planning for children with disabilities: A critical review of the literature," by H. J Boon, L. H. Brown, K. Tsey, R. Speare, P. Pagliano, K. Usher, and B. Clark, 2011, *International Journal of Special Education*, 26(3), p. 230. Copyright 2011 by Helen Boon.

Boon et al. (2012) looked into the growing diversity of student populations in mainstream education, a combination of abled and disabled within the general education setting, in Australian schools. The group examined the consideration of students with disabilities in

developing policies, guidelines, and safety frameworks that support emergencies and crises in Australia. The results identified several policies and statutory frameworks designed to protect the rights of students with disabilities (i.e., Disability Discrimination Act 1992, Disability Standards for Education 2005). As a whole, Australia has become more aware of the needs presented by special populations. For example, Queensland provides guidelines and templates to assist schools in developing emergency plans, and the onus solely lies on the school. Boon et al. noted that the state-provided policies and guidelines generically used the term special needs throughout the documents, which could haphazardly underserve students with severe disabilities by encompassing all vulnerable populations into one category (e.g., mentally ill, non-verbal, socioeconomic disadvantaged). Although focused on Australian schools, the results from the minimal available research do necessitate specialized emergency plans that include accommodations for students with disabilities. The study identified encouraging issues to include when formulating plans: (a) plan for a disaster, (b) plan to deal with particular disasters when they occur, (c) plan to provide emotional and educational support to students after the event, and (d) coordinate all efforts to ensure the students and staff effectively implement the plan (Boon et al., 2012).

Behavioral Skills Training

Some experts have considered using age- and ability-appropriate educational methods to teach and implement safety protocols and procedures. Dickson and Vargo (2017) sought to test behavioral skills training (BST), a standard procedure to teach children safety skills. BST, when utilized in training safety drills (i.e., fire and abduction prevention) for children, consists of four key components: (a) the experimenter provides children with instructions for the tested skill, (b) models the intended skill, (c) provides the opportunity for children to rehearse the skill, and (d)

provides feedback to the children (Miltenberger, 2012). Despite the amount of literature demonstrating BST is a valid early-childhood teaching method, the researchers conducted the study to evaluate the effectiveness of BST in teaching a group of 32 typically developing kindergarteners lockdown drill procedures. The process included randomly placing the subjects into three groups of 10 students within the lead researcher's classroom. The session was video recorded. Following the study, three campus-level administrators and three teachers viewed the recordings and completed a questionnaire regarding the importance and appropriateness of lockdown drills. The analysis of data took place in three distinct phases of the process: (a) baseline phase, (b) BST phase, and (c) post-training phase. The findings of Dickson and Vargo (2017) indicated that all students met mastery within seven sessions and could produce appropriate responses in six of the seven skills. However, all sessions took place in a calm and controlled environment, which does not appropriately depict an active shooter crisis. Results from the questionnaires from teachers and campus administrators were highly favorable, using a scale of 0 (*none*) to 3 (*significantly*). Data showed that the participants viewed lockdown drills as very important ($M = 3.0$) and appropriate ($M = 3.0$). Additionally, all participants were willing to continue using lockdown training ($M = 2.8$) and found the BST training procedure very effective ($M = 3.0$). Lastly, the group recommended future research to assess the generalization of the study's results by evaluating student response when provided with different lockdown intentions (e.g., when prompted to hide).

Garcia et al. (2016) examined the efficacy of an educational method incorporating several BSTs to teach fire safety skills to children with autism. The group studied three children with autism, ages 4 to 5 years old, to test their ability to follow one- to two-step instructions, verbally communicate, and answer basic questions. Garcia et al. utilized a four-step BST training method,

conducted daily performance measurement probes, which recorded whether safety skills were maintained, and follow-up probes to determine the retention of safety skills in the absence of training. Their findings suggested that using BTS strategies, modeling, rehearsing, and praise can be an elective instructional procedure for establishing fire safety skills for children with autism. However, the study demonstrated the efficacy of combining these three strategies for teaching fire safety. Findings from the follow-up probes were compelling, given the time-lapse between training sessions. All participants demonstrated 100% mastery of the fire safety skills.

Individual Emergency Lockdown Plans

With the increasing number of school shootings, Chung et al. (2008) analyzed national safety protocols. Most schools operate under a crisis plan that supports student safety; subsequently, some school districts potentially use inadequate emergency protocols. To encourage safety for all students, particularly students with special needs, Clarke et al. (2014) recommended that school districts consider developing individual emergency lockdown plans (IELPs) to provide procedures that meet the child's unique needs.

Clarke et al. (2014) acknowledged that no program could guarantee student safety, but general methods that do not take into account the individual's cognitive ability and physical limitations, in turn, place students at greater risk by not implementing a more personalized plan. Ironically, the idea of an IELP remains extrinsic; there has been no study to evaluate the efficacy of an individualized lockdown plan designed for students with disabilities, with Clarke et al. being the exception. Clarke et al. suggested that these plans would be incorporated within the child's IEP and addressed at the annual review and decision meeting. Schools might want to add a simple question at the end of each IEP meeting that simply asks, "Is there a need for a specific

plan for this student's individual needs if there were a crisis in the building?" (Clarke et al., 2014, p. 2).

IELPs can consider student limitations (e.g., mobility, non-verbal) and provide age-appropriate accommodations for the most vulnerable students. As with any plan, the IELP's effectiveness depends on crucial campus personnel, such as a nurse's or special education teacher's ability to properly implement the plan at a moment's notice (Embury et al., 2019).

Furthermore, collaboration among peers, teachers, and campus administrators can ensure that the vulnerable student's environmental demands (i.e., traditional lockdown approach, multi-option approach) do not exceed the child's ability to meet the demand (Boon et al., 2012). According to Embury et al. (2019), appropriate planning means that school leaders plan specifically for the range of physical, sensory, and mental capacity limitations that students with disabilities possess and becomes an imperative scenario for IEP committees to consider.

Summary

In this chapter, the researcher discussed several studies associated with the American school system's Achilles heel, the school shooting crisis, whether schools are safe, research analyzing data from school shootings, and the lack of systematic data collection. The literature review included research to explain the current state of America's plan to protect students and staff in schools across the country from active shooter situations and critically reviewed published literature concerning school preparedness to respond to emergency events. These plans to protect included two recommended approaches: traditional lockdown and multi-options. However, the National Association of School Psychologists and the National Association of School Resource Officers recommended a multi-option approach over the traditional lockdown protocol (Vossekuik et al., 2002). The final section of the literature review summarized the

research associated with safety procedures that specifically address the needs of vulnerable campus populations. The research included potential educational methodology in teaching students with disabilities safety protocols using BST (Dickson & Vargo, 2017; Garcia et al., 2016). Also, implementing IELPs (Clarke et al., 2014) for the campuses' most vulnerable populations to support the overarching approved safety initiatives.

III. METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this case study was to describe the statewide policies that address safety measures and the limited consideration of vulnerable student populations in regard to an active school shooter scenario on campus. At this stage in the research process, the safety and well-being of the campuses' most vulnerable populations were generally defined as students with severe disabilities (Kay, 2019).

Description of Research Design

A qualitative design was used for the study. Qualitative research allows for a complex topic to be explained through directly speaking with individuals who have experienced the topic being researched (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) and consists of five different designs: narrative, case study, ethnography, grounded theory, and phenomenology. All five designs were taken into consideration, and the case study was determined to be the best design for the topic of study.

The case study design offers several advantages. One advantage is that case studies allow for the collection of multiple data sources and authorize the use of primary data, which are collected by the researcher, and secondary data provided by an outside source (Merriam, 2014; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018). Multiple data sources were collected for this case study, including four current safety documents utilized in classrooms from four different North Texas school districts. The data in these documents helped discover the real safety protocols and expectations. Another advantage is that case study research is a qualitative method that requires the researcher to

explore a real-life study in context or in an actual setting (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Yin, 2003). Mills and Gay (2019) believe that case studies provide a unique perspective to research through tangible and illustrative conversations, which lead to more concrete knowledge and resonate with the reader. A case study was specifically selected because the purpose of the case study was to collect and examine data from the authentic experiences of special education teachers and campus administrators.

The current case study is collective, which incorporates researcher-conducted interviews collecting data from individuals who have experienced the same practices to gain a contextual perspective (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2003). The IDEA requires that students with disabilities be educated in the most integrated and least restrictive environment for those students as part of the Education of All Handicapped Children Act of 1975. The IDEA protects the educational rights of all students, including those with severe disabilities that impede their ability to cognitively and/or physically protect themselves. Therefore, the researcher selected special education teachers from self-contained units, the most restrictive classroom and whose population includes those with the most severe disabilities, and campus administrators to gather data on the implementation of active shooter response plans involving the most vulnerable population.

Participants

The participants were from public schools in North Texas. Six teachers and three campus administrators, who are personally known by the researcher and serve in several public school districts within the North Texas area, volunteered and were interviewed. All interviews were held at a local coffee shop, lasting about 30 minutes. The purpose of the interview was to gain the participants' perspectives on implementing the district-approved active shooter drill protocols for

vulnerable populations. The participants’ experience varied from five years to over 30 years and varied from one year to 14 years of school administration experience (see Table 1).

Table 1

Participants Professional Information

Participant Number	Years of Teaching Experience	Years of Experience in Self-Contained Unit	Years of Administration Experience
1	15	15	N/A
2	14	4	N/A
3	5	5	N/A
4	22	8	N/A
5	31	4	N/A
6	13	13	N/A
7	6	N/A	14
8	8	N/A	1
9	5	4	6

Role of Researcher

Qualitative researchers can capture human emotional experiences by collecting descriptive narratives through conducting interviews, using well-constructed, open-ended questions, and collecting data (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Mills & Gay, 2019; Yang et al., 2018). Throughout the interview process, the researcher’s role was to provide a safe and comfortable atmosphere for the participants to openly answer direct questions where they were able to share their lived experiences candidly. The researcher in this study had 20 years of teaching experience and taught special education in some capacity at every K-12 grade level; at the leadership level, for seven years, the researcher supervised a campus special education department, which housed six self-contained classrooms. He also held the position of special education behavior specialist

for one year within the same North Texas area. The researcher believes that his educational experiences (i.e., special education teacher, behavior specialist) on various campuses, including knowledge of special education law, add to this study's credibility and validity.

Measures for Ethical Protection

Creswell & Poth (2018) explained the importance of ethical practices when conducting research. Prior to data collection, Southeastern University's IRB awarded approval for the research (see Appendix A). The informed consent described the purpose and intention of the study, guaranteeing that the participants' identity would be kept confidential through random assignments and pseudonyms. The participants willingly volunteered for the study and signed an informed consent document. The participants understood the purpose of the research and how the data would be utilized. The interviews were recorded and transcribed, and a copy of the transcript along with the audio file were emailed directly to the participants to verify their accuracy prior to the analysis beginning (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The organization and storage of data consisted of several precautionary methods. First, all documents were stored in both hard and electronic versions for easy access to the information. The hard copy documents were secured in a locked file cabinet, and the only person with access was the researcher. Electronic documents were kept on the researcher's personal computer and placed in a password-protected online storage system, Google Drive. Within the online file storage system, the researcher organized copies of files for the study in one central location. All documents collected and utilized for the study will remain securely on file with the researcher for 5 years following the publication of the dissertation study. All documents gathered for the study will be permanently destroyed after the 5-year timeframe.

Research Questions

The following research questions were used to guide the study:

1. How do active shooter preparedness and emergency management plans differentiate for students with severe disabilities?
2. What modifications to the broad-based safety plan are special education teachers making to keep their students safe?

Data Collection

Instrument(s) Used in Data Collection

A case study allows for various data sources, including responses collected from surveys or questionnaires, documents, and artifacts (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The study utilized multiple data sources to establish objectivity and support the validity and reliability of the findings. Three types of data sources were collected: current safety documents provided to school districts by the State of Texas, safety documents provided to teachers, and interviews. Each data type served a purpose and provided information to answer the two main research questions.

The TEA provided standardized safety documents to every Texas school district to adhere to. The following current documents were collected by the researcher: Texas Administrative Code, 19 TAC 103.1209; Texas Education Code (TEC), §37.114; TEC, §37.108(b); Active Threat Annex Template Completion Guide (Texas School Safety Center, 2022), and the Standard Response Protocol Extended (SRP; see Appendix B). These documents provide a universal procedural guideline for school districts to utilize directly from TEA and will give additional insight to answer the research questions.

Methods to Address Validity and Reliability

Creswell and Creswell (2018) discussed the various qualitative research approaches to address ethical practices, identifying several ethical standards to be used in research. Creswell and Poth (2018) advocated for two essential principles to be adhered to throughout the qualitative research process: ethical treatment and respect for the participants. Prior to conducting the study, the researcher received approval from the Southeastern University IRB for the research. The participants willfully volunteered for the study and were interviewed at a location selected by the interviewee to promote trust (Mills & Gay, 2019). The majority of the interviews were conducted at a local coffee shop. Prior to the interview, the purpose of the research was explained, and the participants were ensured that they would receive the audio file and transcription of the interview to review for accuracy. The researcher and the IRB determined that no anticipated risk was involved to the participants, and all confidential information was stored in a locked cabinet or on a password-protected computer that only the researcher had access to. Each participant was assigned a random number to ensure identifiable information about the participants, school district, or campus would remain anonymous not revealed in the results of the study.

Validity

Creswell and Poth (2018) adapted the process of validity by providing general guidance through nine validation strategies frequently used within qualitative research. The researchers organized the strategies into three groups in no particular order: reader's lens, participant's lens, and researcher's lens. For this study, the researcher utilized member checking or seeking participant feedback strategy to allow the participants to view and judge the accuracy of the transcripts. The member-checking strategy is often viewed as one of the most critical ways to

establish credibility when conducting qualitative research. Another strategy used to ensure validity was the process of triangulation.

Validity of Triangulation

Triangulation is a method used to determine a case study's validity by investigating a research question from a collection of perspectives to attain consistency and reliability across multiple data sources (Yin, 2018). The triangulation process involves several sources of data associated with the case study to develop thematic findings within the data. The process allows researchers to affix themselves to the data while providing a check and balance for consistency in results (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Triangulation was applied in this study by (a) collecting data from interviews of special education teachers and campus administrators, (b) collecting safety document data from various neighboring school districts, and (c) analyzing the data from safety policies provided by the TEC and TEA. Not relying on a single data source but rather using multiple data sources and data from several school districts with separate policies allowed triangulation and offered another layer of credibility, providing a higher potential of depth and richness to the findings.

Reliability

Reliability in qualitative research can be accomplished through several different approaches. The recording and transcribing of interviews are the primary approaches to obtaining reliable data; therefore, the researcher utilized a recording application, Voice Recorder, to record the participants' interviews. The application provided a transcription function for the interviews, and the researcher manually edited inadvertent errors produced by voice inflection and personal accents. Following transcription, the participants received a copy of their transcript and voice recording to review and validate prior to the information being analyzed.

Reliability of Addressing and Clarifying Potential Biases

The final method used to ensure trustworthiness and to reinforce the validity and reliability of qualitative data is addressing and clarifying potential biases at the onset of a study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Potential bias was minimized in this case study from the beginning with the disclosure of the researcher's role. The researcher's role included a vast background knowledge of special education law and over 20 years of educator experience (i.e., classroom teacher, campus leadership role, and behavior specialist), which was brought to the study.

Procedures

Data collection consists of a sequence of associated activities with the intent to collect information to answer research questions (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The researcher conducted interviews to gain perspectives of the lived experience from self-contained special education teachers and campus administrators as pertained to the district-approved school safety plan and the protection of the campuses' most vulnerable population. An interview protocol (see Appendix C) was used with semi-structured open-ended questions to allow for flexibility, encourage meaningful perspectives and comprehensive information, and collect data. Although the participants were asked the same questions, a variety of responses were given based on personal experience. A list of demographic questions (see Appendix D) was used, as well as a list of 10 open-ended questions for the interviews (see Appendix C), with each participant being provided a copy to reference during the interview after the demographic questions were asked. Each interview varied in time from 30-45 minutes and was recorded and transcribed.

Methods to Address Assumptions of Generalizability

Yin (2010) provided several suggestions for researchers to generalize: (a) theory is clearly presented at the beginning, (b) research literature supports the premise for conducting the

study,; and (c) findings reveal how the theory is either questioned or reinforced by the results. Patton (2002) described critical theory as a construct that centralizes how injustices and experiences shape an individual's conception of reality and attempts not merely to study and understand society but to critique and change society. The second theoretical framework, disability theory, encapsulates two models: the medical model focusing on physical differences (i.e., blindness, deafness, and inability to extremity use; Bernal & Roca, 2016) and the social model that focuses on the environmental barriers created by a disability (Bernal & Roca, 2016; Dokumaci, 2019). Both theories apply to the purpose of this research to explore and discover how schools have developed and implemented plans while considering the safety of all children during active shooter protocols.

Generalizability applies when research findings and conclusions are based on a small sample population utilized to represent a large population. Sensible generalizations are more reliable when more than one case study or situation shows similar results that support the theory (Yin, 2010). The units of analysis for this case study are six special education teachers and three campus administrators. The classroom educators taught in a self-contained special education unit and represented three different school districts. Of the six teachers, five work at the high school level (9th–12th grades), and one teaches at the elementary level (K–5th grades). The three administrators represented a vast range of grade levels and roles and worked in two different school districts. Two administrators were assistant principals: one worked at an elementary campus (K–5th grade), and the other was employed by a high school (9th–12th grades). The third administrator was a middle school campus principal (6th–8th grades). The findings of this study were presented holistically for all cases ($N = 9$). Therefore, results and conclusions were generalized, as a whole, based on the cases of nine educators in the North Texas region.

Data Analysis

The researcher followed Creswell and Poth's (2018) recommended six-step process for analyzing data.

1. Step one: the interviews were numbered, transcribed, and organized into a file system for easy access.
2. Step two: the nine transcripts were read multiple times to gain an understanding of the data.
3. Step three: the data were coded with colors and notes to identify themes.
4. Step four: the data initially presented eight themes, but after further review, the number of themes was condensed to three overall themes.
5. Step five: the themes were developed into a narrative passage.
6. Step six: the researcher interpreted the data and organized the material in a table form.

The nine transcripts were read multiple times to get an overall grasp of the data. Notes were made by the researcher while reading the transcripts to gather ideas for coding and themes. Next, the researcher uploaded the transcripts into MAXQDA Analytics Pro 2022 to assist with the organization of the codes and the identification of themes. The codes were structured into themes. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), coding involves accumulating the data into smaller categories of information and then assigning a label to the code. A short list of codes started the coding and then expanded as the analysis process continued. From the initial code list, a codebook was used to develop themes. Through the second iteration of the codebook, themes were then discovered. Through the coding process, eight thematic ideas were identified: weaknesses, biggest asset, improvements, general procedures, preparedness, the severity of a disability, more consideration, and overlooked. The themes were later condensed and concluded

with three themes that described the lived experiences of special education teachers and campus administrators implementing the current safety plans with consideration of the campuses' most vulnerable populations: procedures, preparation, and population.

The researcher's final data analysis step was to cross-compare the three developed themes from the nine interview transcriptions to the current Texas State safety documents. The data taken from the participants' lived experiences were examined against the overarching governing body's protocols: Texas Administrative Code (TAC), 19 TAC 103.1209; TEC, §37.114; TEC, §37.108(b); and Active Threat Annex Template Completion Guide (Texas School Safety Center, 2022). The researcher also compared the themes and transcripts to the local-level safety procedural document provided by each school district, and all five school districts utilized the same state of Texas required protocol, the SRP (see Appendix B).

Summary

This chapter discussed the methodology of the study. The methodology included the description of the research design and measures taken by the researcher to provide ethical protection for the participants (i.e., teachers, administration, and school districts) and identified two research questions. The methodology attempts to answer the research questions through data triangulation from interviews with special education teachers and campus administrators and the collection of current safety documents from various school districts. The researcher detailed the methods utilized to promote the validity and reliability of the data. The final section of Chapter 3 expounded upon the data analysis process. Chapter 4 presents the data from the interviews conducted and the documents received.

IV. RESULTS

The purpose of this case study was to describe the statewide policies that address safety measures and the limited consideration of vulnerable student populations concerning an active school shooter scenario on campus. The intent was to discover what transpires within a school building and classroom setting during an active shooter situation and what additional procedures special education teachers and campus administrators should implement to protect students with severe disabilities during active shooter drills. At this stage in the research process, the safety and well-being of the campuses' most vulnerable populations are generally defined as students with severe disabilities (Kay, 2019). Chapter 4 provides data analysis and the results of the qualitative study.

Sample Characteristics

The bounded case study's sample population comprised a mixture of special education classroom teachers and campus administrators with at least 1 year in the field. Nine participants took part in the study: six special education teachers, all of whom taught in self-contained units from three different North Texas school districts, and three public school administrators from two different North Texas school districts. Table 2 shows the bounded sample's gender, years of classroom experience, and current role in the public school education system. Six teachers participated in interviews for the sampled population, four female and two male, or 66.66% female to 33.34% male teachers, which corresponds with Texas's classroom demographic

metrics for the 2021-2022 school year (Landa, 2022). According to the TEA Public Education Information Management System database, Texas school districts employed 376,086 teachers, and 75.90% were female (Landa, 2022). Summing up this section, Table 2 illustrates a correspondence between three school administrators' years of service and the TEA Public Education Information Management System database. According to the data, during the school year 2021-2022, campus administrators' years of experience mean was 19.48 years, and assistant principals' years of experience mean was 15.76 years, which was similar to the study's participant's years of experience (Landa, 2022).

Table 2

Demographic Characteristics of Bounded Sample

Participant	Gender	Years of Classroom Experience	Years of Campus Administration Experience	Current Role
JC	Male	15	0	Self-Contained Teacher
II	Female	14	0	Self-Contained Teacher
SB	Female	5	0	Self-Contained Teacher
DQ	Female	22	0	Self-Contained Teacher
IT	Male	31	0	Self-Contained Teacher
VE	Female	13	0	Self-Contained Teacher
IO	Male	6	14	Campus Principal
KL	Male	8	1	Campus Assistant Principal
DB	Female	11	6	Campus Assistant Principal

Data Collection and Management

After securing Southeastern University's IRB approval (see Appendix A), the interviewer conducted face-to-face interviews using a 10-item interview protocol (Appendix C) with interviewees who returned digitally signed informed consent forms. Each participant was personally known by the researcher or through a mutual colleague and was asked if they would like to participate. Furthermore, considering the interviewer's insight into this study's theoretical frameworks and 20 years of public school service in special education, an essential part of data collection involved bracketing. *Bracketing* is a deliberate approach used by qualitative investigators to place their personal experiences and knowledge of the phenomenon aside throughout the research process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As a result of bracketing, the interviewer should not have provided more personal knowledge or experience with the study's phenomenon during data collection; however, to maintain transparency and credibility with interviewees, when asked, the interviewer acknowledged a fundamental understanding of the public school safety crisis.

The face-to-face interviews were conducted at a local coffee shop and lasted approximately 30 minutes. Before the meeting, the interviewer received consent from the interviewee to audio record the conversation; the investigator used the Voice Recorder application on an Apple iPhone 13 cellular device to promote transparency and authenticity. Each interview included five additional participant demographic questions (Appendix D) to transition into the interview protocol seamlessly. During the data collection phase of the study, interviewees essentially spoke while the interviewer attentively listened and clarified any protocol content requests that arose during interviews.

Immediately following each interview, the researcher transcribed the participant's audio-

recorded MP3 file through the Voice Recorder application. The text-based transcripts and MP3 files were uploaded directly into a password-protected folder on the researcher's secured cloud-based Google Drive account for storage and universal access. The interviewer compared each text-based transcript to the voice-recorded MP3 file and adjusted any misrepresented words generated by the Voice Recorder application. All nine transcripts required minor corrections by the researcher following the above-listed systematic data collection and verification procedures. Data collection was complete following the data saturation process, and transcripts were validated as accurate. Utilizing the above-mentioned data collection process allowed interviewees to receive, review, and verify each transcript's accuracy via email within two days following the interview.

Data Analysis Strategies

This bounded case study's purpose centered on research that examined active school shooter plans implemented by districts for students with disabilities. Following a semi-structured interview format, Texas special education teachers and campus administrators answered questions on a 10-item interview guide framed around disability and critical theories. The interviewer elicited interview data to address the following questions: How do active shooter preparedness and emergency management plans differentiate for students with severe disabilities? And moreover, What modifications to the broad-based safety plan are special education teachers making to keep their students safe? Following the conclusion of the study's data collection component, the researcher performed an analysis through Creswell and Poth's (2018) data analysis method. Creswell and Poth's data analysis process involved the researcher uncovering emergent themes from single or multiple cases. The investigator employed a researcher's perspective and read through the interview data with fidelity several times before

conducting an initial open-coding task known as memoing. More notably, the investigator, with nearly 20 years of teaching experience in special education, consciously set aside any experiences or views about the phenomenon under study during data analysis.

Table 3 illustrates the investigator's codebook process map through MAXQDA 2022, a qualitative and mixed methods data analysis program. The initial iteration of open coding resulted in 328 tentative codes from 317 chunks of compiled interview data. A second iteration of open coding of the interview data resulted in no additional codes; however, merging existing codes into ideas and concepts reduced the total number to 183 codes. Following a meeting with the methodologist assisting with the study, the principal researcher completed the fourth and final open-code iteration. The researcher's continual data analysis spiral (Creswell & Poth, 2018), combined with the pairing of key interviewee words and phrases, resulted in 27 codes and the potential of 10 overarching themes that represented the data on the third iteration. In sum, the data analysis identified three themes representing the phenomena of interest identified during the case study.

Table 3*Codebook Process Map*

Initial Iteration	Second Iteration	Third Iteration	Fourth Iteration	Expanded Codes	Theme Categorization
328 Codes	183 Codes	27 Codes	8 Codes	General procedures	Procedures
0 Themes	0 Themes	10 Themes	3 Themes	Biggest assets	Procedures
				Improvements	Preparation
				Weaknesses	Preparation
				Better preparation	Preparation
				Severity of disability	Population
				More consideration	Population
				Overlooked	Population

Themes

Themes are the product of the combination of emergent codes that assist researchers in establishing ideas or concepts from raw qualitative data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The themes in the study emerged after the principal investigator explored codes derived from keywords and phrases consistent within interviewees' transcripts. The participants' accounts provided rich, detailed information about authentic experiences regarding the study's phenomena. The researcher made grammatical edits to the interview transcripts for clarity and readability when introducing the thematic findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Therefore, following several data analyses of the interviewees' transcripts, three themes emerged from eight expanded codes

(summarized in Table 3) related to active school-shooter safety plans for vulnerable populations: procedures, preparation, and population. Table 4 describes the principal expanded codes that developed into the study’s three themes.

Table 4

Major Expanded Codes Identified

Codes	Theme	Description
General procedures	Procedures	Locally approved safety plan and policies
Biggest assets	Procedures	Critical components of current safety procedures
Improvements	Preparation	Changes made and implemented to standardized safety protocols
Weaknesses	Preparation	Feebleness of safety protocols
Better preparation	Preparation	Advancement of preparation for stakeholders involved in the implementation of standard safety procedures
Severity of disability	Population	Disabilities that severely affect an individual’s impairment, activity limitation, and participation restrictions
More consideration	Population	Needs of students with disabilities included in the development of safety and security initiatives
Overlooked	Population	Students with severe disabilities have become subjects of oversight by standardized safety plans

Theme 1: Procedures

The procedures theme emerged from data illustrating all nine interviewees’ descriptions of the current process that school systems follow regarding safety and security for vulnerable populations. The interview data identified two common codes: general procedures and the biggest assets. Of the two codes, general procedures were mentioned more in the interviewees’ description of school active shooter practices.

General Procedures

These general safety protocols and procedures are guidelines the state of Texas provides to districts to uphold. According to Interviewee KL, “After the big incident at Uvalde [Texas], I am sure there will be many changes on every campus.” According to the state of Texas, school districts follow the SRP (Appendix B) provided by the Texas School Safety Center as best practices for school districts. During the 87th Texas Legislature regular session, an amendment, §37.114 to the Texas Education Code, was proposed and approved “requiring the commissioner of education, in consultation with the Texas School Safety Center and the state fire marshal, to adopt rules for best practices related to emergency drills and exercises, including definitions for relevant terms” (Texas Senate Bill 168, 2021, p. 1). However, the interviewees considered the revamped and approved procedures as generic and broad-based. Interviewee JC described the procedures saying,

The current safety protocols and procedures are set out for all the kids in public education and look out for their best interest. Procedures are set more for the normal and physically able populations and not for those who need others to help them.

Interviewee JC exclaimed, “My experience with safety procedures has been that self-contained students are irrelevant to the school’s active-shooter plan because they do not adjust the procedures to fit our students.”

School districts utilize drills for the applicable portion of school safety procedures, and the updated language directs school districts to apply guidance and resources provided by the Texas School Safety Center. These resources (e.g., SRP) are utilized to develop drills to ensure physical safety for all participants, minimize potential trauma for participants and staff, and limit educational disruptions (Texas Senate Bill 168, 2021). Regarding drills, Interviewee IO stated,

“There has always been a safety concern at every school and in every district I have worked for, but that is why you practice the drills.” Interviewee IO went on to reiterate the vulnerability of schools:

When we talk about tornadoes, which are less in our control, you can execute what you have learned and still have losses. That drill is to minimize loss. You talk about nature and things falling; there is no hundred percent, but we practice enough that it is pretty ingrained in our systems.

In the same vein regarding drills, Interviewee DB proclaimed, “All students are pretty much treated the same during a drill, and the expectation is the expectation.” Interviewee VE explained the expectations: “Lockdown means that we turn off our lights in our room and lock the doors and try to stay out of sight.” Interviewee IT’s explanation of lockdown was “An administrator comes over the intercom and tells us, ‘Lock our doors and get away from the windows.’ Five minutes later, they come back on and tell us that the drill is over.” However, Interviewee IT described a lockdown drill while in a self-contained classroom saying, “We were in lockdown once; they were supposed to walk by our door to let us know we were out of lockdown, and we were in lockdown for like four hours, not knowing that we had been released.”

Interviewee IO voiced additional concerns regarding the State of Texas’s best practice for school active-shooter lockdown drills because “it is constantly evolving.”

What we do since it is a lockdown drill, we stay in our room, or if you are not with your class, find the nearest classroom. The drill taught us to find a bathroom to hide, but we have evolved from just that. If you are out and can get away, move as far as possible to get away from it. If you are in close contact with the shooter, we have started to say that

“you engage.” You try to keep yourself safe and do whatever it is. It will be an ongoing conversation, especially since Uvalde, Texas.

IQ said, “When you talk about changing, it is just finding that balance of what the best practice will be.”

Biggest Assets

The second primary code under the theme of procedure was the campuses’ most significant asset: teachers. Interviewee IT viewed teachers as “the strength of our school safety and security program.” Interviewee KL emphasized how teachers are the driving force behind the campus’s safety: “They are always keeping their eyes out, and we are telling them to be in constant communication because they are eyes for us when we are not around.” Interviewee DB chimed in about the teacher’s role in the safety plan saying, “I feel that our number one strength is the teachers wanting what is best for kids and wanting to know what it is they can do to keep kids as safe as possible.”

Within the campus safety plan, teachers play a significant role in ensuring the effectiveness and efficiency of the protocol. Another interviewee mentioned, “Our teachers are very diligent, and they have a great group of faculty members that love the kids and think they would step up.” Interviewee IO went further to include support staff’s (e.g., paraprofessionals, librarians) involvement in the plan:

Those drills that require movement do get additional support. So, whether it is a special education teacher or a support staff member, a librarian, or a counselor, self-contained classrooms get help to move those scholars during fire drills or help them with tornadoes and shelter in place.

Interviewee IO finished the quote by mentioning, “Outside of providing extra support for self-

contained classes, safety protocols are the same for all students on campus.” Teachers, especially self-contained teachers who have provided extra support to the safety plan, have adapted by “keeping [them] preoccupied with quiet toys and snacks during active-shooter drills to help with anxiety or from becoming scared.”

Theme 2: Preparation

All nine interviewees offered significant insights into the study’s preparation theme, which emerged from data analysis of the current process that school systems follow regarding safety and security for vulnerable populations. In this study, interviewees described the preparation theme by expressing concerns of weaknesses within the current school safety plan, vouching for better safety-related preparation, and acknowledging the improvements made by school districts and governing bodies.

Weaknesses

Interviewee DB identified an underlying weakness to be the need for updates to the active-shooter plans for students with disabilities:

There has to be more of a sense of urgency. The thought of an active shooter has always been there, and with the Uvalde debacle in your home state, it becomes closer to home. It becomes real. Active shooter protocols are something that districts and schools across the board need to think through and figure out a plan. We have to protect our kids.

However, Interviewee IO expressed concerns about how the change will come: “I think about the training, my assumption is when we talk to our district safety leaders, they will tell us in those situations that is something that the campus is going to have to determine.” Another interviewee stated, “If we agree there is a weakness or an identified gap in protection, then there needs to be a separate conversation, or even a separate plan, to meet the needs of students with certain types

of disabilities.”

Several interviewees’ perceptions aligned with Interviewee DB. Interviewee JC stated, “We need more training on our population and helping those kids,” while another exclaimed, “The training is not geared towards us.” Interviewee DB viewed safety training as a weakness, stating, “Teachers need more training for active shooter drills.” Interviewee SB stated that they “would joke around about how we (self-contained classroom) would be the first they would hear because there is no way for us to protect them all.” One participant went on to say

Have we even thought about this [vulnerable populations], and how will we handle this? School is more than just the classroom and academics but every aspect of being a student in our district. We have to consider this, and it can only be something that is discussed. If it were an oversight in academics, we could not get away with that because academics have been the focus for so long. But we need to talk about complete safety on our campus. This oversight must be brought into account, and I will be an advocate for that.

Better Preparation

A standard code that emerged from the researcher’s data analysis within the preparation theme was the need for better preparation. Several interviewees mentioned a virtual safety training program called SafeSchools that many school districts have adopted to provide campus safety training. According to the Vector Solutions (2023) website, the producer of SafeSchools Online Active Shooter Training System, the program is designed:

To help K-12 schools and districts with this critical topic, the SafeSchools Online Training System has an Active Shooter: Administrators course and an Active Shooter: Staff course that include evidence-based strategies and proven techniques that increase the odds of survival in an active shooter situation.

The goal of our Active Shooter courses is to prepare school administrators and staff members for active shooter situations by providing information on how they occur and how they may be more effectively prevented. The courses are designed to help administrators and staff more effectively address any active aggressor, regardless of the type of weapon he or she uses. After taking these courses, school administrators and staff should:

- Know the facts about school shootings.
- Understand how to reduce the likelihood of active shooter situations.
- Learn evidence-based methods to improve the odds of survival during an active shooter event.
- List actions to take in the event of an active shooter situation.

However, Interviewee II felt that the SafeSchool training program was not an adequate mode of preparation.

The SafeSchools' modules are provided for all educators at the beginning of the school year during professional development as a mode to disseminate the essential safety procedures through an online computer program; however, during that time most teachers are preoccupied with all of the beginning of the school year demands and are not fully focused.

The participant said, "Especially for new teachers, and I think about myself when I entered the district, and I did not know our emergency plans. Yes, they were posted on the wall by the door, but that was the extent of it."

Several interviewees offered solutions to better prepare teachers and staff members in self-contained classrooms for an active shooter event on campus: increased number of drills,

more rigorous drills, and point-of-view of receiving prior notification of upcoming drills. One of the most significant concerns that many interviewees indicated was the procedure that some campus administrators follow when giving the self-contained teacher prior notification of a drill. Several interviewees suggested an increased number of drills and, specifically, “real-life drills.” As Interviewee KL said, “It is just a matter of ‘if we are going to practice drills,’ then let us practice drills for real.” Interviewee VE said,

You’re not going to tell me when a shooter is coming in. I do not know if there is a fire unless it happens, but we are already outside, so do not tell me beforehand what will happen. So, we put the students up in their chairs and get them ready to go, and you think everything is fine, but when an actual occurrence happens, we have a problem.

Another interviewee said, “It needs to be a surprise; whatever I am doing, of course, it will be tedious and uncomfortable, but I’d rather deal with that now and then if something happens. Then at least, I’m prepared for those situations.” On the other hand, Interviewee II would like to receive prior notification of a drill:

It would be nice to get a warning when it comes to practicing the drills, just so that some of our students are challenged with changes in routine or surprised. That we could give them just an opportunity to say, “We’re gonna have a drill, and this is what is going to happen,” so there is not as much chaos when it does happen. Just a little more organization, and then if something did occur, they would be more prepared if we could prepare them better by having more drills and being aware of those drills not just happening.

Interviewee II clarified the statement, “I do not even know if that [given prior notification of a drill] is even doable, but it would be nice if we knew ahead; however, I know in real-life situations you wouldn’t get a notice.”

Another notable point by Interviewee II was the need for specificity of drills that deal directly with active shooters.

I think that teachers need more training for active shooter drills. From campus to campus, it may vary, and I have only been on one campus, but I believe that teachers should be trained by someone who is an expert in the field.

Interviewee KL stated:

That’s kind of the training I received from school that doesn’t prepare you for it [live active-shooter event] because it is not a hands-on type of training. The training can only teach you so much, but it differs from the training when you’re on the job. Now you think back on the training, “Hey, I learned this in class,” and you relate to that, but at the moment, it is different from the training.

Improvements

Improvement is the final sub-theme under the preparation theme. The level of safety improvements differentiates across campuses and interviewee districts. Interviewee DB was optimistic about the improvements made by the district stating, “I think as a district, we are moving in the right direction; we now have a safety and security director who is responsible for school safety specifically.” DB continued, “We are improving some things as a state, coming down from TEA [Texas Education Agency], things are happening. We are moving in the direction where there will be more safety and security procedures.” Interviewee KL stated, “We have updated our camera system to improve our visibility and have covered all blind spots. Our

campus has also added a second SRO [School Resource Officer].” Interviewees IT and SB indicated the tightening of access at their campuses. IT stated, “One thing that has improved is the ready access to our school building.” SB mentioned,

I think that our access is top-tier, in my opinion, based on what goes on in the world. I always call it “Fort Knox” because I have to scan my badge everywhere. It’s very locked down in that sense, but I would say that we’re prepared in the way that kids would know what to do, teachers and kids would know what to do, but I just feel you could never be prepared enough in that situation.

Theme 3: Population

All nine interviewees provided a noteworthy perception of the study’s population theme, which materialized from data analysis of the current process that school systems follow regarding safety and security for vulnerable populations. In the study, interviewees described the population theme by expressing concern that the vulnerable population has been overlooked in the development of safety plans, the severity of disabilities within the classroom, and more consideration within procedures for students with disabilities.

Overlooked

Interviewee II’s comment encapsulated the tone of many other interviewees regarding the safety of students with significant vulnerabilities:

Unfortunately, I feel like students with disabilities, you’d think that they would be at the forefront of any type of emergency plans, but sometimes we are forgotten about. Being able to hide inside our classroom from people outside is our big concern. I do not know that we are protected any better than the normal population.

Another interviewee noted, “There is a need for something different for the vulnerable population and how we can adapt to ensure that those students are just as safe as everyone else.”

Interviewee JC’s perspective was, “In my experience with the adopted safety plans is that they are not appropriate to all of the members within the building, and they have not adjusted the procedures to fit our students.” Participant DB acknowledged, “I do not know that there has been a separate conversation or a separate plan to meet the needs of students with certain types of disabilities.” Interviewee SB described reservations about contacting her campus administration to address the gap in protection for students with severe disabilities:

I would say that we aren’t necessarily a top thought. It is more like “Oh yeah, you could do this” or “Oh yeah, you can do that” if I ask a question. It is not, “Hey, this is what you’re going to do,” or “This is how we are going to handle this situation”; instead, it is more of “Oh yeah, let me see how I can fit that for you” and never circle back. We are an afterthought.

Vulnerable populations being an afterthought has caused some participants to become proactive by creating unauthorized plans within their self-contained classrooms to provide additional protection for their students. Interviewee IT explained his unauthorized plan:

My paraprofessional and I have come up with our plan. We are going to put the kids on our backs, and we will go, especially the ones that are not mobile. We have the windows, and if they are trying to come through the door, we will go out the window, which is a big window. If we can see police officers out there, we will run for it.

Another participant stated:

For as long as I can remember, we set up a plan for our classroom and discussed this with paraprofessionals. Protection is a large portion of a self-contained special education

teacher's role. If something were to happen, they protect the kids the best they can, and I will be put at the forefront. I have always said that in my teaching experience, and it is scary to even say it, but I'm there for it. I'm just that type of person for anyone in danger. If I can do something, I do not care who it is, even if it is the shooter; I want to try to be that person in the forefront before I even put anybody else at stake. So, I have told my paras to grab the students, turn over tables, and block as much of themselves and those kids. Put them behind the tables; if anybody were to go first, it would have to be me.

Severity of Disability

The second subcategory under the theme of population was the severity of disabilities within the self-contained classroom. Educators within complex classrooms comprising multiple students with varying severe disabilities (e.g., medically fragile) are obligated to maintain a sense of awareness for any potential danger that may occur at any moment throughout the school day. One interviewee expressed a concern that campus administrators were unaware of the severity of disabilities within their classrooms.

When we have some of the drills, I do not think administrators understand the severity of some students' disabilities and how it can affect their safety from us trying to get out of the buildings or hiding within the room from intruders.

One participant noted that the students they serve are "completely dependent upon someone else." Interviewee JC stated:

My safety responsibilities are essential to me as to how to keep our students safe, safely, without hurting them in the process of trying to follow the rules that are set. Many of our students are fragile, and we are just trying to figure out what we can do to get them to their safe position or location without hurting them. We could hurt our kids to death

trying to save their lives. So we need some kind of procedure or some kind of safety routine, or something in our classroom to help a student.

Interviewee II suggested, “Maybe more drills in place could help; I do not know, but I do not think that my population does not get enough practice that focuses on the varying disabilities and medical issues within my classroom.”

The design of drills is “to minimize loss,” as Interviewee IO mentioned. However, Interviewee II spoke of an instance that occurred with a student within the self-contained classroom during a fire drill:

I remember, for instance, a fire drill where our medically fragile students were out with the general education population. The hallways got chaotic quickly, and we were trying to get them out of the building with wheelchairs. We had six wheelchairs and one in a walker. Still, the general education population is cutting them off and going out. There needs to be better exit plans for high-needs, especially the medically fragile ones confined to a wheelchair and needing a lot of assistance.

One interviewee noted another problematic portion of the safety situation that self-contained teachers are in: “It makes it very difficult to navigate to safety with the type of students that I have; many are medically fragile, non-ambulatory, and non-speaking.” Another mentioned a potential situation that needs attention:

One concern is that my classroom does not have a restroom, and with my kids, I constantly have to be across the hallway to change a student. In our classroom, we work with catheters and medical instruments like that; when I am across the hall, my paraprofessional is back, but what if something happens during that time? Where do we go? Are we just stuck in that spot? What happens with my classroom across the hallway?

I would feel safer in that situation if we had our facilities. As I say, you never know when something will go down, or we will go into a lockdown, and I am halfway through changing a child's diaper or putting a catheter in. You cannot just jump and grab and try to get him back into his wheelchair. That, too, would be a safety issue.

Interviewee DO discussed potential issues that may occur in her classroom during an active shooter drill:

And if we are in a drill, whether it is an active shooter drill, fire drill, or any type of emergency, I have students with medical trachs and feeding tubes, and for example, if a trach came out, would I be able to put it back in? That would be a hard, "No." I could not do that, and if a feeding tube came out? We have had a student pull theirs out, and we only have a short window of time to get those back in before we have to call 911 if parents are not readily available. So, who would be there to assist if we are in an active shooter drill and something like that happens?

More Consideration

The final code under the population theme was more consideration of vulnerable populations needed to ensure all students' safety. Within the study's parameters, classroom teachers and campus administrators have acknowledged and contributed that more consideration for vulnerable populations is necessary. One participant stated, "I think there needs to be more consideration for students with disabilities regarding safety and security in many ways but even more so now, in particular the realm of drills." Interviewee DB indicated that "there has not been consideration taken into students who might have specific needs during these drills; I am aware of at least one on my campus." Another commented:

I do not know of any adjustments made [to drills], or any teachers have mentioned any

concerns about them. I think they were all on board [with the proposed plan]; how it went and felt was reasonable. I did not hear of any complaints, but we will see what happens this year after the significant incident in Uvalde. I am sure there will be many changes on every campus; but for self-contained, I do not know of any changes or updates for that department.

One participant pinpointed the sheer fact that students with disabilities who are educated in the most restrictive setting (i.e., self-contained classroom) are required by law to have an IEP:

So far, this has not been a big issue, but we must remember that under special education law, everything must be individualized. We have to discuss this because, when you talk about SPED, it is an IEP; it is individualized, right? So, we must recognize that some uniqueness is brought, and we must figure this out. I mean, you have a student that has a problem controlling whether or not they can sit still or not be loud. That is where I see that aspect as more of a challenge than in my general education classrooms.

He went further to give an example of a potentially threatening situation on campus:

The biggest thing is what happens when they are out on campus and if we are talking about the context of special populations. We were in the cafeteria, and something was to occur. It is a little bit different than our general education students. So those students are not necessarily even aware of what is happening in society, and we have had many active shooter stories in the media. Teachers can have conversations with students in the general education setting, and we have those regarding the propping of doors and things like that. So that if something were ever to occur, we could ensure that the students understand what is going on, but in our self-contained classrooms where many cannot comprehend the severity of the moment? That is where the challenge lies. How do we best help to

protect those students?

Interviewee IO stated,

If anything happens, we must think accordingly and quickly to help our students in the best way we can. So if we need to make a plan in our classroom to help those children who cannot self-mobilize or function, then that is what we need to do.

The administrator went on to say,

FAPE, and everything included in that act, include safety and protection. This makes sense; I think there needs to be at least a conversation about acknowledging that there may be some unique factors in these classrooms. So part of your plan must be instructions on how to handle this, and when we do the drills, there should be a conversation of, “Tell me about your self-contained classroom, and are there any unique things that we have to do to ensure protection?” I know this will be difficult because every campus is unique and will be individualized by students. That is understandable, and I definitely can see where we need to make sure that we have a plan because that is potentially a hole, and it is not something that we can simply say, “Well, we tried our best,” when you understand that these students have unique needs.

Evidence of Quality

In qualitative research, Creswell and Poth (2018) endorsed using at least two validation strategies to ensure that a researcher’s explanations of a studied phenomenon are unbiased and accurately represented the data collected. For the study, the investigator consciously engaged in member checking or seeking participant feedback strategy to allow the participants to view and judge the accuracy of the transcripts and bracketing to place their personal experiences and knowledge of the phenomenon aside throughout the research process by incorporating vignettes

to depict past and current insights into interviewees' experiences with school safety protocols for vulnerable populations. Furthermore, several interviewees provided enlightening details and descriptions, which validated the phenomenon under investigation through this study. In summary, following the qualitative principles of data collection, data analysis and scheduled debriefings with the study's methodologist further validated the studied phenomenon.

Summary

This chapter provided enriched insights into nine educators' experiences with the recommended school safety protocols regarding students with severe disabilities. In this study, interviewees narrated experiences during face-to-face interviews at a local coffee shop, which led to three distinctive themes following data analysis. The three emerging themes from the interviewees' data were (a) procedures, (b) preparation, and (c) population and comprised eight codes: general procedures, biggest assets, weaknesses, better preparation, improvements, overlooked, the severity of a disability, and more consideration. Finally, in Chapter 5, the study's findings will be compared with previous relevant literature to highlight future research considerations and implications for practice or policy for school districts for active shooters regarding the safety of vulnerable populations.

V. DISCUSSION

The purpose of this case study was to describe the statewide policies that address safety measures and the consideration of vulnerable student populations regarding an active school shooter scenario on campus. The intent was to discover what transpires within a school building and classroom setting and what additional procedures special education teachers and campus administrators implement to protect severely disabled students during active shooter drills. At this stage in the research process, the safety and well-being of the campuses' most vulnerable populations, defined as students with severe disabilities, must be reconsidered (Kay, 2019).

Methods of Data Collection

Following qualitative research strategies endorsed by Creswell and Poth (2018), the researchers conducted the study by utilizing a voice recording application, Voice Recorder, to perform data collection during the face-to-face interviews administered at a local coffee shop. After obtaining the approval of Southeastern University IRB to perform the research study, the researcher recruited participants from public schools in North Texas. Each participant interviewed was personally known by the researcher or through a mutual colleague and invited to participate. Once respondents were scheduled for meetings, nine in-person interviews helped elicit answers to this case study's instrumental research questions, which were based on Sieber's (2011) disability theory and Patton's (2016) critical theory. Within two days post-interview, participants received a text version of the interview transcript via email and an MP3 audio file of

the meeting for accuracy verification to ensure data validity. Data collection ceased after completing the final interview, and the data were verified by the participants. All documents collected from the interviews, MP3 audio files of interviews, transcripts, and data analysis memos were securely stored. The researcher secured hard copy versions in a locked filing cabinet and electronic versions of data on the investigator's password-protected, cloud-based Google Drive account. Following Southeastern University's IRB policy, all data gathered for the study will be permanently destroyed 5 years after the study's completion.

Summary of Results

In this bounded case study, three themes emerged from the analysis of interviewees' qualitative interviews about the school's active-shooter safety protocols for students with severe disabilities: procedures, preparation, and population. Seven interviewees, six current classroom teachers, and one administrator, a former special education teacher, had personal experience dealing with the intricacies of implementing safety and security plans, particularly active shooter protocols, within a self-contained room. Two interviewees, both campus administrators, oversaw the implementation of safety plans campus-wide but did not have direct safety and security experience regarding students with severe disabilities.

Regarding training and preparation, all nine participants, representing four different North Texas school districts, alluded to receiving similar safety and security training (i.e., SafeSchools, drills). Six interviewees indicated that the district-provided training needed to be improved. Many expressed a concern about being underprepared for an active-shooter crisis. Three interviewees stated that the training was ample preparation; one participant mentioned that the district provided active shooter-specific training but needed to know if classroom teachers had been included. All nine interviewees notably mentioned that the provided training and drills

did not consider the specificities, and the researcher made no adaptations for students with disabilities educated in a self-contained setting.

Interviewees provided insight into incidents, and alarming campus safety breaches, that transpired on campuses and concerns for the safety of their classroom's vulnerable population. Four participants spoke of particular incidents on their campus when their students were required to participate in drills (i.e., live incident, active shooter drill) and could not follow the district-approved safety plan correctly due to not being in the classroom during the time of the incident. Five interviewees stated that they had never experienced an active crisis incident, but during regularly scheduled drills, they have thought about protection gaps for students within their care. Furthermore, when asked which specific drills are difficult to perform with vulnerable populations properly, five interviewees specified lockdown drills, three stated fire drills and active shooter, and two mentioned tornado drills.

In order to successfully implement safety protocols, school districts rely heavily on the adults in the classroom. However, six participants indicated a need for more confidence in their ability to protect their students within an active-shooter crisis. Moreover, eight interviewees alluded that the TEA safety and security plan did not appropriately protect or consider the needs of students with severe disabilities in self-contained classrooms. Interviewees recounted situations when teachers altered the state and district-approved safety procedures to meet the needs of their student population. Five of the nine interviewees mentioned that they had altered the universal plan to account for the students within their classroom.

All participants provided insights for lawmakers to consider updating or improving current safety protocols with consideration to the specific needs of students with severe disabilities regarding safety drills and training. Two participants suggested that policymakers

include self-contained special education teachers in developing safety plans to ensure the inclusion of all populations. All nine participants voiced positives concerning strengths within the safety and security plans established at the district and campus levels. Two participants indicated that training and drills are their campus's strong suit. Four participants identified personnel (i.e., teachers) as the overall strength of their campus's plans. Three interviewees viewed the increase in campus security as a strength. Interestingly, several interviewees discussed varying levels of district security personnel, SROs, security guards, and a director of safety and security.

Discussion by Research Question

Interpretative understanding is social constructivism or an interpretive framework utilized by qualitative researchers to provide a lens to view and understand the meanings of real-life experiences from participants' perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The bounded case study was developed around two theoretical frameworks—: disability theory (Siebers, 2011) and critical theory (Patton, 2016)—to gather an interpretive understanding of the study's phenomenon. Nine public school educators—six self-contained special education classroom teachers and three campus administrators—provided a perceptual understanding of the phenomenon studied during face-to-face interviews in the bounded case study.

As established within the literature review, much of the school safety research has been focused on the current state of America's plan to protect students and staff in schools across the country from active shooter situations as well as providing a critical review of published literature concerning school preparedness response to emergency events. Although a literature review determined that few studies mentioned particular protection approach recommendations (e.g., traditional lockdown, multi-options), no research identified targeted safety procedures to

address the needs of vulnerable campus populations specifically. The research did include potential educational methodology for teaching students with disabilities safety protocols. The following section elucidates relevant literature to clarify the bounded case study's findings and the three identified themes into naturalistic generalizations (Creswell & Poth, 2018) to provide potential insights into the phenomenon of school safety protocols for students with severe disabilities during active shooter events.

Research Question 1

How do active shooter preparedness and emergency management plans differentiate for students with severe disabilities?

Interviewees in the present study expressed concerns about the state- and district-level adoption of active shooter safety and security protocols for vulnerable populations and focused on procedures and preparedness. In addition, eight interviewees described the prescribed safety protocols as generic and developed around the non-disabled population. The principal researcher drew thematic findings from data analyses of the interviewees' transcripts. The following themes related to active school-shooter safety plans for vulnerable populations emerged: procedures, preparation, and population.

The study utilized two theoretical frameworks: disability theory and critical theory. Disability theory has been interpreted and defined through recent scholarship within several different models. For this study, the researcher utilized two models to effectively construct the frame of the phenomenon: medical and social (Bernal & Roca, 2016; Siebers, 2011). In Sieber's (2011) research, the medical model focused on physical differences (i.e., blindness, deafness, the inability of extremity use) with the intent to normalize for society. For decades, the medical model suggested that people with disabilities could contribute to society but only to the extent

that normalized standards had successfully rehabilitated them. The normalization process of the 20th century was conducted within the confines of isolated institutions in which diagnosed peoples were viewed as mere medical objects (Bernal & Roca, 2016).

Contrary to the medical model, Great Britain developed a model that seemingly focused on the environmental barrier naturally created by disability—the social model (Bernal & Roca, 2016; Dokumaci, 2019). In Kirby's (2017) study, the social model acknowledges that various disabilities require accommodations or modifications to access societal affairs (e.g., ramps for wheelchairs). Considering the social model through the education framework, society should consider classrooms and school buildings as societal environments. According to the mandate within the All-Handicapped Children Act of 1975 and the Individuals with Disabilities Act of 1990, schools are required to provide education to students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment and through the support written within the student's IEP (Idol, 2006). Interviewee IO voiced a concern that the state-mandated plan violates the student's rights according to the Individuals with Disabilities Act, as it should include the child's safety.

Theme 1: Procedures

The emotional impact of active shooter events (e.g., Columbine High School and Sandy Hook Elementary) has been intensified by news reports exposing the vulnerability and helplessness of school campuses of all grade levels across the country. Interestingly, Rinaldi (2016) discovered that the U.S. Government had not identified nor dedicated a central authority, agency, or policy center to address the American school shooting crisis; instead, they placed the onus upon state and district leadership to design safety plans and protocols. In 2007, the USGAO issued a national survey and discovered that 64% of states had instituted their laws or policies necessitating K-12 institutions to have some form of an emergency management plan, and a

number of these plans did not provide procedural recommendations (USAGO, 2007a; USAGO, 2007b). The survey further pin-pointed that school emergency management plans did not address the safety needs of special needs students nor provide professional training to implement the safety management plan regularly (Rinaldi, 2016).

As states and school districts assumed a combative approach to preparing for the school shooting crisis with the addition of active shooter scenario drills to the regimen of traditional safety drills (e.g., fire, tornado), small-scale data are available to indicate fewer fatalities, improved preparedness, and the reduction of unmeasurable emotions (e.g., fear, panic) among students and staff (Moore-Petinak et al., 2020). Through the preventative approach, districts have transitioned from the traditional campus-level practices of natural disaster drills (e.g., hurricane, tornado, fire) to more of an incident-specific student protection routine such as shelter-in-place, perimeter lockdowns, and drills; natural disasters do not occur specifically to kill people, active shooters do (Worthington et al., 2021). Unfortunately, campus improvements from internal and external constituents' perspectives expressed concern that school-wide and district general emergency plans may not take into consideration learning needs, physical differences, medical or emotional needs of individual students with significant disabilities, placing them in greater risk in the event of a severe emergency (Embury et al., 2019).

As aforementioned, research on plans explicitly focusing on the needs of students with disabilities is nonexistent. Boon et al. (2011) critically reviewed the limited literature to examine published, peer-reviewed articles addressing school preparedness through four leading databases for contingency and disaster emergencies. The researchers found that most schools had well-established evacuation plans, fewer had relocation plans, and even fewer had lockdown plans, but schools still needed to plan effectively for special populations. Regardless of whatever

investment in preparedness schools have made, neglect of children with severe disabilities appears to be apparent within those efforts.

Steeves et al.'s (2017) study focused on Louisiana's rural and urban school districts. The group sifted through the Louisiana state laws related to crisis management and Louisiana's Revision Statue of 1950, which required all public schools to prepare a collaborative response plan with local first responder agencies and community members (e.g., teachers, parents). The state-level statute required at least one practice drill per school year, action plans to be readily accessible to all appropriate personnel, and annual plan revision to ensure compliance and reliability. Sixty-four staff members from six southeastern Louisiana public elementary schools participated; the findings indicated that all six schools had written crisis plans, but each differed in content and comprehensiveness. Steeves et al. (2017) noted that four of the six elementary campuses included in the study were from the same urban school district, and their crisis plans were identical in content and design. School districts often utilize form structure to promote uniformity. However, these identical crisis plans did not include actual school-specific content (e.g., contact numbers and unique evacuation plans) and even included outdated contact information of former district employees. Finally, most staff members could adequately explain their roles in response to a school crisis. However, some crisis plans lacked basic recommended details and policy guidelines, such as specific procedures for evacuating special needs students.

In the state of Texas, the TEA provided every school district with a standardized safety protocol, the SRP (see Appendix B). All nine participant's school districts abided by the guidelines provided by the overarching governing body. However, interviewees emphasized the lack of consideration and differentiation within the adopted safety and security protocols for students with disabilities. Eight of the nine participants viewed the mandated safety plans as

insufficient and problematic for educators who facilitate self-contained special education classrooms. Interviewee IT did not think students with disabilities were protected any better than their abled peers. Interviewee JC believes plans are designed and developed for the abled population and did not know of any adjustment to protect students with physical or cognitive disabilities.

Theme 2: Preparation

Six participants indicated that the provided training was insufficient to protect their campus's vulnerable populations. Five mentioned incidents occurred on campus when the universal protocols proved to be lacking in consideration of students with disabilities, leaving them in a potentially compromising situation. Four interviewees did not indicate a specific incident that had occurred. However, all nine have thought through scenarios to identify potential gaps in the protection the haphazard safety and security guidelines leave for students with severe disabilities under their care. The potential gap mentioned by all nine interviewees was if a crisis were to occur and the students with severe vulnerabilities were participating with their peers in the mainstream population (e.g., hallway, cafeteria, gymnasium) and not in the classroom where they had rehearsed drills.

Boon et al. (2012) conducted a study on the growing diversity of student populations in mainstream education, a combination of abled and disabled within the general education setting, in Australian schools. The group examined the consideration of students with disabilities in developing policies, guidelines, and safety frameworks that support emergencies and crises in Australia. The results identified several policies and statutory frameworks designed to protect the rights of students with disabilities (i.e., Disability Discrimination Act 1992 and Disability Standards for Education 2005). Australia has become more aware of the needs presented by

special populations. For example, Queensland provides guidelines and templates to assist schools in developing emergency plans, but the onus solely lies on the school. Boon et al. (2012) noted that the state-provided policies and guidelines generically used the term special needs throughout the documents, which could haphazardly underserve students with severe disabilities by encompassing all vulnerable populations into one category (e.g., mentally ill, non-verbal, socioeconomic disadvantaged). Although focused on Australian schools, the results from the minimal available research do necessitate specialized emergency plans that include accommodations for students with disabilities.

Over the years, safety recommendations have developed and become more advanced due to the increase in school shooting cases in the United States. For instance, in response to the school shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary in 2012, when 20-year-old Adam Lanza drove to the nearby elementary school and killed 20 children and six adults (Blum & Jaworski, 2016), the U.S. Department of Education recommended an expansion to the lockdown-only approach for school safety. In 2014, the National Association of School Psychologists and the National Association of School Resource Officers partnered to guide school districts regarding factors to consider when developing safety protocols and plans. The document incorporated input from Safe and Sound Schools: A Sandy Hook Initiative and the ALICE Training institute, which detailed the nation's top two active shooter drill paradigms (National Association of School Psychologists, 2017).

Nationally, most states and school districts apply one of the two active shooter drills: traditional lockdown or multi-option response (Jonson et al., 2020). In traditional lockdown, students, faculty, and staff relocate to a locked classroom or other secured locations. The multi-option approach began to draw national attention from school leaders as federal, state, and

private organizations precariously evaluated many school shooting events. Jonson et al. (2020) revealed that these agencies recommended a multi-option approach over the traditional lockdown response (Jonson et al., 2018, 2020). A highly utilized multi-option plan, ALICE, was issued by the ALICE Training Institute in response to the 1999 Columbine High School shooting. ALICE's national growth occurred following the 2012 massacre in Newton, Connecticut, at Sandy Hook Elementary School. Greg Crane, one of the creators of ALICE, believed that schools place all children in imminent danger if they teach them to be static targets. Unlike traditional lockdown methods, which recommend simply locking the classroom door, ALICE encourages barricading the room. Barricades formed with items, such as tables, desks, shelves, and chairs, make the room more difficult for the assailant to enter, forcing them to move on and saving many more lives (Jonson, 2017).

However, in the State of Texas, the universal safety protocol adopted by the TEA is known as SRP (see Appendix B), and all school districts are mandated follow identical procedures. The one-page document enlists adults and students to take five forms of action: hold, secure, lockdown, evacuate, and shelter. Each of these commands signals a specific call to action for every individual on campus and, in theory, encapsulates a protective approach towards the most severe of potential threats (e.g., tornado, fire, active shooter). Eight interviewees identified difficulty performing specific mandated drills with the vulnerable student population. Five participants cited lockdown as the most challenging drill to rehearse with children in wheelchairs and those who are non-verbal and medically fragile. Three participating educators voiced concerns about performing active shooter drills.

Research Question 2

What modifications to the broad-based safety plan are special education teachers making to keep their students safe?

The second theoretical framework utilized in this study was the critical theory. Critical theory is a portion of a worldview that advocates imperativeness for self and others (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2002). Patton (2002) describes critical theory as a construct of the orientational framework, which centralizes how injustices and experiences shape an individual's conception of reality and attempts not merely to study and understand society but to critique and change society. In the study, five participants indicated they had altered the state's mandated safety protocol, SRP, within their special education self-contained classroom. Interviewee IT claimed to have built a bar lock for the classroom door to prevent the door from opening if a crisis occurs. Another participant created a plan to help those children who cannot self-mobilize or function adequately.

Theme 3: Population

The most significant concern from all nine participants was the lack of consideration given to protecting students with severe disabilities during active shooter plans. The interviewees used different words, such as more consideration and overlooked, to express their concern due to the severity of the disability. One interviewee suggested that lawmakers and street-level diplomats should volunteer in a medically-fragile classroom for the day to understand the vast discrepancy between disabilities better. A noteworthy notion from the interview transcripts is that six interviewees do not feel adequately prepared to protect students with severe disabilities during a crisis. More specifically, Interviewee JC educates while in fear that if a crisis were to occur on campus, one wrong decision, though in good faith, could potentially become a fatal

injury to a medically-fragile child.

Interviewee JC mentioned the difficulty of teaching safety drills to cognitively impaired students. However, due to the increase in school shootings, he continues to think of innovative methods to teach universal protocols. Researchers Dickson and Vargo (2017) sought to test BST, a standard procedure to teach children safety skills. BST, when utilized in training safety drills (i.e., fire and abduction prevention) for children, consists of four key components: the experimenter (a) provides children with instructions for the tested skill, (b) models the intended skill, (c) provides the opportunity for children to rehearse the skill, and (d) provides feedback to the children (Miltenberger, 2012). Despite the amount of literature demonstrating that BST is a valid early-childhood teaching method, Dickson and Vargo (2017) conducted a study to evaluate the effectiveness of BST in teaching a group of thirty-two typically developing kindergarteners' lockdown drill procedures. The process included randomly placing the subjects into three groups of 10 students within the lead researcher's classroom and recording. The findings of Dickson and Vargo indicated that all students met mastery within seven sessions and could produce appropriate responses in six of the seven skills. However, all sessions took place in a calm and controlled environment, which does not appropriately depict an active shooter crisis.

Garcia et al. (2016) examined the efficacy of an educational method incorporating BST to teach fire safety skills to children with autism. The group studied three children with autism, ages 4 to 5 years old, to test their ability to successfully follow one to two-step instructions, verbally communicate, and answer basic questions. Garcia and company utilized a four-step BST method, conducted daily performance measurement probes, which recorded whether safety skills were maintained, and follow-up probes to determine the retention of safety skills in the absence of training. Their findings suggested that using BST strategies, modeling, rehearsing, and praise can

be an elective instructional procedure for establishing fire safety skills for children with autism. However, the study demonstrated the efficacy of combining these three strategies for teaching fire safety. All participants demonstrated 100% mastery of the fire safety skills.

Interviewee IO explained that school districts need to consider adapting the individualized plan for students with disabilities, the IEP, to include safety provisions during drills. Clarke et al. (2014) recommended that school districts consider developing IELP to provide procedures that meet the child's unique needs. The researchers acknowledged that no plan could guarantee student safety, but general plans that do not consider the individual's cognitive ability and physical limitations, in turn, place students at greater risk by not implementing a more personalized plan.

Ironically, the idea of an IELP remains in immanency; there is no study to evaluate the efficacy of an individualized lockdown plan designed for students with disabilities, with Clarke et al.'s (2014) study being the exception. Clarke et al. suggested that these plans would be incorporated within the child's IEP and addressed at the annual review and decision meeting. The researchers suggest that schools add a simple question at the end of every IEP meeting to determine whether a need for a specific plan for the student is necessary if a crisis were to occur in the building. These plans can consider student limitations (e.g., mobility, non-verbal) and provide age-appropriate accommodations for the most vulnerable students. As with any plan, the IELP's effectiveness depends on crucial campus personnel, such as a nurse or special education teacher's ability to properly implement the plan at a moment's notice (Embury et al., 2019). Furthermore, collaboration among peers, teachers, and campus administrators can ensure that the vulnerable student's environmental demands (i.e., traditional lockdown approach, multi-option approach) do not exceed the child's ability to meet the demand (Boon et al., 2012).

Study Limitations

This study has characteristic limitations. One limitation of this bounded case study was the limited sampling available. During the purposeful sampling process, the investigator attempted to locate school districts willing to participate in the study. The researcher contacted several school districts in the North Texas region; however, no school district would agree to participate in the study due to the nature and severity of the school shooting phenomenon. Consequently, interviewees selected to participate in the study were educators, special education teachers, and campus administrators either known by the researcher or referred by an associate of the principal investigator. Most notably, all participants represented several metropolitan school districts in North Texas and may have been similar in regard to gender, age, and educational experience compared to other schools in Texas. The results may be generalized to something other than the field of school safety for vulnerable populations in all other schools.

Implications for Future Practice

This qualitative study aimed to discover the details within a school building and classroom setting that special education teachers and campus administrators experience when implementing active shooter drills with vulnerable populations. Thematic findings in this qualitative case study aligned with the disability and critical theories in which special educators have identified oversights within the universally adopted safety protocols about the needs of students with severe disabilities. Despite this bounded case study's sample population comprising six special education self-contained teachers and three campus administrators, representing five different school districts in North Texas, the rich insights into the studied phenomenon obtained from interviewees have practical implications for educational leadership and safety domains.

All nine participants acknowledged and applauded the adjustments to safety procedures at the campus level (e.g., security cameras, security staff, and campus access); however, the study's findings regarding the procedures provided by the TEA for school districts to universally utilize SRP to provide uniformity and consistency throughout the state. All interviewees indicated a lack of provision and protocol adjustments for students with disabilities. Interviewees indicated that the adopted plan failed to protect vulnerable students adequately and negated the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1975. The design of the act was to provide quality education and support the whole child.

Interviewees in the study regarding safety preparation for an active shooter crisis imply the district plan is limited and generic. Several participants voiced concerns about needing to prepare and being semi-incompetent if an actual active shooter crisis were to occur on campus. The interviewees and literature suggest a differentiated approach to educating students and teachers on safety protocols. The practical implications of incompetent adults within classrooms could potentially place children and adults in harm's way if a crisis occurs.

In addition to implications concerning the adopted procedures and preparation methods for teachers and students, findings in this study identified practical implications regarding the protection of vulnerable populations. Through rich interviews, the researcher compiled a list of looming situations in which interviewees expressed concerns for the safety of students with disabilities regarding the adopted protocols when they are (a) not in the designated classroom, (b) experiencing a medical emergency during a crisis, or (c) unable to defend themselves. These scenarios could become problematic for teachers, administrators, and school districts if not considered within the scope of safety and security.

Recommendations for Future Research

This bounded case study's sampled population of public-school educators and administrators provided considerable insight into the studied phenomenon. However, despite the findings generated by six special education self-contained teachers and three campus administrators, future research into safety protocol differentiation for students with physical, mental, and emotional impairments is needed. The need for future studies is apparent in utilizing a mixed-methods approach for states or school districts to assess self-contained special education teachers' confidence in the adopted safety protocols to gather additional qualitative and quantitative data to assist decision-making and garner data from experienced individuals. Studies should include support staff (e.g., paraprofessionals, nurses, librarians) in safety protocol plans. Complementary to the collected qualitative data, researchers could use focus groups comprising educators with similar job responsibilities from varying demographics across the state and country to elicit experiential knowledge from participants on potential threats within a self-contained classroom of medically fragile students or students with disabilities. Therefore, researchers conducting future studies of this nature should consider nationwide purposive sampling of special education teachers and using a mixed-methods approach case study design to concurrently analyze quantitative data and qualitative thematic findings regarding potential threats and opportunities to become proactive for the protection of students with disabilities.

Conclusion

The purpose of this case study was to describe the statewide policies that address safety measures and the limited considerations for vulnerable student populations concerning an active school shooter scenario on campus. The intent was to discover what transpires within a school building and classroom setting and what additional procedures special education teachers and

campus administrators implement to protect students with severe disabilities during active shooter drills. Interviewees participating in this bounded case study identified three emergent themes that link the study's phenomenon around the disability theory and critical theory framework: procedures, preparation, and population. In addition, the results of the case study have added to the school-shooting literature in the education and safety domains. Therefore, the study's findings have practical implications for assisting state and local-level policymakers, administrators, and educators with safety and security provisions for vulnerable populations within the school setting.

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Appendix A

Institutional Review Board Approval

SOUTHEASTERN
UNIVERSITY



NOTICE OF APPROVAL FOR HUMAN RESEARCH

DATE: July 7, 2022
TO: Jason Covarrubias, Susan Stanley, Janet Deek
FROM: SEU IRB
PROTOCOL TITLE: A Call for Protection and Planning: A Case Study of Active Shooter Emergency Plans for Students with Disabilities
FUNDING SOURCE: NONE
PROTOCOL NUMBER: 22 ED 28
APPROVAL PERIOD: Approval Date: July 7, 2022 Expiration Date: July 6, 2023

Dear Investigator(s),

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the protection of human subjects has reviewed the protocol entitled, *A Call for Protection and Planning: A Case Study of Active Shooter Emergency Plans for Students with Disabilities*. The project has been approved for the procedures and subjects described in the protocol.

Any changes require approval before they can be implemented as part of your study. If your study requires any changes, the proposed modifications will need to be submitted in the form of an amendment request to the IRB to include the following:

- Description of proposed revisions;
- *If applicable*, any new or revised materials;
- *If applicable*, updated letters of approval from cooperating institutions.

If there are any adverse events and/or any unanticipated problems during your study, you must notify the IRB within 24 hours of the event or problem.

At present time, there is no need for further action on your part with the IRB.

This approval is issued under Southeastern University's Federal Wide Assurance 00006943 with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP). If you have any questions regarding your obligations under the IRB's Assurance, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,

Rustin Lloyd
Chair, Institutional Review Board
irb@seu.edu

Appendix B

Standard Response Protocol (SRP)

IN AN EMERGENCY TAKE ACTION



HOLD! In your room or area. Clear the halls.

STUDENTS

Clear the hallways and remain in room or area until the "All Clear" is announced
Do business as usual

ADULTS

Close and lock door
Account for students and adults
Do business as usual



SECURE! Get inside. Lock outside doors.

STUDENTS

Return to inside of building
Do business as usual

ADULTS

Bring everyone indoors
Lock outside doors
Increase situational awareness
Account for students and adults
Do business as usual



LOCKDOWN! Locks, lights, out of sight.

STUDENTS

Move away from sight
Maintain silence
Do not open the door

ADULTS

Recover students from hallway if possible
Lock the classroom door
Turn out the lights
Move away from sight
Maintain silence
Do not open the door
Prepare to evade or defend



EVACUATE! (A location may be specified)

STUDENTS

Leave stuff behind if required to
If possible, bring your phone
Follow instructions

ADULTS

Lead students to Evacuation location
Account for students and adults
Notify if missing, extra or injured students or adults



SHELTER! Hazard and safety strategy.

STUDENTS

Use appropriate safety strategy for the hazard

ADULTS

Lead safety strategy
Account for students and adults
Notify if missing, extra or injured students or adults

Hazard

Tornado
Hazmat
Earthquake
Tsunami

Safety Strategy

Evacuate to shelter area
Seal the room
Drop, cover and hold
Get to high ground

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Appendix C

Interview Protocol

1. Tell me about your experiences with safety and security among students with disabilities.
2. How has the training you have received in school safety and security prepared you to respond with the student population in your classroom?
3. Can you explain an emergent incident during an active shooter drill that you have experienced in the school which you feel needs to be addressed by the safety and security training program?
4. What emergency drills do you find difficult to perform with the vulnerable population in your classroom?
5. What safety responsibilities you believe are important for you to know in your position yet are unsure of how to perform?
6. How are your high-needs population protected under the current school safety procedures?
7. What do you feel needs to be updated or improved regarding your school's safety and security response plan?
8. How have you altered the approved plan to meet the needs of your students during an active shooter drill?
9. What do you feel is the strength of your school's safety and security program?
10. What else would you like to contribute to this study on safety and security of vulnerable populations in schools?

Appendix D

Participant Demographic Questions

1. Are you a special education teacher or a campus administrator?
2. Do you teach or an administrator in a public school?
3. What type of classroom do you teach in—self-contained or within the general education setting?
4. How many years of teaching and/or administration experience do you have?
5. Of those _____ years of teaching experience, how many have been in the self-contained setting?