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PROTECTING OUR MOST VALUABLE
RESOURCES

by
Douglas S. Schmitt

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement of the
Master of Arts Degree
of
The Graduate School
at
Rowan University
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Approved by _____

Date Approved April 10, 04

ABSTRACT

Douglas S. Schmitt

Protecting Our Most Valuable Resources
2004

Dr. Ted Johnson
School Administration

The purpose of the study is to determine the effectiveness of school supervision, policies, and procedures relating to the safety of the students at Collingswood Middle School using interview and action research. The study will result in a report to inform administrators and board members of changes needed in the present policies to create the safest possible learning environment for the students.

The study includes a variety of data gathering techniques. Seven members of the Collingswood Middle School staff, both past and present, were interviewed on their opinions of the facilities and present school policies. The material culture of the school, policies from similar school districts and journal articles were reviewed to determine best practices and the need for change at Collingswood Middle School. Data was also gathered through observations during both routine and non-routine evacuations of the building.

It was determined that the Collingswood Middle School has created a safe environment for its students. The number of violent acts are minimal and security measures have been taken to maintain a safe school. Policies and procedures have been adjusted to maintain a safe school despite an aging building.

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge some of the people who helped me to complete this project. To the staff members and administrators, especially my mentor, Joe Gurscik, who participated in interviews and generally lent any support possible, thank you. I would also like to thank the Collingswood superintendent and Board of Education members for allowing me to participate in the internship program during my workday. I would also like to thank my coaching staff, Mike Randall, Jenn Howdershell, and Beth Rodgers for taking the team during practice sessions when I needed to leave early to go to class. Thank you Dr. Johnson for the wisdom and knowledge you passed on to me, you are still teaching!

Most importantly I would like to thank my entire family for all your support and understanding through these years. To my mom and dad, you inspire me to be the best at all I do. To my kids, Michael, Rachel, Matthew, and Jacob, thanks for loving me back and remember everything is attainable with education and hard work. Try to live what you dream! The biggest thanks goes to my wife, Julie, who without her, I would not have made it through this program. You keep the family together. I love you all!

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Focus of the Study

The study will determine if Collingswood Middle School has the necessary safeguards to help protect its students. Supervision, policies, and procedures of Collingswood Middle School will be researched, analyzed, and compared to other school districts. School administrators and staff will be interviewed. The study will determine the effectiveness of the policies and procedures that create a safe school for 7th and 8th graders. The study will make suggestions to enhance, replace, or add to the present policies to create the safest possible environment. In light of current events around the world, all schools need to revisit the issue of safety in their buildings and on their campuses.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine the effectiveness of school supervision, policies, and procedures relating to the safety of the students, at Collingswood Middle School, using interview and action research. The study will result in a report to inform administrators and board members of changes needed in the present policies to create the safest possible learning environment for students.

Definitions

Powerschool is a district wide administrative and staff computer program that is used by all staff for student's grades, attendance, and discipline. Powerschool is also used by administration to schedule teachers and students. Parents may access their child's grades and attendance reports online, using Powerschool.

Evacuation number, also referred to as an evacuation pole number, is a designated number on the fence behind the middle school, where each teacher's class lines up, in case of an emergency.

Limitations of the Study

The study cannot be directly replicated to any school because each community has different needs and each school building and campus is different. Location in a rural, suburban, or urban setting, the size of the building and the student population are other factors why the study cannot be replicated. There has been recent turnover in administration and guidance that could lead to a lack of insight into relating past practice to current practice. The teachers in the school district where the study is taking place are presently working without a contract, which could present itself in negative attitudes and responses from staff, when being interviewed.

Setting of the Study

The study takes place in the Borough of Collingswood, which was incorporated in 1888. The town covers 1.8 square miles and is bordered by Camden, Haddon Township, Pennsauken and Cherry Hill. Within this small town are two county parks, Newton Lake

Park and Cooper River Park. A third park, Knight's Park was given to Collingswood by a resident when he died and that is where most high school and recreational activities occur.

The local government consists of a mayor and two commissioners that are elected officials. According to the United States Census 2000, the population of Collingswood is 14,326. There were 7,807 registered voters in 2001, of which 2,376 were Democrats, 1,258 were Republican, 49 were Independent and 4,124 were undeclared. The median age, according to the 2000 census was 37.1 with nearly 50% of the population between 25 and 54 years old. The population was 86% white, 7% African American, 3% Asian, 4% other. Twenty-eight percent of the households had children under 18 and 26% the population was over 55 years old. For the population over 25 years old 88% graduated from high school, 30% earned their Bachelor's Degree, and 10% earned a graduate or professional degree. When comparing Collingswood to the state average, Collingswood was above the average house age and above the average population density.

Resident properties accounted for 84% of the tax base, while commercial property is 12%, and apartment property was 4%. The estimated total tax rate in 2001 was \$3.54 per \$110 of assessed valuation. The median home value was \$101,529, which indicates an estimated tax of \$3,594.13. In the past four school budget elections, voters have gone to the polls in increased numbers each year. During the 2000 election, 970 votes were cast. Four years later, in the 2003 election, 1,547 votes were cast which would indicate an increased awareness and concern for the Collingswood Public School System. In the 2000, 2001, and 2002 elections the school budget was approved by a large margin, more than double the number of approval votes compared to disapproval votes. However, in

the 2003 vote the public was asked to shoulder a large tax increase and the budget fell 934 – No votes to 579 – Yes votes. These 1,547 votes account for just over 19% of the registered voters in Collingswood.

The Collingswood Public School District is a K-12 district with four elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school. The high school receives students from two sending districts: Oaklyn and Woodlynne. There is no busing within the district for the general population and the elementary schools are “neighborhood schools.” The study will take place in the middle school, which is located on the same property as the high school.

There are 312 students enrolled in the Collingswood Middle School (CMS), 153 eighth graders and 159 seventh graders. The district spends, on average, \$11,036 per student. There are twenty-six staff members, six of whom have advanced degrees beyond a bachelors degree. In 2002, 12% of the population had Individualized Education Programs regardless of placement. The student attendance rate at CMS, in 2002, was 95.4%. Ninety-two percent of the students speak English at home and 7% speak Spanish.

On the Grade Eight Proficiency Assessment (GEPA), administered by the State of New Jersey, 89.6% were proficient in Language Arts Literacy. On the Mathematics portion of the GEPA, 69.4% were proficient. All of the levels of proficiency are higher than the state average. In 2003 the Collingswood Middle School (CMS) has implemented two programs aimed at raising test scores and grades. All students that are identified by the GEPA test as partially proficient will attend a mandatory class, two days a week, after school. The middle school will also provide an after school homework program that is

supervised by teachers with the intent that students can complete their homework and get additional help from teachers and fellow students.

The curriculum at CMS is extensive and provides a variety of programs for all types of learners. There are honors programs, as well as supplemental programs for any student identified as either high or low achievers determined by grades, standardized tests, teacher recommendation, or parental concern. There are many classes for the students to choose from such as band, chorus, individualized music lessons, WCMS (the school news show), and computer technology to name a few. Students may also choose to participate in many extracurricular activities including, but not limited to athletics, student government, and peer mentoring.

Significance of the Study

Many parents worry about their children's future, wondering how their children will navigate through all the problems that surround them. Drug abuse, sexually transmitted diseases, changing economy, and violence are in every facet of a child's life. These life problems, however, are expected to be non-existent or at least controlled in the child's school.

Schools are a reflection of the world, country, states, and communities that surround them. Curriculum is driven by world problems, as well as local initiatives. Topics such as special education, standards, drugs, weapons and communicable diseases have all been discussed at school board meetings across the United States. In the most recent years, school violence, violence prevention, and school safety have become "hot" topics. With the most horrific tragedy in United States history occurring on September

11, 2001, I believe that everyone has become more aware and concerned about his or her safety on a daily basis. School leaders should take this opportunity to evaluate their school policies and safety measures with regard to violence. Is violence a problem in the school, and if so, how do we stop it? Is our school a safe environment for students to learn, educators to teach, and community members to use? Do the teachers believe the school is safe and what measures have been taken to create a positive school climate?

In the late 1990's, it seemed school shootings were making headlines on a bimonthly basis. The tragedy at Columbine High School, in Colorado, in 1999, was the worst and most publicized of all violent acts in the history of United States schools. Immediately everyone asked the simplest question, "Why?" Was it the parents of the shooter who were to blame? Did bullying or some other behavior by the victims provoke the shooter? Was it the rock and roll or rap music, the video games or the movies that led the assailants to commit these heinous and unforgivable acts? Was the killer on drugs or alcohol? Did the attacker have a history of violence? The question that will haunt every leader in the school will be, "Is there anything I (we) could have done to prevent this tragedy?" I will answer that question for Collingswood Middle School before the tragedy occurs.

Organization of the Study

The remainder of the study is organized in this way: Chapter 2 – Review of Literature, Chapter 3 – Data Collection, Chapter 4 – Presentation of the Research Findings, Chapter 5 – Conclusions, Implications, and Further Study. After Chapter 5,

there will be a listing of all references for the study. The appendix and biographical data will follow the references.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

National News

The President of the United States addressed the issue of school violence in his National Goals 200 when he said that we would have safe, disciplined, and drug-free schools with environments conducive to learning. Have schools achieved this goal? Most would say they have because ninety percent of our schools are safe (Walker, Eaton-Walker, 2000). How does one explain to the parents of Columbine High School that their school was among the unfortunate ten percent? Some other educators may say we have achieved this goal because only ten students out of 1,000 are involved in serious violent crime either on their way to, from, or at school compared to twenty-six out of 1,000 that are involved in serious violent crime away from school (Department of Education, 1999). Making and keeping our schools safe could be the most important thing we do as school leaders.

Creating Emotional Safety for Students

While recent events may have heightened our awareness and focus on physical safety, that should not be our only objective in schools. The importance of making our schools emotionally and socially safe for our children should also be a priority. The elementary school is where an emphasis must be placed on the emotional safety of the student. At this young age, a person needs to feel love and have a sense of belonging. Teachers must attempt to nurture every child to develop a sense of worth and self-esteem.

I believe the middle school years are important emotionally, socially, and academically, in determining a child's future success. Teaming of teachers will help to develop relationships and contacts with students. A variety of activities and clubs with focus on cooperation and understanding differences will improve the student's social behaviors. High school teachers also need to connect with students in a meaningful way.

Many conflicts and outbursts in schools are the result of the students "inability to meet their needs for identity, belonging, respect, or dignity in healthy ways (Bluestein, 2000)." Teachers need to avoid using sarcasm, humiliation, anger, and impatience in their classroom. All students should feel dignity, purpose, success, and acceptance daily in the classroom from both the teacher and fellow students. The teacher must respect confidentiality unless someone is in danger. Teachers must respond immediately to any incidents involving bullying, harassment or threats to safety. When all staff members make these efforts on a daily basis, students will feel emotional security, thus helping to create a safe school environment.

Curriculum for Safety

The school should be a leading force in providing safety and educational programs necessary for students to learn how to prevent, reduce, and avoid violence. School is where youth spend a large part of their lives. In our changing society, schools may be the only place a youth feels a sense of belonging or gets a good meal. Schools are also proven mechanisms with trained personnel, who exist to help shape and guide our youth into contributing members of society.

As a middle school educator, I believe our students need to understand that teachers are not simply in school because they are getting paid. Schools and their teachers must teach beyond the three “R’s.” Schools must teach students care, concern, and connection (Dodd, 2000). No teacher should be in the classroom unless they have a love of children. We must demonstrate our concern for every child in our class, not only educationally, but also emotionally and socially. We must greet students, question students, praise students, and be fair to students, in order to develop relationships and understanding of traditional social behavior. We must genuinely develop a rapport with our classes that helps them understand we are all different people that have the ability to do tremendous things in our lifetimes. As the bumper sticker says, “I touch the future, I teach.” No one knows any of the student’s futures, but we, as educators, need to help them understand that we all have a future to find.

According to an article in the Journal of School Health, there are nine components of successful violence prevention programs (Dusenberry, Falco, Lake, Brannigan, Bosworth, 1997). Schools must take a multifaceted approach that includes all settings of life. These programs must begin early in elementary school and should be reinforced through all grade levels. Interventions must be appropriate to the targeted audience based on age and maturity. The “program’s content should promote personal and social competencies (Dusenberry, Falco, Lake, Brannigan, Bosworth, 1997).” Activities that require group interaction should be a piece of every program. The target populations ethnicity and culture should be identified, thus addressing the community’s needs. A positive school climate is required, which would include effective classroom management techniques. Activities should be designed to foster norms against violence,

aggression, and bullying. The last component to any successful school program is staff development and teacher training. Without the training, the staff will not “buy into” any program and it will not succeed without the teachers support.

There are countless programs that cover every issue within schools, designed to promote safe environments for students (Department of Education, 1999). Model programs listed by the Department of Education include the following topics: aggression/fighting, bullying, family issues, gangs, racial and other bias-related issues, sexual harassment/sexual violence, substance abuse, truancy/dropout, vandalism, and weapons. Every program has an age group or target group for an intended audience. Schools need to identify their problem areas then choose the program that will help create a solution.

Attitudinal Changes for Safety

Once all students and teachers believe there is a need for a caring school community, safety will follow. Attitudes in schools must change. Schools must create a school community within their walls to give students a sense of belonging. Students should be recognized for effort and perseverance, as well as for learning subject matter. Teachers need to be connected to students as a mentor or advisor, so students can speak freely to them (Walker, Eaton-Walker, 2000). Students must be allowed to experiment, explore or question while providing the opportunity to understand the risks and rewards of such decisions. Teachers should try to show and to create excitement in the classroom while learning. Learning can be fun. Encourage students to be independent thinkers to create leadership and responsibility. Teachers should help students to be comfortable and

assured in their own personal growth, so the student will develop self-confidence. These conditions can only occur if educator's attitudes and commitments toward students change.

The teachers have a profound effect on the safety of the school. The relations that they cultivate within their classrooms may be more important than the student's peer relations. Teachers should use the following strategies (Osterman, 2003). Ground rules must be set in classrooms stating that harassment and abuse of others is not acceptable. Using the following rules must challenge any type of harassing behavior. Tolerance and acceptance must be modeled and recognized rather than trying to control students and then punishing misbehavior. Students need to feel that others care about them and teachers should again model this behavior and promote it between students. Teens tend to mimic behaviors of role models. When teachers begin to express their care and concern for their students, peers of those students will not only begin to show the student the same respect, but also mimic their behavior.

Physical or Plant Changes for Safety

Not only will improved attitudes help curb violence, but schools also need to make physical or plant changes to create a safe environment. The school population does not always create violence in schools. Outsiders also pose a threat to all persons within the school. Access to all school buildings should be controlled. One possible solution is use of a single entrance where all visitors must check-in, check-out, and receive proper identification. According to the Millennium School 2000 Survey, respondents believe the number one change made, at their school, to ensure safety, was limiting the number of

entrances to the building (Shapiro and Associates, 2000). Clear marking of entrances, exits and other major areas will help limit confusion and lessen anxiety. Limited and monitored access to the school campus for cars and busses would also help curb school violence. The flow of traffic, pedestrian walkways, and parking lots should all be considered when designing facility access for safety.

Although no school can ever be considered completely safe, new schools must consider many areas in and around the school. If the school facilities are accessible after hours, these areas should be visible from the surrounding neighborhoods and well lighted. This will allow community members to monitor activities in these areas. Consideration should be made for flow of traffic within the building. Corridors must be wide to allow for proper circulation of students and staff. Wide hallways also improve the staff's ability to supervise the area. If schools are large, they should consider creating smaller pods or schools within the school. This will allow students to get a feeling of ownership and staff members will be able to manage the students more effectively (Prager, 2001).

Older schools may need to alter their facility to make it safer for students. One simple suggestion is to place the school office within site of the main entrance. In some schools, glass may need to be removed, if there is a possibility of a car driving through it and into the building (Kass, 1999). In other areas, glass windows may need to be placed in walls to allow supervision of otherwise "problem areas." Locks on doors need to be able to be locked on the inside by the teacher in case of an intruder.

Controlling locks in buildings is another means of promoting school safety. The locks that control access to the facility for staff members must be secure and reliable. Schools have a variety of ways to access buildings. Keyed locksets (traditional metal

keys), key cards (similar to a credit card), and smart keys (a small computer chip are the most common forms of keys in schools. No matter what type of system the school chooses, one person should be in charge of all keys and should authorize repairs, changes and re-keying (King, 1997).

Newer technology for school security such as smart cards, metal detectors, alarm systems, and surveillance equipment are what many school are using despite the possible unintended consequences. These forms of security may increase fear and ruin what may have been a positive school climate. The technology used must match the schools needs to be useful and successful. Technology can be expensive from the initial cost and throughout the maintenance of the system. The need for metal detectors and cameras in common areas may be necessary in some schools with a greater rate of violence (Astor, Meyer, Pitner, 2001). No security technology should be purchased unless a problem is being addressed and it has been determined that this expenditure is more important than any other school need.

Supervision for Safety

One of the most important factors for creating a safe school environment is supervision. Staff supervision of students is critical at all times of the day. Hallways should be monitored before, during, and after classes daily. This is not a policing type of supervision; it is more of a monitoring supervision. For example, students should be greeted and dismissed at entrances and exits before and after school. The physical presence of a staff member at these times of day, will stop many fights from occurring, and will also meet students emotional needs with a simple “hello” or “goodbye.” Critical

areas such as locker rooms, bathrooms, hallways and cafeterias should have adequate supervision. Some schools have police officers or paid security personnel in their building for surveillance. I believe this type of presence is not necessary in most schools, and it will undermine a positive school environment. Visibility is a crucial factor in providing a safe school. If a potential vandal or assailant believes they may be seen or recognized, the chance of them committing the act greatly decreases.

Parent patrols have become a popular form of supervision in many schools (Kass, 1999). After one of the most deadly acts in United States history, parents began monitoring the hallways at Columbine High School, in Colorado. This type of supervision helps the school in many ways. By involving the community, familiar adults can calm students and identify early signs of trouble. Having familiar adults can also have the benefit of giving students a feeling of emotional comfort. In a North Carolina school, a parent believed that a white parent patrolling with a black parent sent a subtle message to students of racial harmony. The school also would open a line of communication with the community by inviting “parent patrols” into their schools. The only downside to this type of supervision would be the training involved and the legal ramifications of possible confrontations between parents and students.

Police officers or Student Resource Officers (SRO) are yet another form of supervision that schools employ. Routinely, police officers rotate their assignments, as well as their working hours. With SRO’s, this rotation is strongly discouraged. The National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO), issued a paper stating four reasons for discouraging rotation of SRO’s. Three of the reasons involved the need for the officer to build relationships. These relationships are between the officer and the

students, school staff, and members of the community. Development of relations with all three groups is critical to creating trust and effective communication between all parties to enhance the safety of the school community. The fourth reason for discouraging rotation of SRO's is improved skill development by the officer. As the officer's training continues, so do their experiences, and therefore their knowledge, thus making them more effective in their job.

Zero Tolerance Policies

Some schools have instantly reacted to school violence that occurred in other districts. These districts have created rules and regulations that may not be appropriate for their situation. These same school boards need to adapt other school's policies for their community instead of blindly accepting them because "it works for the other district." Schools that have a zero tolerance policy believe they have created, through rules and regulations, a safe and orderly school. What they have ultimately done is adopt a law enforcement model for a school system (Hyman, Snook, 2000). Now a student no longer has the opportunity to explain why he has a water pistol in his book bag before he is immediately suspended. Because of this harmless toy, what has this school system done to this child? Should the student have known not to bring a "gun" to school? Probably, but are children no longer allowed to play with military men and their accessories because of these policies? If so, there must be a better way to create a safe school environment.

Everyone has a Role in Safety

Through collaboration and communication entire communities must take an active role to provide a safe school environment (Department of Education, 1999). Students must take responsibility for the safety of the school. They can do this by behaving appropriately. Students see, know, and hear more than anyone else in the school so they must report crimes and threats to the appropriate person. Students can often become peer counselors or mediators. They also need to know how to avoid being the victim, and if they should become a victim, where they can get help in the community.

Parents play a role in the safety of our schools. Parents must actively communicate with children and be clear and consistent when disciplining their child. Parents must model appropriate social behavior and they should get involved in the school and the community. Parents must limit children's exposure to crime and violence. They also must keep guns and other weapons out of unsupervised areas and out of children's hands.

The police department cannot only provide SRO's, they must assume many other roles. Police must establish a relationship with the school, patrol the grounds and respond to reports of criminal activity in schools. They should also be part of the security design team that would routinely update emergency response plans and solve security problems.

Local business can also play a role in the safety of schools. Businesses could provide training in job skills, internships, employment, and scholarships to deserving students. Businesses also have many resources they can share with the school both including, but not limited to money and equipment.

Local elected officials and government agencies can provide leadership for school crime prevention. They can support school crime prevention research and begin discussions of key legislative issues surrounding school safety. Governments can help schools pool resources to maximize the strengths of each school. Government can also support safe schools by encouraging all schools to monitor and report crimes.

Chapter 3

Design of the Study

General Description of the Research Design

The study occurred at the Collingswood Middle School in Collingswood, New Jersey. The intern received formal approval, to complete this project as part of his internship from the Superintendent of schools. The school services approximately 360 students with twenty-eight staff members, a guidance counselor, and a principal. The middle school and the high school are part of the same campus, but are separate buildings. A school resource officer is assigned to the campus of the high school and middle school and his office is in the middle school. The middle school is one of six schools (four elementary, one middle, one high school) within the K-12 Collingswood Public School system. The town of Collingswood is considered to be a middle class suburban community.

The study will affect the entire school community. Students, teachers, and administration will be affected by any changes in the present policy. Staff members were chosen and interviewed for their opinions on present safety policies and needed changes. Each interviewee was asked to voluntarily participate in the interview. The principal, guidance counselor, and substance abuse coordinator were also interviewed. Individuals were interviewed in their surroundings in an attempt to make the person as comfortable as possible. For example, teachers were interviewed in their classrooms, and the principal was interviewed in his office. The intern pretested the interview questions on a fellow educator, who teaches in another school district. After attempting to handwrite all her

responses, the intern concluded that he should tape the remainder of the interviews and transcribe those tapes word for word, so that no statements were omitted.

When the study is completed, the intern will present his findings to the Superintendent of schools. The Superintendent and Board of Education must then determine whether or not the present situation in Collingswood is satisfactory. If after reviewing the study changes are made to present policy, parents, and possibly the police and fire department will need to be made aware of those changes.

Description of the Development of the Research Instrument

There are two instruments that the intern used in his research. The first research instrument is the interview protocol. When developing the questions, the intern attempted to create questions that determined whether or not Collingswood Middle School is a safe environment for students, and if there are other safeguards that should be used to protect the students. Initially, the intern created fifteen questions and then he placed them in a logical and historical sequence in order to put the interviewee at ease at the beginning of the interview. The more thought provoking questions were placed at the end. After pretesting the interview protocol, the intern determined that some of the questions were redundant and the interview was too long. Some questions were combined or removed to bring the interview to ten questions that should last approximately twenty to forty minutes. Also, on the interview protocol were probes to help the intern gain insight into the interviewee's answers.

The interview began with a question about the person's background and experience. The intern then tried to determine the interviewee's definition of a safe

school and if they work in a safe school. The next questions determined what types of unsafe acts have occurred at the school and how the school and administration reacted to these incidents. The intern then determined what policies and plans are in place at the school. The final questions of the interview attempted to determine how schools could provide a completely safe environment for learning.

The second instrument the intern used for data collection is a simple checklist of observable behaviors during evacuation and emergency procedures. Observation of behaviors occurred before, during, and after fire drills and other non-routine evacuations. The checklist included but was not limited to: date and time of procedure, type of procedure, time for evacuation of building, behavior and organization of the student population, staff response to evacuation, instructional time lost. Informal discussions about the procedures also occurred between the principal and the intern.

Description of the Interview Sample

A pretest of the interview protocol has been given to a teacher from a district outside Collingswood. The responses from this interview were not used for the research. They were only used to determine any weaknesses in the original interview protocol.

The intern interviewed seven members of the Collingswood Middle School staff. Two of the interviews were with former employees, a retired guidance counselor and the previous principal. A teacher with over twenty-three years of experience who was a Teacher of the Year Award recipient was interviewed. The present principal, guidance counselor, substance abuse coordinator, and school resource officer were also interviewed. The school resource officer is the former DARE officer for the elementary

schools and the only formal security in the High School or Middle School. All of these people are presently or were important staff members when it comes to violence prevention and the safety of Collingswood Middle School and its population. These individuals were interviewed in their most comfortable environment within the school, at their convenience. Each individual was asked to voluntarily participate in the interview. Their identity is being withheld for the purpose of confidentiality, as well as to encourage honesty from the interviewees without fear of repercussions.

Description of the Data Collection Approach

Permission to research this topic was formally received from the superintendent of schools and the board of education. After developing an interview protocol, the intern then refined his interview protocol through a pretest, who is a teacher in another school district. The intern then approached the aforementioned individuals and asked them if they would participate in my research project by conducting an interview at their earliest convenience. They were told at that time that their interview would remain anonymous and they were asked if the interview could be recorded at the time of the interview. At the conclusion of the interview, all interviewees were asked if they have anything to add or if they wish to have anything stricken from their statements since all interviews were transcribed word for word by the intern. All interviews were completed and transcribed before the end of January.

The intern analyzed the data being collected on the observable behavior checklists, during evacuations. This analysis concluded in January although many similar evacuations occurred after this date. Comparisons were made between September

evacuations and later evacuations to note if improvement had occurred as students better understood the procedure. Improvement was gauged based on time and organization of the students.

Description of the Analysis Plan

All data was gathered by the end of January. The data was both open-ended and structured. Research collected from journal articles, magazines, newspapers, school policy and government documents was concluded and is part of chapter two. This data presents what is happening in other schools, as well as areas of weakness, and what other professionals believe should be done to make schools safe. Based on this data Collingswood may need to make some changes depending on its school culture and community.

The structured analysis was based on the checklist for observing evacuation procedures. The structure of the checklist allowed the intern to estimate average times necessary to evacuate the building. He also determined if there are times of day that the evacuations were more prolonged or if there were any other factors that affected the evacuation process. The middle school houses approximately four high school classes, which also may prolong any evacuation or shorten it dependent on how many more students are in the building at that time.

The open-ended data came from the seven interviews. The intern read the transcripts of each interview and any other notes taken throughout the study and determined the common themes and categories within the research. The intern then color-coded his notes and interviews according to those themes and categories. The intern then

presented this research in chapter four and made conclusions and recommendations in chapter five of this thesis that would make Collingswood Middle School a safe school.

Chapter 4

Presentation of the Research Findings

There are many critical factors related to school violence and safety. Large schools may be impersonal, thus allowing students to feel distant or disconnected from the school community. Location of the school in either a rural, urban, wealthy, or depressed area may contribute to school violence. The economy of the nation and the local community may contribute to violence or safety. Staff experience, age of buildings, cleanliness of facilities, parental involvement, community support, and activities are just a few factors that could contribute to whether or not a school is safe.

Most school districts are safe and have faced the issue of school violence and safety effectively for their situation. There will always be random acts of violence in schools. Unfortunately, our schools mimic what happens in our society. Just as we have postal workers and day traders going on shooting rampages, we will have students being violent toward other students. Some parents may say that kids these days have a winner take all, Lord of the Flies mentality, which states that social adaptations and manners do not matter. This is not simply a school issue; it is a world issue.

Schools use a variety of different methods to curb violence and create safe schools. Depending upon the grade level, the administration, the buildings, and the staff, schools should choose the appropriate program. As stated earlier, there are many critical factors schools must consider before implementing a method for safe schools. After skimming many articles and statistics, there are not many incidences of violent crime and the number has decreased over time. Even though many schools have a “zero tolerance”

policy, they also have programs that attempt to create a positive school climate to help students avoid violence.

I determined what type of violence occurs in schools based on Department of Education reports. I also compared what experts believe is needed for a safe school and a positive school climate. I compared and contrasted the Collingswood Middle School policies and regulations to that of the experts to determine whether it is a safe school. I determined the strengths and weaknesses of the Collingswood Middle School (CMS) policies in relation to middle school areas of concern according to students' perceptions (Astor, Meyer, Pitner, 2001).

In order to determine whether violent acts are increasing in our nations schools I referenced a report which documents the number of crimes committed as well as plans and prevention models for schools (Dept of Ed., 1999). I have collected another document funded by the National Center for Educational Statistics, which provides information and data related to how many violent acts occurred, what the administrator's perspective was in regards to these issues, the disciplinary actions taken by the schools, and what violence prevention programs were being used (Heaviside, Rowand, Williams, Farris, 1998). In order to determine what policies, rules, and actions are needed to achieve a safe school and positive school climate, I consulted the aforementioned articles, two articles from the NAASP Bulletin (Walker, Eaton-Walker, 2000, Dodd, 2000) and an article about teaching towards a democratic school from Phi Delta Kappan (Irwin and Snook, 2000). The middle school perceptions of unsafe areas were taken from an article in the Elementary School Journal that surveyed students from middle and elementary schools (Astor, Meyer, Pitner, 2001).

Part of the data and information for my paper was gathered by interviewing two administrators, two guidance counselors, a teacher, a student assistance coordinator, a school police officer and a school resource officer (SRO). The administrators, student assistance coordinator, guidance counselors and SRO were interviewed in his or her own offices to assure a comfortable and private setting. The teacher chose to use her classroom, which placed them in a comfortable and familiar setting. The police officer was interviewed in my classroom, at his request, which is a private setting.

The interviewees were from the same K–12 school district. One administrator has had experience in many different school districts in a variety of positions. Another administrator had been in another middle school as a classroom teacher, and then a vice-principal. The teacher has been at the school for twenty years and is a Teacher of the Year recipient who is well respected by her colleagues. The police officer is the only formal security the school has employed, and he was the DARE officer for the elementary schools in the district. The SRO could be considered formal security, but he attempts to have a slightly different role and he does not wear a police uniform. The interviewees represent a wide range of experience that provide a varied cross section of the middle school, our place of employment.

Each was asked to voluntarily participate in my interview. Each person's actual identity was withheld for the purpose of confidentiality, as well as to encourage honesty from the interviewees without fear of repercussions. I told each person that they were part of a cross section of educators and administrators I was interviewing on the topic of violence and school safety at their school. The interview consisted of ten questions and took between twenty minutes and thirty-five minutes.

After the pretest interview was completed, I transcribed my notes for each subject onto a typed "Interview Protocol" sheet adding any additional thoughts as well as my impressions of the interviews. After handwriting the interviewee's answers to the pretest, I concluded that I was unable to write down everything. I decided to tape the seven official interviews and transcribe those tapes word for word so that no statements were omitted.

After all data was collected I compared and contrasted each subjects responses. I determined whether violence is a problem within the school and what changes need to be made to create a safe school. I used my protocol as a basic outline to determine the strengths and weaknesses of the school districts violence prevention programs and school safety plans. This information suggested that no major changes to existing programs or creation of new programs need to occur. Facilities at the school could be changed to promote safety for students as a result of the data. It is recommended that our school maintain the status quo with slight changes due to generally positive reactions of all participants in the interviews.

After reading the seven interviewees transcripts many times, I found several common threads among them. All interviewees were asked the same questions and worked at the same middle school. The answers contained positive perceptions of the school and the safety of teachers and students. The seven interviewees had slightly different knowledge of the violence in the school as well as the programs made available to the students. Every interviewee believed the discipline policy, safety/evacuation plan, and security measures were necessary at the school. The community's role, along with parents, was mentioned by all interviewees but in different ways. Finally, all

interviewees had an idea of what creates a safe school although they also mentioned that all of the aforementioned topics might need to change depending on changes in society and the local community.

Six of the seven people interviewed believed the school was safe place to work and learn with the reservation that you never know though what might happen. Julie when asked if she worked in a safe school answered, "Yes ... It is as safe as can be ... barring anything catastrophic." When asked the same question Alan said, "I think everyone works hard to make it a safe school. There are some things I'd like to do differently but ... I think we have a safe school, and I feel safe here, and the kids do, too," One person, Mike, had no reservations about the safety of the school. He said, "I think it's very safe ... I think it has come a long way from a couple years ago."

According to the seven interviewees there have not been any major violent acts, which would include weapons during their time at the school. The most common act of violence is fighting between students. "Usually the fights start out of school and then they spill into school," said Shelly. She also added, "Disagreements occur in school and it usually happens right outside or after school, not necessarily in the classrooms or in the hallways. Julie mentioned "... a male student was having a confrontation with a female student and was choking her and ... another teacher and I broke it up ... she did have big red marks on her neck." There was another incident where "... a student was kicking another student in the head and there was intervention there, quickly," Julie said.

Along with the topic of violence, the issue of bullying was mentioned as a major problem, which lends to students fighting. When asked what leads to the fighting in your school Alan said, "... more special issues than anything else, put downs, somebody

making fun of somebody else's you know mother." Katie mentioned, "... intimidation or bullying or actual fist fights" when discussing violence at the school. Vince did not seem to be concerned about violence, but he did mention most fights brew out of "... rumors, hearsay, he said she said stuff."

The middle school has implemented many programs to help students avoid, discuss, and stop violence as well as create a safe environment both in school and in their everyday lives. Julie mentioned programs and events such as Panther Peace Week, Child Assault Prevention (CAP), Words of Wisdom, Peer Mediation and the Newcomers group during her interview. Mike, "... thought DARE was effective..." but also believes the program presented by police officers called Sunrise "... is good because it gets kids at a younger age." Another program called Bridge may help prevent violence, Becky said, because it's a "...place for kids to go and discuss whatever is going on in their life at the present time, it may be an issue of divorce or anger or bullying or whatever is going on in their life." Every interviewee except Becky mentioned the CAP program, and I will highlight some of the major emphasis of that program later in my discussion.

The school districts security plan is not a major issue according to most interviewees but Shelly was concerned because although the doors are locked "... people put stones and props in the other doors that should be locked at all times." On the other hand, Becky thinks, "... physically we have done a good job." Our security is also ever changing as mentioned by Alan we now have an anthrax evacuation policy where if there were concern of contamination "... we would go to the theater/auditorium." This is obviously a reaction to somewhat recent events but generally the school has been proactive with security measures.

Along with security each building has an evacuation or safety plan for different emergencies such as a fire, a stranger in the building, or a bomb threat. Shelly said, "... there are different codes for different evacuation needs ... whether it be a lockdown ... or reporting outside the building on the track." For example, Julie said, "... the superintendent is in the building, is a code for stranger in the building." Even though no major accident or violent act has occurred since the evacuation policy has been instituted Alan thinks, "... if that situation came up ... we [the staff] would respond appropriately."

The building or facility can help facilitate or undermine the security of a school and the safety/evacuation plan. At this school the facilities do not seem to be a major issue, however Alan did say that "... because our building is setup so strangely there is a big leeway and sometimes people get lost," in reference to the distance from the entrance to the main office. Shelly agreed with Alan's comment by stating, "I think the office should be located closer to the main entrance of the building ... they should be able to open the front door to the office before you can even gain access to the building." One positive factor of our facility and our district is its size. As Vince said, "... in a small school like ours I think we are doing the proper security measures."

The community and parents play a leading role in the safety of schools. Becky agrees with the statement "It takes a village to raise a child." She said that, "... solving kids problems can't be done in one office, it is a community issue, it has to be the big picture." Shelly believes it is the parents' responsibility "... to prepare their kids to come to school to learn and not to bully kids or intimidate kids, or ... pick fights." Mike mentioned that "... the principal, the [police] chief, the superintendent [of schools], the mayor" all meet once a month which "opens communication." School crime and

violence are truly community problems that affect the safety of students who attend the schools that serve them. Many students are more concerned for their personal safety on the way to and from school (Walker and Eaton-Walker, 2000). Therefore, it is critical that the school creates relations with the community, business, and emergency departments. Parent Teacher Associations (PTA) could facilitate this communication.

Every interviewee had a slightly different definition of a safe school, which seems to be directly related to the individual's role within the school. Shelly was concerned about the students when she said, "A safe school is one which kids are not afraid to come to." Becky attempted to make a community connection to safe schools when she said it takes "... awareness on the part of everyone from community to students to parents, [to] staff." Mike spoke of personnel when he said, "... a good vice principal, and ... faculty make it safe."

Five of the interviewees also alluded to the discipline policy as a key to safe schools. Alan said, "... you have to have staff members that know what your expectations are ... you have to have a well defined disciplinary code ... that you have to follow." Mike also said that the police "... have a no tolerance policy if there is problems with juveniles." The discipline policy keeps students safe as stated by Julie when she -related two incidents of severe fighting, the individuals "... were removed from our building and from our district."

The seven interviewees had a total of nearly ninety years of experience. Most of that experience came at the same school district, which explains the many similarities between the interview transcripts. The interviewees' experience, knowledge, and insight

are irreplaceable. The fact that all of them never mentioned a violent act or an unsafe situation worse than a major fight speaks very well for the schools' safety.

Morale of the staff and perceptions of the community, staff, and students all play a role in determining the safety of a school. However, reality must be considered when one lives in a violent society and no community is immune to violence. Teachers must play an active role not only in the students' academic education based on curriculum and standards, but they must also consider social expectations and appropriate behavior. Students and staff must understand the need to respect one another's rights. Schools should provide students with a sense of shared responsibility, as in a democracy, with the staff for assuming safety for all (Irwin and Snook, 2000).

We must try to eliminate all acts of violence within our schools through all means available. Students in middle and high schools are much more likely to commit acts of violence than in the elementary schools (Heaviside, Rowand, Williams, Farris, 1998). Possibly with the implementation of programs such as Sunrise in place of DARE as mentioned by Mike may "... get the kids at a younger age" and this helps with acceptable social behaviors. The CAP program whose theme is "No More Bullies, No More Victims," not only attempts to train students how to stop violence through words and actions, but it also provides separate staff and parent workshops to help identify each person's role. As with any program it should be reviewed for its effectiveness through surveys and/or interviews, which is also included in the CAP program. The middle school is not only safe because of these programs but because they provide such a variety of opportunities for students to "work out" problems in peer mediation, Bridge, Pupil Assistance Committee (PAC), and an anger management group. There are also activities

such as Words of Wisdom and Panther Peace Week that help students find peaceful outcomes.

More data was gathered by observing behaviors and movement of students during emergency practice procedures. During these drills, the intern evaluated the following areas of the drill: date, time, duration, organization after evacuation, attendance, cooperation of all parties, noise level and any other observable behaviors. Law requires schools to perform two practice drills every month. The school complied with this law and also conducted its' own "code red" emergency drill. All of the evacuation drills were completed at a minimum of two minutes and the maximum of three minutes and sixteen seconds.

Most of the drills occurred during the first half of the school day, but time of day did not seem to have any affect on the student's behaviors. The student's fastest exit from the building occurred during the same period that it took students the greatest amount of time to exit the building. When exiting the building, students did converse, but at a level that instructions could be heard if necessary. After getting outside students were organized into rows, on the track, based on their teacher's evacuation number on the fence. At that time, all teachers took attendance and wrote the names of all students not present and noted where they were if the teacher knew. For example, if a student was at the nurses' office, this would be noted on the attendance sheet and the principal would then compare that to the nurse's attendance record. The drills were well run and well organized.

During the "code red" emergency drill, teachers are supposed to lock and close their doors, turn off the lights, close the windows and blinds, and have a silent classroom.

There seemed to be some confusion amongst staff members when this drill was run. The principal, SRO, and intern walked the halls checking doors and rooms to make sure all classrooms had followed the correct procedures. There were four classrooms whose doors were closed but locked, compromising the safety of the students inside. The other behavior noted by the intern was five teachers were still teaching. When the intern asked the teachers why they did not have silent rooms they all responded that they knew it was “just a drill” and they wanted the students to keep working. All staff members were reminded at the faculty meeting following the “code red” that all procedures need to be followed from our emergency response plan, regardless of whether or not the teacher knows it is a drill.

Chapter 5

Conclusions, Implications and Further Study

Introduction

Within this chapter, the intern will describe the major conclusions and their corresponding implications, as they are related to Collingswood Middle School. The chapter will highlight the conclusions and implications of the study on the intern's leadership development. The chapter will also address how the school has changed and what changes are being considered as a result of the study. Finally, this chapter will explain the need for further study within the topic of school safety at Collingswood Middle School.

Major Conclusions and Their Corresponding Implications

The number of violent acts mentioned in the interviews, at Collingswood Middle School, was very low for the years of experience that the interviewees had at the school. This would indicate that the discipline policy and security measures at the middle school are appropriate. Although the discipline policy only mentions zero tolerance in relation to weapons and drugs, the policy is very low tolerance. The code calls for specifications such as out of school suspension, meetings with parents and administrators, and possible expulsion for fighting and other offenses. The code is very specific about the consequences of actions whether they are actions of word or deed. The discipline code can be found in each students handbooks and on the Collingswood Public Schools website. Every interviewee and every article from my bibliography mentioned the disciplinary policy as a key to a safe school. Not only administrators and staff, but also

student leaders rewrote the middle school disciplinary policy code approximately five years ago, and again this past summer. Involving students into this process as well as other policies such as the dress code policy has helped create a feeling of ownership in our building, as we should have in a democratic society (Irwin and Snook, 2000). Schools need to constantly and consistently review and update their discipline and other school policies.

The security measures taken at the middle school are minimal and unobtrusive yet effective for the most part. The most obvious is that all doors are locked and visitors must get “buzzed” into the building. The school district also has a community police officer available everyday while school is in session to assist with any problems as well as to write reports and “press charges” when necessary. There is only one camera in our entire building, which allows office personnel to see people coming into our buildings. Alan said during his interview that at one of his prior schools, “... the camera missed the things you need the pictures of most.” They could be used as a deterrent in certain areas such as hallways, cafeterias, and locker rooms, which are where most acts of violence, occur according to one article (Heaviside, Rowand, Williams, Farris, 1998). Steve mentioned during his interview, that he is working on getting cameras in both the middle school and high school for next year. Two major obstacles for installing cameras are the cost of the equipment and the age of the middle school structure. Steve is attempting to get grant money to purchase the equipment so that the local school board will not bear the brunt of the expense.

The building, which houses the middle school, is approximately sixty years old but according to the interviewees, it only has one security flaw which could allow an

unwelcome stranger access to the building. The office is not located near an entrance; therefore, visitors must walk through the hallways unsupervised for about fifty yards and down a set of stairs before they arrive at the main office to sign in and obtain a visitors pass. If cameras are not purchased for the entire building, this entrance is where a few cameras could be placed to monitor the visitor's entrance and hallways leading into the building. Since each entrance is located at a ground level staircase, the concern of the staff is real because after an unwanted person entered the building, he could gain access to any floor almost immediately. The key to safety here is, "... we have a good staff that keep an eye out on things," Alan said. Monitoring of the hallways by staff members is a crucial element for safety in our schools. Teachers are asked to stand outside their classrooms during the time between classes to act as deterrents for inappropriate behavior. This is a very effective way to keep the school safe. It is better than a police officer that could yield uneasiness or the perception of an unsafe school to students and visitors (Astor, Meyer, Pitner, 2001). Other changes that could be made to the building were mentioned by Shelly when she suggested that the district build "... an enclosed walkway that joins the middle school to the high school" since classrooms are shared by staff and students in each building.

Another reason the staff believes the school is safe is because the district has instituted a very comprehensive safety/evacuation plan. The school board, administrators, and the facilities manager created the plan. Law mandates safety and evacuation drills, but our school has been proactive in developing plans for different situations. The policymakers have adjusted the plan to meet the ever-changing needs and facility situations. For example, Collingswood now has an emergency response plan

where every teacher has a responsibility, such as taking attendance or organizing movement of classes to other locations due to bomb threats. Each teacher also has a specific location to meet his/her class both on and off campus in case of an emergency. The emergency response plan and the aforementioned changes have all occurred due to changes in society and teacher concerns and requests.

Implications of the Study on Organizational Change

A few minor changes have already occurred or are being planned as a result of this study. According to the interviews the biggest safety concern is unwelcome intruders. The most noticeable of the changes is new signage on the entrance doors as well as throughout the hallways. Visitors can easily determine the direction to the main office. Also on these placards is the statement “all visitors must obtain a visitors pass from the main office.” This will help staff and students determine whether or not someone belongs in the building. Plans are also being considered to change the entrance to the middle school so that it passes through the assistant principal’s office. This would be the only unlocked door through which persons could enter the building.

Both Shelly and Scott mentioned during their interview one other concern for the safety and welfare of the middle school students. Because the high school and middle school share some staff members, some middle school students have classes in the high school and some high school students have classes in the middle school. Not only does this open the doors of each building between periods but it could also place a twelve-year-old child in a building with a nineteen-year-old child. The high school principal middle school principal and guidance counselors are trying to devise a schedule that will

eliminate this from occurring. Once again one of the difficulties in solving this problem is the age of the buildings and the size of the classrooms. Because the buildings are old and the staffs of each building are small there is not much flexibility when it comes to scheduling in the middle school or high school. However, the principals are committed to a solution for next year.

Collingswood Middle School is a safe school where students can learn and teachers can teach. In order to create and maintain a safe school the entire community must play a role. We will never remove the issue of safety from our schools. We must never stop asking if we have done everything to make this school as safe as it can be. We must continue to focus energy on improving our communities and our lines of communication. We must continue to use appropriate disciplinary measures. Schools should provide programs that teach and practice social skills and connect violence prevention skills to academics and real life. The reality is that no single approach, no program, no speaker, no security system, no police officer, no principal, and no teacher can single-handedly prevent violence or provide a safe school. It takes a community effort.

Implications of the Study on the Intern's Leadership Development

As a future educational leader, the intern intends to be aware of the entire school safety program. If there is any uneasiness within the staff or students, adjustments to the safety/emergency plan must be made immediately. Members of the entire community must determine these plans and adjustments. Local law enforcement agencies should be involved in the planning and revising of all policies and procedures related to the safety

of the children. In order to have safety in schools, we must have long and short-term plans at the national, state, and community level (Walker and Eaton-Walker, 2000). These plans must be reviewed and adjusted annually.

The intern will share the results of the interviews (not the transcripts) with the middle school principal. At that time, the intern will ask the principal if he would like him to share these results with other concerned persons. The intern will ask for permission to share the results at a faculty meeting in order to initiate discussion amongst my colleagues in hopes of creating a safer school for everyone. The intern will also present the results at the Parent Teacher Association meeting. This could begin a discussion of not only school, but also community concerns and safety issues.

The results of the data and research paper may lead to a community forum for a town emergency plan. School systems are a large part of all communities; therefore, all emergency plans should be understood and include all possible participants in that area. If a violent act occurs in a school, the community must react, as well as the school personnel. If there are guidelines designed by all possible participants, the likelihood of success for the plan will increase.

Need for Further Study

Further research may be needed in the area of safety measures such as hall monitors, cameras, and metal detectors. How students perceive safety within our schools would be another possible topic for future research since student and adult perceptions often differ. It would be interesting to compare schools that have had no violent acts to those schools that have had several. Is the difference between these schools

environmental, social, economic, location, or another factor? How have other schools reacted after violent acts to create safe schools such as in Littleton, Colorado at Columbine High School?

Further research could be done comparing safety issues between elementary schools, middle schools and high schools. The intern was unable to find any articles specifically related to middle schools. The completed research showed a higher percentage of violence in middle schools and high schools, but none of the articles separated the middle school from the high school. Also, a survey of both teachers and students, could be conducted, to determine perceptions of a safe school, and their evaluation of the many programs provided to them, at the school and in the community.

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Appendix A
Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol

1. Tell me about your teaching experiences?
 - a. Where did you work and when?
 - b. Any administrative positions?
 - c. At CMS?
2. What makes a safe school?
 - a. Teachers, Students, Parents?
3. Do you work in a safe school?
 - a. Why or why not?
4. Tell me about any acts of violence in your prior school?
 - a. Were any teachers or students injured?
 - b. Were you and did you feel safe?
 - c. What were the consequences for the individuals involved?
5. Tell me about any acts of violence in your present school?
 - a. Were any T. or S. injured?
 - b. Were you and did you feel safe?
 - c. What were the consequences for the individuals involved?
6. How did the school administration/ school board react?
 - a. New policy?
 - b. New programs?
 - c. Guest speakers?
 - d. Additional counselors?
7. Tell me about any violence prevention programs at your school?
 - a. What are they?
 - b. Do they work?
8. Tell me about your school's safety plan and evacuation plan?
 - a. Who created it?
 - b. How does it work, what do you do?
 - c. Are there different plans for different emergencies? (Fire, Bomb, Stranger Danger, Injury)
 - d. Are all T. and S. aware of plan?
9. How can schools stop violence?
10. How can schools provide a safe school?

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