

EXPLORING THE SCHOOL BUS AS AN ENVIRONMENT FOR  
BULLYING: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

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Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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**ABSTRACT**

This qualitative research examined the school bus as an opportune environment for bullying behaviors. School bus drivers have the responsibility to transport students safely to and from school; however, when students use the school bus for bullying activities, the task of driving becomes a challenge to the school bus drivers. The study investigated the experiences from school bus drivers' stories of bullying behaviors on the school bus. A qualitative approach was used with a phenomenological design to obtain data for this research study. Seven school bus drivers from a metropolitan school system in southeastern United States participated in the study. The data collection consisted of individual semi-structured interviews, a questionnaire to obtain the school bus drivers' experiences, and school documents of student violations on the school bus. Data were analyzed by horizontalization (Moustakas, 1994). Five themes were identified: (a) bullying behaviors, (b) supervision challenges, (c) distractions and safety, (d) total support, and (e) essential training.

*Descriptors:* aggression, bully, bullying, school bus, school bus driver, victim, victimization

## **Dedication and Acknowledgements**

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Samuel and Mildred, and my brothers, Linwood and Alan. I would like to say a heartfelt thank you to all of you who assisted me during my educational journey. First and foremost, thank you God, for answering my prayers when I prayed for guidance, wisdom, and knowledge. You answered “Trust in the Lord with all your heart . . . Remember the Lord in everything you do, and he will show you the right way” (Proverbs 3:5-6, Good News Bible). Thank you to my mother for encouraging me to keep the faith during those long nights when I stayed up thinking, reading, and typing until the early mornings; you were there through every emotion that I had. Thank you to my father and mother for providing me with the gift of learning that always stayed with me. Thank you to my family and friends for your support and prayers.

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## **Lists of Abbreviations**

Center for Disease Control (CDC)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

National Association for Pupil Transportation (NAPT)

National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)

State Department of Education (SDOE)

## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

Bullying in schools is a major issue in the United States (Schoen & Schoen, 2010). Far too many students suffer from victimization during school hours. As a result, legislators, along with each state department of education, collaborated to develop laws to prevent bullying in the school environment (Neiman, Robers, & Robers, 2012), which lead to the emergence of anti-bullying laws. Kueny and Zirkel (2012) reported that as of 2010, “43 states anti-bullying laws addressed bullying behaviors in the schools” (p.26). With the surge of student bullying within the school environment, a recent report during the year of 2014 indicated that the number of states with anti-bullying laws increased to 49 (Stopbullying.gov, 2014). Montana is the only state that does not have an anti-bullying law, but it does have a policy that addresses student behavior (Stopbullying.gov, 2014). From these laws, each state mandated local school systems to include in their respective code of conduct plan a prevention program to tackle the ongoing bullying behaviors within the school environment (Edmondson & Zeman, 2011). It is common for each of the state laws to address what they perceive as bullying. For example, among the states anti-bullying laws, each respective state law may differ as related to definition, policy, notice, reporting, investigating, and consequences (Kueny & Zirkel, 2012; Neiman et al., 2012). Because of the severity and impact of bullying, each state department of education holds school systems accountable for complying with their respective anti-bullying programs.

There are also legislators that view student bullying in schools as a crime. In May 2014, the City Council of Carson, California voted to label bullying as a misdemeanor crime of school age bullies to 25 years old adult bullies (Mazza, 2014).

Although the anti-bullying ordinance failed to pass, there are legislators and citizens that foresee “criminalizing” bullying as another method to stop student bullying behaviors in the schools (Mazza, 2014).

The school environment is generally a safe haven away from home for students while they learn and socialize, not an environment that students would fear daily. However, the act of bullying can have a negative impact on school climate and student achievement, moreover, potentially hindering students’ rights to feel safe in their educational environment (Gourneau, 2012). In particular, bullying of students directly influences the direction of the school and the perception of whether the school climate promotes a safe environment. These bullying behaviors frequently occur inside and outside of schools, consequently resulting in lower academic achievement, social, and emotional growth of students (Gourneau, 2012; Long & Alexander, 2010).

Bullying has been reported to occur anywhere within the school environment. Specifically, the school grounds such as the playground, restrooms, cafeteria, and hallways, which are locations where bullies most often victimize (Putnam, Handler, Platt, & Luiselli, 2003). One often overlooked environment where bullying takes place is on the school bus (deLara, 2008a; Galliger, Tisak, & Tisak, 2008; Henderson, 2009; Hirsch, Lewis-Palmer, Sugai, & Schnacker, 2004; Putnam et al., 2003; Raskauskas, 2005; Wolf, 2009).

Bullying does occur when students are in the environment of the school bus in which a variety of social interactions takes place among students (Galliger et al., 2008). This environment provides an opportunity where students either build friendships or display aggressive behaviors (Galliger et al., 2008). More importantly, only a few studies

have examined the reasons students use the environment of the school bus as a place to bully their peers. For example, research confirmed that the school bus environments usually consists of large numbers of students (Raskauskas, 2005), limited student structure, (Galliger et al., 2008), and low adult supervision on the school bus (Galliger et al., 2008; Raskauskas, 2005), making it a prime place to display aggressive behaviors. In addition, grouping of students based on specific demographics played a role with school bus bullying. Ramage and Howley (2007) reported that an environment in which heterogeneously grouped students ride together with various ranges of age and grade level (i.e., six through twelve) are at risk for bullying behaviors, especially on routes in rural areas, according to research conducted by Henderson (2009). In this environment, older students are more likely to victimize younger students, especially during long rides to and from school (Henderson, 2009; Ramage & Howley, 2007). Overall, research studies reported that different locations within the school environment provided bullies an opportunity to victimize when there is a lack of adults monitoring students.

According to the study of deLara (2008a), many administrators and teachers are not aware of the behaviors that take place during the school bus ride to and from school. Equally important, the school bus driver is the only adult present on the school bus during the ride to and from school, and is the sole contact person to forward information regarding bullying behaviors, in addition to making critical decisions of safety for themselves and students while driving (deLara, 2008a). The researcher also noted that it is important to realize that the school bus drivers' primary role is to transport students safely to and from school. "Although their first charge is to drive safely, they are called

on to deal with incidents of harassment, bullying, and other forms of violence during the ride” (deLara, 2008a, p. 49).

The National Association for Pupil Transportation (NAPT, 2012), along with the United States Department of Education Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools, and the Supportive Schools Technical Assistance Center, devised two training modules to address bullying on the school bus. The modules consisted of direct instructions on how school bus drivers should handle bullying behaviors on the school bus. For example, instruction provided the school bus drivers with tools to identify, respond, address, and report bullying behaviors on or around the school bus (NAPT, 2012). Moreover, the primary focus of the organizations is to provide bullying training, information, and inform local school system’s bus drivers of management methods to combat bullying behaviors on the school bus. In reality, school bus drivers now have the responsibility of monitoring the behaviors of aggression that cause physical and verbal harm to others during the bus ride.

### **Definitions of Terms**

- *Bullying* is defined in the educational setting as “(a) harassment of the victim occurs over time; (b) intent behind the harassment is either mentally or physically harmful to the victim; and (c) an imbalance of power is apparent” (Flynt & Morton, 2008, p. 188).
- *Relational/social bullying* “involves hurting someone’s reputation or relationships, which may include leaving someone out on purpose, telling other [students] not to be friends with someone, spreading rumors about someone, or

embarrassing someone in public” (Department of Health and Human Services, n.d.).

- *Physical bullying* is the act of “hurting a person’s body or possessions. Examples consist of hitting/kicking/pinching, spitting/tripping/pushing, taking or breaking someone’s things, making mean or rude hand gestures” (Department of Health and Human Services, n.d.).
- *School bus driver*, for the purpose of this study, is a full-time employee with a designated route transporting students to and from school. The driver completed the required training of the State Department of Education and the School System Transportation Department.
- *Verbal bullying* is defined as “saying mean things, which may consist of teasing, name calling, taunting, or threatening to cause harm” (Department of Health and Human Services, n.d.).
- *Victim* is defined as a [student] who is repeatedly subjected to unwanted harm from physical, verbal, and/or relational bullying (Olweus, 1993).

### **Background**

Data derived from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), stated that 28 % of students ages 12 through 18 surveyed during the 2008 – 2009 school year reported being bullied at school (2011) compared to 27.8 % bullied during the school year 2010 to 2011 (2013). As the public reacted to bullying in the schools, Schoen and Schoen (2010) stated, “Schools have a legal and ethical responsibility to prevent and respond to bullying and harassment” (p. 70).

The location of bullying is an important factor that school systems need to examine when combating school bullying. Traditionally, most school bullying occurred at different locations throughout the school grounds; however, another undetected location where bullying does occur is on the school bus, to and from school (deLara, 2008a; Galliger et al., 2008; Putnam et al., 2003; Raskauskas, 2005). Data from the NCES (2013) revealed that 7.4 % of students in grades six through twelve reported being bullied on the school bus during the 2010 - 2011 school year increasing from the reported 6.3 % of students bullied on the school bus during the school year 2008 to 2009 (2011). The data reflected the responses from students enrolled in public schools throughout the United States. Because the school bus is not a physical part of the school building, the school bus is not recognized as an extension of the school, leaving bullying behaviors on the school bus mostly unreported (deLara, 2008a; Galliger et al., 2008; Putnam et al., 2003; Raskauskas, 2005). Given this overlooked behavior on the school bus, victims of bullying face a difficult battle for the right to transportation to and from school in a safe and secure environment.

Bullying behavior for the school day is most likely to begin and end on the school bus. Although school officials may not be aware of the reasons and severity of this overlooked behavior, this environment is critical for further investigation. Prior studies (Putnam et al., 2003; Raskauskas, 2005) reported that the school bus is a place for bullying for reasons such as a lack of adult supervision and student disagreements that spill over from the school day. Another reason is that the large amounts of students on the bus with varying ages and grade levels making the environment high risk for bullying behaviors (Ramage & Howley, 2007).



Most often, bullying behavior influences the academic achievement, social stability, and the emotional health of victims (Bowllan, 2011; O'Brennan, Bradshaw, & Sawyer, 2009; Long & Alexander, 2010) which, "translates into serious academic costs for the victim" (Gastic, 2008, p. 399). For example, bullying caused victims to fear going to school and in some instances the victims have become aggressive themselves (Gastic, 2008). Because of fear, becoming a bully to fit in camouflages the victims to protect themselves from further victimization (O'Brennan et al., 2009). According to Gastic (2008), "Victim's truancy and disciplinary problems at school contribute to missed opportunities to learn and engage with classmates and teachers" (p. 399). NCES (2013) data reported that students in grades six through twelve during the 2010 through 2011 school year skipped class (2.0 %), skipped school (2.6 %), dodged school activities (3.3 %), and bypassed specific places at school (12.2 %) to avoid being a victim of bullying. In addition, being a victim of bullying can cause feelings of depression, anxiety, and struggles with peer friendship (O'Brennan et al., 2009), which further isolates victims from their peers as they regress from their academic studies (Gastic, 2008). Clearly, bullying on the school bus is an overlooked serious problem, which impacts the safety of students as they travel to and from school on the school bus. This study served as a framework for further investigation to explore student bullying behaviors on the school bus.

### **Situation to Self**

Within my tenure as an educator, I taught, mentored, and counseled students ranging from grades six through twelve that attended traditional and alternative schools who have either witness bullying or suffer as a victim of bullying. From this observation,

I found it disheartening that educators are overwhelmed with increased class sizes, extra duty assignments, administering standardized tests, and excessive paperwork, which does not leave much time during the school day to intervene or investigate student activities that involve bullying behaviors in and out of the school. Moreover, school systems have minimized their role in addressing bullying due to the constant demands placed upon educators or their lack of knowledge regarding bullying behaviors. According to parents and the news media, bullying is rampant in all areas of the school environment. While observing all areas where bullying takes place, I was particularly concerned with bullying behaviors within the school bus environment, which can lead to affecting students' educational success or lack thereof.

Additionally, I found that students who are often absent from school reported that riding the school bus was a place of constant bullying, which contributed to their reason for not attending school. For this reason, as an educator, I am aware of the vital influence of bullying students. Fear of coming to school can lead to student dropout, parents transferring their children to another school or homeschooling. My concern is that bullying on the school bus is also problematic for the driver in addition to the students.

The philosophical assumption that motivated me to conduct this research is ontology. Ontological assumption conveys the nature of reality according to the participants' specific views, which is based on their perceptions of what is taking place (Creswell, 2007). I was particularly interested in describing the school bus drivers' perceptions of bullying behaviors on the school bus. The phenomenon of the school bus driver's experience of student bullying behaviors on the school bus will bring awareness to the school community, school leaders, and board of education for recommendations to

alleviate bullying activities. Advocacy/participatory was used as the paradigm for researchers to promote discussions for future changes for victims of bullying. For this reason, I have encouraged any student throughout my career as an educator to seek adults to confide their concerns when feelings of fear threaten their happiness and safety. As a Christian and an educator, I have the responsibility to advocate on behalf of victims, bring awareness to the school community, and to promote changes in reforming bullies regarding their behaviors.

### **Problem Statement**

The problem is that student bullying is occurring on the school bus. Student bullying behaviors are often unnoticed and unreported, as school bus drivers are focused on driving students safely to and from school. For the bully, the school bus is an ideal environment because of low adult supervision, a compact physical capacity, and a large number of students involved in unstructured activities (Galliger et al., 2008). Because students fear bullies, numerous confrontations with a bully on the school bus discourage students from attending school, which leads to dropping out (Zabloski, 2010) as well as negatively affecting their social, emotional, and academic success (Long & Alexander, 2010).

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to understand and explore the school bus as an opportune environment where bullying occurs from the experiences of school bus drivers. Most studies focused on bullying behaviors that occur on the school grounds, which include playgrounds, classrooms and hallways, restrooms, and cafeteria areas (Putnam et al., 2003) excluding the school bus environment. The goal of this study

is to lower the risk of bullying on the school bus, therefore, further investigation was needed to explore reasons this environment is sought out as a favorable location for victimization to occur. In addition, data from the study of the perceptions of school bus drivers addressed how bully intervention/prevention programs may assist bullying on the school bus. Although bullying does not have a clear defined definition of a specific behavior, for the purpose of this research, the types of bullying described are physical, verbal, and relational to identify the bullying behaviors throughout the research. Because of the limited literature on this topic, further research is needed to address the gap on the topic of bullying in the environment of the school bus.

### **Significance of the Study**

The exploration of bullying on the school grounds is boundless. However, an often overlooked location where bullying occurs is the school bus environment with limited research on this topic. Few research studies investigate the emergence of bullying activities on the school bus as researchers explore methods to identify techniques to lower the risk of bullying (deLara, 2008a; Putnam et al., 2003; Raskauskas, 2005) for students to feel safe as they are transported to and from school.

A collaboration of diverse research regarding bullying activities on the school bus can be an avenue to the reduction of bullying on the school bus. Research that explores the school bus drivers' observations of activities on the school bus (deLara, 2008a) coupled with research that investigates the social interactions among students on the school bus (Galliger et al., 2008) contributes to safety or lack thereof. In addition, research using management tools to track bullying behaviors as a method of hindering

aggressive behaviors (Hirsch et al., 2004; Raskauskas, 2005) along with the support of the community stakeholders is needed to enforce a bully free school environment.

From the studies of the researchers, this study drew attention to school leaders to acknowledge that the location of bullying is as important to the act itself. By exploring the environment of the school bus of the “lived experiences” (van Manen, 1990) from the perceptions of the school bus drivers, this qualitative study provided a framework for future quantitative studies to gain valuable information for further study. In addition, this study provided the school system with data for planning an intervention and prevention program specifically for bullying behaviors on the school bus, updating school bus bullying rules, addressing safety of the students, and future training for school bus drivers to recognize, intervene, and report bullying.

### **Research Questions**

Literature documented student bullying as persistent and problematic within the school environment (Olweus, 1993). An often overlooked area of bullying within the school environment occurs on the school bus, which is always observed first hand by the school bus drivers. The first research question was formulated from literature that documented school bus drivers’ insight of student bullying behaviors on the school bus (deLara, 2008a; Galliger et al. 2008; Krueger, 2010; Putnam et al. 2003; Raskauskas, 2005). Research question two was derived from literature that discussed methods to prevent bullying episodes on the school bus (Galliger et al. 2008; Krueger, 2010; Putnam et al. 2003; Raskauskas, 2005).

The following research questions guided this study:

1. How do school bus drivers describe their experiences with student bullying?

2. What perceptions do school bus drivers have of parents, administrators, and methods of management to prevent student bullying on the school bus?

### **Delimitations**

The focus of this study was to explore the environment of the school bus to obtain descriptions and experiences of student bullying behaviors on the school bus. A delimitation of this study was that the participants for the research were seven school bus drivers employed full time who shared the same experience of observing student bullying on the school bus. Another delimiting factor was that the school bus drivers work within a metropolitan school system with a diverse student population.

### **Research Plan**

A qualitative research plan was used for this study with a phenomenological design. The phenomenological design was best for this study because it described and explored the school bus as a prime location for bullying to understand school bus drivers' experiences with student bullying. Three methods of data collection consisted of (a) semi-structured interviews, (b) a questionnaire, and (d) aggregated data from school documents.

First, data collection consisted of a semi-structure interview of open-ended questions with school bus drivers as they described bullying activities within the environment of the school bus, which provided insight about bullying behaviors during the school bus ride. The school bus drivers described the meaning of lived experience of the phenomenon they each shared. The data analysis method consisted of horizontalizing significant statements, determining the meaning of the statements, and describing the experience (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994) of bullying activities on the school bus. In

addition, meanings or themes formulated from significant statements were grouped based on commonality (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). Textural and structural descriptions combined described the essence of the experience of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). Another method of collecting data was a questionnaire for additional information to examine the frequency, type of bullying violations, and management methods. A third method of data collection consisted of aggregate data from the school system's disciplinarian referrals seeking common trends and disciplinary consequences regarding school bus bullying behaviors. Each of these data collection methods added to the understanding of bullying behaviors during the school bus ride to and from school.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Introduction**

In the school environment, every student encountered a bully or victim throughout his or her time as a student. The school environment consists of the school building and any place school instruction, activities, or gatherings are taking place (NCES, 2013). Nationally, bullying is taking place in the schools as well as on school buses (NCES, 2013). The NCES (2013) survey revealed that 27.8% of students ages 12 to 18 reported being a victim of bullying at school during the 2010 to 2011 school year. The locations of the bullying occurred in the hallway or stairway (45.6 %), inside the classroom (32.8 %), on school grounds (22.1 %), inside the restroom or locker room (11.0 %), in the cafeteria (8.6 %), and on the school bus (7.4 %) (NCES, 2013). According to the data, bullying on the school bus is the least reported. School bus drivers' responsibilities have evolved from transporting students safely to the task of monitoring bullying behaviors while driving (Putnam et al., 2003). These behaviors have extended beyond the school building onto the school bus during the daily transport to and from school (deLara, 2008a).

The school bus is the only mode of transportation to school and home for many students. The National Highway Transportation Safety Administration reported that approximately 450,000 public school buses traveled about 4.3 billion miles to transport 23.5 million children to and from school and school-related activities yearly (2006). During this transition to and from school, some students participated in aggressive behaviors during an unstructured environment (Galliger et al., 2008). Because of the limited reporting of school bus bullying, students use this time on the school bus as an



opportunity to victimize students (Galliger et al., 2008) as well as the bus drivers (deLara, 2008a; Raskauskas, 2005). Justifiably, the focus of this study was to understand the school bus drivers' perceptions of student bullying behaviors during the school bus ride, which led to suggestions of reliable methods to manage, intervene, and prevent further aggressive behaviors.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory guided this study and supported the findings of student bullying behavior. Bandura studied aggression in children and concluded that children learn behaviors from observing, modeling, and imitating adults (Bandura, 1969; Bandura, A., Ross, D., & Ross, S., 1961; Bandura & Walters, 1963). Bandura further explained that children who observed adults displaying aggressive behavior became aggressors themselves, suggesting that there is an adverse influence on behavior, language, and cognitive skills (Bandura, 1969; Bandura et al., 1961; Bandura & Walters, 1963).

As noted in numerous studies of student bullying behaviors, Bandura's social cognitive theory, and the *Bobo doll* experiment is commonly cited by researchers to explain why children bully. Bandura is widely known for the Bobo doll experiment, which demonstrated learning by observing. In 1961, Bandura and his colleagues conducted an experiment using Bobo dolls to demonstrate that children learn behaviors from observing models (Bandura, 1969; Bandura et al., 1961; Bandura & Walters, 1963). The children were exposed to models of aggressive and nonaggressive behaviors. The findings of the research indicated that children who were exposed to adult models who were verbally and physically aggressive to the Bobo dolls imitated the same behavior

when they were alone in the room with the Bobo dolls (Bandura, 1969; Bandura et al., 1961; Bandura & Walters, 1963). As the old adage stated “violence begets violence.”

According to Orpinas and Horne (2006), “. . . the social cognitive theory constructs relates to the development of aggression” is essential to understand student bullying. The constructs are “(a) reciprocal determinism, (b) social learning of aggression, (c) rewards and punishment, (d) social environment of families, friends, and school, and (d) personal cognitions” (p. 62). The constructs are further discussed with clarity in this study. Thus, acknowledging the internal and external influence, educators are constantly devising methods to intervene and prevent student bullying.

In summary, the social cognitive theory is the framework for identifying and understanding reasons children act out more, imitating negative behaviors that they see and hear as they display bullying behaviors at school. Children learn aggressive behaviors from observations of social interactions with aggressive parents, whereas they are more likely to imitate and exhibit bullying behaviors toward peers (Holt, Kaufman, & Finkelhor, 2009). Children also observe and imitate aggressive behaviors outside of the home from “interactions with peers and other adults” (as cited in Horne & Sayer, 2000; Patterson, 1982). Children can be influenced by models via social media, radio, and television, as shown from their social interactions with one another by means of cyber-bullying. Children bully because of what they see and what they hear, even when the behavior is hurtful to others; thus, bullying is a result of imitating aggressive behavior.

## Related Literature

### History of Student Bullying

Student bullying is an old phenomenon with documented history over three decades. According to the study of Olweus (1993), who cited the research of Heinemann (1972) and Olweus (1973a), several incidences of student bullying became public during the late 1980s. During this time, the Norwegian Education officials initiated a campaign to stop bullying after three junior high school students committed suicide from the constant bullying they experienced during school. Prior to this incident, in Scandinavia during the 1960s and 1970s, the media, parents, and the school community also became concern with student bullying, although school officials were not perusing the reasons for the aggressive behavior of students. Thus, the Olweus (1993) research of student bullying in schools was prompted by the earlier series of school bullying events in Sweden, which resulted in rigorous research during the 1980s. A plethora of research investigations of student bullying emerged, which originated from student bullying problems in the United Kingdom (Smith & Sharp, 1994).

Earlier written accounts revealed that student bullying occurred in the schools far longer than the 21<sup>st</sup> century. “The fact that some children are frequently and systematically harassed and attacked by other children has been described in literary works, and many adults have personal experience of it from their own school days” (Olweus, 1993, p. 1). For example, Smith and Sharp (1994) indicated two written documents that discussed bullying: (a) *Tom Brown’s school days* written in 1880 by Hughes, and (b) *Teasing and bullying* by Burk in the Pedagogical Seminary for 1897 (p.2). There was evidence of the history of [student] bullying documented literary novels

and plays, poetry, movies, and religious documents. According to historical documents, numerous undocumented accounts of student bullying existed. Clearly, with control and imbalance of power at the forefront of [student] bullying, indications of [student] bullying may have been a problem during all periods of time throughout the world.

### **Emergence of School Bus Transportation**

The lack of transportation was a major factor for students who were able to be educated in rural areas. The majority of school age youths worked instead of attending school (Borman, Cahill, & Cotner, 2007). Before 1920, transportation was nearly nonexistent, except for students who rode horses or walked countless miles to attend school (Borman et al., 2007). By the early 20th century, organized student transportation emerged as a means of transporting students living in the rural areas to towns where schools were located (Borman et al., 2007; Wolf, 2009). Borman et al. (2007) indicated that school bus rides in rural areas negatively impact academics because of the substantial amount of time students spend traveling to and from school.

The school bus not only was a means for transporting students to school, it also served as transportation for social activities held at schools within the rural communities. In 1930, 10% of students rode the bus for transportation in the rural communities (Borman et al. 2007). With state standards mandating schools to merge to provide better education opportunities, movement from small towns to urban areas was unavoidable, thus, families followed jobs as farm work was decreasing (Wolf, 2009). Wolf (2009) noted in the study that the rural community opposed consolidating schools even though masses of families moved to urban areas. Larger schools replaced neighborhood schools, making student commutes much longer, and schools distances were further apart from

homes leaving families depended more on school buses to transport students to and from schools.

As the middle of the 20th century approached, an influx of families moved from urban to the suburban area leaving an even wider range of distances for students to commute to and from school (Wolf, 2009). Consequently, with the large demand for school buses to transport students, school systems meticulously organized a system to accommodate the task of hiring school bus drivers, devising bus routes, and maintaining the mechanics of the school buses regulated by government guidelines (Wolf, 2009).

Because of the increase number of students riding the school bus, misbehavior became a problem. The school bus environment became a location for aggressive behavior among students. Several studies agreed that a tight confinement and unstructured time (Galliger et al., 2008), as well as low adult supervision (deLara, 2008a; Galliger et al., 2008; Putnam et al., 2003; Raskauskas, 2005), contributes to inappropriate conduct on the school bus.

In the United States, the school bus is by far the largest method of transporting students to and from school (Borman et al., 2007). According to statistics from the National Center for Education Statistics (2013), 7.4 % middle to high school students reported victimization while riding the school bus for the 2010 to 2011 school year. This percentage of bullying is low as compared to inside the building, such as 32.8 % in the classroom and 45.6 % in the stairwell or hallway.

### **Definitions and Types of Bullying**

Olweus, a pioneer of student bullying and a leading psychologist, introduced the term “bullying” while researching aggressive student behaviors in Norway and Sweden

in 1978 (Carrera, 2011; Hughes, Middleton, & Marshall, 2009). Olweus introduced the term three decades ago to the English speaking academic community in the United States (Carrera, 2011). As the school community and public used the term *bullying*, many educational scholars initiated researches to describe and define the term. From this point, researchers also began the task of identifying types of bullying behaviors. Because of the lack of a clear-defined meaning of bullying, many occurrences of bully behaviors are unnoticed and unreported. For this reason, a clear definition is detrimental in the identification of bullying behaviors.

Olweus (1993, 2003) defined bullying as intentionally harming another person through physical, verbal, and emotional harm when there is a difference in power and strength directly or indirectly, which is repeatedly. Olweus later added that the victim has “difficulty defending themselves” (2011, p. 512). Another definition of bullying is an act of power over another person or persons, in addition to being hurtful or belittling to a person, property, or feelings, which can be a direct or indirect behavior that causes intensive harm to another person (Hughes, Middleton, & Marshall, 2009). Bradshaw, O’Brennan, and Sawyer (2008, p. 10) stated that bullying is “intentional and repeated acts that occur through direct verbal (i.e., threatening comments, name calling), direct physical (i.e., hitting, kicking), and indirect (i.e., spreading rumors, influencing relationships, cyber-bullying)” behaviors. Regardless of which definition is used, bullying is an unwanted behavior (Olweus, 1993).

Another emerging form of bullying is cyber-bullying (Mason, 2008; Slovak & Singer, 2011). Cyber-bullying is a challenge to define due to the constant advances of technology, which includes the ever-changing methods of electronic communication such

as email, instant messaging, video chat, blogs, and social networks (NCES, 2011). According to the studies of Mason (2008) and Slovak and Singer (2011), cyber-bullying impacts victims the same as traditional bullying; however, instead of the face-to-face taunting, the harassment is carried out electronically by means of pictures and verbal or written messages.

Because of new bullying behaviors that emerge daily from the traditional physical, verbal, and emotional taunting, the definitions of bullying continues to change rapidly. As a result, a clearly defined meaning of bullying is vital for school personnel [the school bus driver] to be able to identify bullying behaviors within the school environment [the school bus]. According to Lee (2006), “. . . definitions of bullying change with time, purpose, and culture; therefore they need revisiting and, perhaps, revision” (p. 74).

### **The Bully**

Many characteristics define the bully. Who is the bully? The bully is anyone who purposely hurts or causes pain to another individual in the form of physical, verbal, and/or emotional behaviors (Olweus, 1993). Gourneau (2012) reported that bullies could be honor roll students, leaders of academic teams, or popular athletes, as well as the social outcast or tough students (p. 119). According to Gourneau (2012), “. . . bullies come from different races, genders, and cultural backgrounds with different excuses and reasons to engage in such antagonistic behaviors” (p. 117). Bullies usually control their surroundings by manipulating peer groups to aid them in victimizing others, thereby pushing the lead bully into a position of obtaining more control and power (Borman et al., 2007).

Moreover, bullies can be students who range in grade levels from kindergarten to seniors. A longitudinal study by Jansen, Veenstra, Ormel, Verhulst, and Reijneveld (2011) argued that when the bully begins to victimize at a young age, he or she is more likely to continue to bully students, as they get older unless an intervention takes place. Another longitudinal study by Olweus (2011) revealed that male students who bully as adolescents are more likely to engage in criminal activity as adults. “Some 55% of them [bullies] had been convicted of one or more crimes and as many as 36% had been convicted of at least three crimes in the 8-year period from age 16 to 24” (Olweus, 2011, pp. 154-155). Gourneau (2012) also identified bullies as angry, controlling, and lacking empathy. In another study of bully characteristics (Carrera, DePalma, & Lameiras, 2011), they are described as “impulsive, showing lack of guilt and self-confidence, easily provoked, and having a disruptive temperament” (pp. 482-483). Unfortunately, the bully will always seize the opportunity to victimize at any location within the school, whether on the school grounds (i.e., cafeteria, classroom, hallway, restroom, and playground) or off the school grounds (i.e., school bus, after school activity, walking to and from school) in an unsupervised environment.

### **The Family of the Bully**

Holt et al. (2009) researched family characteristics of students who bully. He noted that certain characteristics within the family contributed to aggressive behaviors of children who bully. The study reported that bullying behaviors is prevalent among children when displays of domestic violence are in the household. In addition, the study of Gourneau (2012), which concurred with the study of Holt et al. (2009), stated that children who bully often witness violent verbal and physical violence between parents



and family members. Another study reported that bullying behaviors are common among children in households with little or no family values, mothers with mental health issues, and exposure to at risk parenting skills (Shetgiri, Lin, Avila, & Flores, 2012). However, news media continue to report incidences of students from all backgrounds who bully, indicating that this behavior is not limited to specific sociodemographic status.

Holt et al. (2009) reported that when children self-report that they are the bully, parents did not agree that their child was the perpetrator. Clearly, these types of behavior are likely to continue from parent to offspring without interventions and positive modeling of good behavior. In a recent study of socioeconomic status and bullying according to Tippett and Wolke (2014) “. . . bullying perpetration did not appear to be socially patterned and occurred across all socioeconomic strata at fairly similar rates” (p. e57). The study reported that there is no connection between bullying and socioeconomic status.

### **The Victim**

In a recent study of bullying, the Center for Disease Control (CDC) reported that 20% of students were victims of bullying during the 2011 school year (2012). Customarily, the description of a victim is frail, weird, and/or timid (Gourneau, 2012). In addition, recent research studies also suggested other characteristics of a victim as having low self-esteem, feeling unattractive (Carrera et al., 2011; Gourneau, 2012), having few or no friends (Gourneau, 2012; Raskauskas, 2005), learning or physical disabilities, alternative lifestyles (i.e., gay, transgender, lesbian, bisexual) and low economic status (Carrera et al., 2011).

In contrast to the victims who are characterized as weak and fragile, there are victims who are accepted socially by their peers who portray confidence and are popular among classmates, but are still victimized (Gourneau, 2012). To illustrate this point, bullies may target, with constant harassment or isolation, a star athlete for the mere fact of missing a shot during a basketball game. Therefore, the victim can be anyone. Many students, parents, and educators are misled by the characterization of a victim.

According to Tippett and Wolke (2014), “. . . both victims and bully-victims were more likely to come from low socioeconomic backgrounds . . .” (pp. e54-e55). The study revealed that victims may become targets because of a lack of material items (i.e., designer clothing) to fit in with peers (Tippett & Wolke, 2014). “For students who are [victims], instead of being able to concentrate on school work, their lives are consumed with worry and anxiety about how they are going to make it through another day when they have to continuously face their tormentor or tormentors” (Gourneau, 2012, p. 117). Clearly, being a victim of bullying impacts students socially, emotionally, and/or academically whether they are in the classroom, gymnasium, or school bus.

### **The School Bus Driver as Victim**

Students are no longer the only victims of bullying on the school bus. According to deLara (2008a), bullies target school bus drivers and school bus monitors who are the very ones responsible for transporting [bullies] safely to and from school. With a thorough search of literature on bullying of school bus drivers, the search resulted in one research study that included limited information that indirectly addressed school bus drivers victimized by student bullies. Moreover, when bullying is discussed in education

forums, the student is always described as the victim, thereby excluding any adults even though student bullies may victimize them.

The researcher also discussed the outcome of an adult being bullied on the school bus. The article from the School Bus Fleet (2005) report identified Joyce Gregory as a victim of bullying. She was a school bus driver who worked in a rural county in Tennessee who died because of a gunshot wound by a 14-year-old student on March 2, 2005 as she drove her morning route. The reason he shot her was that she reported him to school officials for using smokeless tobacco on the school bus. Not only was the school bus driver killed, but students were victimized by his actions and could have been physically harmed as a result of this act of violence. When bullying of a school bus driver becomes fatal at the hands of a student bully, further research is needed to explore and address the seriousness that bullying does occur towards school bus drivers.

Moreover, the number of bullying incidents against school bus drivers appears to be increasing as bullies are becoming bolder. Through media attention, more school bus drivers are coming forward and telling their stories of being victimized. In addition, there are students who witnessed the victimization of school bus drivers and recorded the incidents on cell phones, which usually end up on social media. While many school bus drivers may not report the incidents of bullying for fear of retaliation, student victims silently speak out by making the recordings viral to inform the public of what is taking place on the school bus. Therefore, this study is useful to gain information about students who silently come to the aid of bullied school bus drivers on the school bus.

For this reason, school bus drivers' input should be included in the discussion and planning of bullying prevention programs (deLara, 2008a; Krueger, 2010; Putnam et al.,

2003; Raskauskas, 2005). Yet, when planning and discussions regarding the bullying behaviors on the school bus take place, the school bus drivers are omitted from taking part. According to the research of deLara (2008a), “[School bus] drivers’ perceptions of their experience of bullying on the [school] buses as well as their ideas for improvement have been neglected . . . “ (p. 49).

As the only adults present, they relay messages and communicate happenings that take place on the school bus (deLara, 2008a). In fact, “the [school bus] drivers . . . provide[d] valuable information and suggestions for reducing bullying and aggression on school buses” (deLara, 2008a, p. 64). Therefore, with this information, school administrators can utilize the school bus drivers’ knowledge of what is taking place on the school bus to assist in their efforts to decrease bullying victimization.

The research of deLara (2008a) and Putnam et al., (2003) noted that school bus drivers have reported that there is a lack of interest from parents, administrators, and the school community to work towards controlling bullying behaviors. In addition, research noted that school bus drivers need extensive training to recognize, intervene, and prevent bullying behaviors on the school bus (Putnam et al., 2003). With effective training and management methods for dealing with aggressive behaviors, school bus drivers will be able to safely transport students, recognize bullying behaviors, and intervene when necessary.

### **The School Bus Ride**

Why do students display bullying behaviors while riding the school bus to and from school? Why is the behavior different when students ride the school bus when monitored by more than one adult? Do aggressive behaviors interfere with student

safety? These questions provided information to explain that there is a need for this study to understand why some students use the bus as a convenient environment for bullying.

As students travel on the school bus, they recognize that the ratio between students and adults are not balanced. According to Raskauskas (2005), “School buses often have only one adult supervisor (the driver) per bus load of students . . .” (p. 96). The Blue Bird Bus Company (2012) recommended seating 54 to 90 students per school bus, which is a large number for one adult, creating an opportunity of convenience for bullies to victimize others because the school bus driver’s full attention is concentrated on driving. Given that the school bus driver is facing forward, with a large number of students sitting behind the school bus driver, the bully or bullies have an advantage. This leads to the bully displaying aggressive behavior as they watch the school bus driver. The school bus drivers may not be a match for the bully or bullies. Even when the bus is at a full stop, one adult may not be cable of supervising bullying behaviors without additional adult supervision. The research by deLara (2008a) and Krueger (2010) indicated that low adult supervision with a full busload of students is a prime environment for bullying behaviors. Further, students are more likely to withhold bullying behaviors when more adults are present, thus showing that there is a need for additional supervision to monitor students. For example, students are less likely to bully on field trips because of the presence of teachers coupled with parents present as chaperones.

Equally important, the physical structure of the bus can be a hiding place for some students to display aggressive behaviors. For example, a narrow aisle with many

rows of seats suggests a favorable environment for bullying (Raskauskas, 2005).

Raskauskas (2005) stated, “. . . moving to empty seats provides the only viable escape from bullying and the sheer number of students in a full bus may either prohibit this escape or independently contribute to increased bullying . . . “ ( p. 96). According to Blue Bird (2012), a school bus manufacturing company, a busload of students can occupy a school bus with a seating capacity that range from approximately 54 to 90 students.

With safety a key issue for school bus drivers as they transport students to and from school, the environment must be free from all disturbances that jeopardize the wellbeing of the students. It is important to understand that bullying on the school bus can cause a distraction to the school bus driver, placing the students and driver at risk (Putnam et al., 2003). Moreover, school bus drivers are vital to making a difference in the lives of victims and the school community, as they promote safety during the school bus ride. This study addressed the questions regarding safety as well as reasons the school bus environment becomes a location for bullying behaviors.

### **Managing Bullying**

Managing student discipline interferes with the school bus driver’s ability to concentrate when safely transporting students that places the school bus driver at a disadvantaged of managing bullying behaviors of students while driving a 10-ton school bus (Galliger et al., 2008). According to the study of Ashford, Queen, Algozzine, and Mitchell (2008), a survey was administered to parents, students, and teachers that ranked the occurrences of discipline problems among middle and high school students. Each participant ranked school bus violations as first, third, and fifth, respectively. The study did not reveal the specific behavior that constitutes a school bus violation. Several

studies explored management methods to thwart bullying behaviors on the school bus. The management methods consisted of parental support (deLara, 2008a), administrator support (Long & Alexander, 2010; Morash, 2007), discipline referrals (Hirsch et al., 2004), rewards (Putnam et al., 2003), and video-monitoring (Raskauskas, 2005). Research has proven that school systems that use one or more types of management methods to monitor aggressive activities are likely to experience a decrease in bullying behaviors on the school bus. Thus, not using any type of method would be detrimental to the safety of students bullied on the school bus. As a follow up to any type of management method, it is imperative that immediate discipline be administered once bullying has been identified or the respective methods are deemed useless. This study examined the different types of management methods by the aforementioned researchers.

**Parent Support.** DeLara (2008a) surveyed 30 school bus drivers from rural and suburban school systems and asked questions regarding parental support, or the lack thereof, as a contributing factor of bullying behaviors on the school bus. From the survey, the school bus drivers revealed that little or no parental support minimizes their attempt to gain and maintain control of bullying behaviors. For this reason, the importance of parents committed to addressing their child's misbehaviors during the ride to from school must be instrumental to prevent further bullying on the school bus.

The researcher detailed suggestions for administrators as a follow-up to address parents who ignore warnings when their children exhibit aggressive behaviors on the school bus. The suggestions included “involving parents immediately, holding parents accountable, taking quick and decisive actions, involve the police, label as assault when an action is an assault, and handle assaults externally” (deLara, 2008a, p. 59). Given the

importance of the school bus driver as being the sole person liable for student safety, more encouraging parental support outweighs the lack thereof to prevent bullying behaviors during the school bus ride.

**Administrator Support.** According to the study of Long and Alexander (2010), the presence of an [administrator] within any school environment discourages most bullying behaviors. Although administrators are not on the school bus, the thought of knowing that an administrator will meet the school bus upon arrival would be a relief to the school bus driver. In another study of bullying, one of the themes indicated that elementary school students suggested that school personnel ride the school bus so they could feel safe during their travels to and from school (Morash, 2007). In addition, the findings from the survey and interviews from deLara (2008a) indicated that school bus drivers agreed that when administrators were supportive, “this constitutes a show of solidarity of school administrators with the school bus drivers” (p. 61). Collectively, the three studies revealed that support from administrators lessens aggressive behaviors on the school bus.

**Discipline Referral.** School bus discipline referrals are another method of managing bullying behaviors on the school bus. Hirsch et al. (2004) conducted two case studies using data derived from discipline referrals infractions of students on the school bus. The first case study consisted of data from school bus discipline referrals of students within the entire school system, and the second case study consisted of data from school bus discipline referrals of students from one elementary school within the same school system. Data from both case studies revealed meaningful information such as the number of school bus discipline referrals per month, grade, recurrence, school bus driver, and



school bus route, which was entered into a database linking a bully's name or names to one or more school bus infractions (Hirsch et al., 2004). Administrators were able to monitor patterns of misbehavior when the same names continued to surface in the database.

The study also revealed that school bus discipline referrals issued by school bus drivers acknowledged whether students adhered to the prescribed school bus rules. One factor that contributed to a positive outcome of using this method of management was as simple as being consistent when issuing referrals for any bullying violation (Hirsch et al., 2004). Although school bus discipline referrals is not a full proof management method to stop student bullying on the school bus, when monitored consistently and properly, this management method becomes beneficial to administrators in developing intervention and prevention programs to decrease future bullying episodes.

**Rewards.** A longitudinal study that spanned three years by Putnam et al. (2003) investigated a whole intervention plan to improve student behavior on the school bus. One intervention was the use of rewarding positive behaviors through a school wide intervention program. This rewarding management method examined data collected from school bus discipline referrals. The intervention program guided the various types of rewards that school bus drivers used to point out positive behaviors on the school bus. According to Putnam et al. (2003), the study reported positive behavior observed using a series of rewards and honors that decreased disruptive behaviors on the school bus. The program was successful, with the cooperation of the whole school, which consisted of students, school bus drivers, and school personnel. The researchers further added that the primary focus was to train school bus drivers to recognize displays of positive behaviors

to improve the school bus riding experience with an ongoing reward system (Putnam et al., 2003).

**Video-Monitoring.** The use of technology can serve as a management aid to monitor bullying behaviors. Raskauskas (2005) examined the use of video-monitoring within the school bus environment to analyze the frequency, types, and the seriousness of bullying activities. In addition, he reported that a lack of friends, uninvolved bystanders, large number of students in a confined environment, and low adult supervision as contributing factors for ongoing bullying behaviors on the school bus.

This study included observing videotapes of student behaviors on 10 school buses for one month during random morning and afternoon rides to and from school.

According to the findings from the videotape analysis on the school bus, bullying occurred more often during the afternoon ride home and twice during a 25-minute time interval (Raskauskas, 2005). In addition, with this study and other studies, gender was a factor in bullying; for example, boys bullied more often than girls (Bradshaw et al. 2008; Raskauskas, 2005). Contrary to prior research, students with friends on the school bus were more likely to be a target of bullying (Raskauskas, 2005). Another recent study explored the impact of video-monitoring on the school bus, which reported that video-monitoring aligned with anti-bullying interventions indeed reduced the number of bullying activities Kruger (2010). According to both researchers, videotaping of student behaviors while riding the school bus is only an effective method of management when viewed regularly by school staff with an intended intervention plan and consequences for bully behaviors (Kruger, 2010; Raskauskas, 2005).

## **Impact of Bullying**

The impact of bullying influenced the overall academic, social, and emotional success, or lack thereof, for bullied victims within the school (Long & Alexander, 2010). In the education arena, most of the research on bullying focused on activities that occur on the school grounds, which impacts the safety, emotional, social, and academic growth of victims. In today's education systems, there is limited research on the impact of bullying and aggressive behaviors as students ride on the school bus to and from school, which points to a gap in the literature. According to Krueger (2010), "On the school bus, victims are forced to confront their bully to and from school, with no escape" (p. 3). A study of gifted dropouts by Zabloski (2010) explored the lived experience of a student who encountered constant bullying from friends during a school bus ride, which led to dropping out of school. The students' reason for leaving school was ". . . [I] left school in ninth grade under the guise of being home schooled . . ." (Zabloski, 2010, p. 86).

With the quietness of bullying behaviors filtering back and forth from the neighborhoods on to the school buses and into the schools, more victims are coming forward with their stories. Not only do victims of bullying suffer physically, they also suffer emotionally. The study confirmed when a victim is bullied constantly there is an emotional breaking point, particularly from being in a confined area (Galliger, et al., 2008), when students have nowhere to turn as they are subjected to intimidation, fear, and/or aggressive behaviors. Under those circumstances, the impact of bullying is detrimental, making victims feel unsafe during their school bus ride as their academic achievement suffers (deLara, 2008a) and social interactions with other students is challenged (Galliger et al., 2008). Thus, the fear of being bullied on the school bus to

and from school results in victims skipping school, dropping out, and/or staying home to avoid dealing with daily aggressive behaviors (Gastic, 2008). In fact, truancy results in loss opportunities to engage in the whole school experience. Therefore, students miss (a) peer and social interactions, (b) academic support, and (c) teacher-student relationships because of excessive absences (Gastic, 2008).

Additionally, the school bus ride also serves as an opportunity for bullies to portray negative peer social interactions while riding to and from school (Galliger, 2008). This study also indicated that this type of interaction leads to aggressive behaviors, such as verbal aggression (i.e., name-calling), physical aggression (i.e., tripping students as they walk down the aisle), stealing (i.e., taking backpacks and hiding it), and relational aggression (i.e., ignoring) (Galliger, 2008).

Another impact of bullying victimization leads to disciplinary problems (Gastic, 2008). The victim will “act out” as frustration builds from the constant pressure of being bullied. Gastic (2008) revealed four types of discipline problems associated with being bullied. These problems are “(a) constantly staying in trouble (b) suspensions from school (c) in-school suspensions and (d) transferring to another school because of disciplinary infractions” (p. 398). All of these discipline problems are a result of a break in the academic cycle.

As bullying behaviors become more aggressive and detrimental to the victims, a new term and definition related to bullying has emerged called *bullycide* (High, 2012). Bullycide is defined as a person who commits suicide because of being victimized by a bully (High, 2012). Many victims feel that bullycide is the only answer that will relieve them from the trauma of bullying (Wallace, 2011). Although the term bullycide is new,

the act itself has been used as an escape mechanism for years when victims of bullying find themselves feeling hopeless.

### **Bullying At All Grade Levels**

Bullying impacts all grade levels of students, from elementary to high school. Bandura's social cognitive theory provided evidence that aggressive behavior of children is learned through observation of modeled behavior that is imitated (Bandura, 1969; Bandura et al., 1961). Children of all ages and grade levels undoubtedly learn aggressive behaviors from adults, peers, and media influences (i.e., violent videos and television programs). Consequently, children no longer follow the old adage from adults 'Do as I say, not as I do' when observing adults [parents] model aggressive behaviors. Research has extensive documentation of children at all grade levels demonstrating cyberbullying, verbal, physical, and relational bullying learned through models, observation, and imitation.

According to National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 27.8 % of students reported being a victim of bullying during the school year 2010 – 2011 (NCES, 2013). The statistical report consisted of surveyed responses from students ranging from age 12 to 18 who attended grades six through twelve. The findings from the NCES (2013) listed the grade level and the total percentage of students bullied: sixth grade (37 %), seventh grade (30.3 %), eighth grade (30.7 %), ninth grade (26.5 %), tenth grade (28.0 %), eleventh grade (23.8 %), and twelfth grade (22.0 %). Further findings (NCES, 2013) indicated the percentage of students bullied on the school bus in grades six, seven, and eight as 12.5 %, 9.9 %, and 7.3 %, respectively, whereas, students at higher grade levels reported lower percentages of being bullied on the school bus with ninth grade (6.4 %),

tenth grade (7.2 %), eleventh (4.7 %), and twelfth grade (3.3 %). In most school systems, grade levels of six to eight represents middle school students. Although students younger than age 12 were not included in the NCES report, research literature indicates that bullying does occur among elementary grade level students.

**The Elementary School.** Literature proves that bullying not only impacts students at the upper grade levels, but that student bullying exists at the elementary grade level with an increase of bullying behaviors during the latter years (Kueny & Zirkel, 2012). Educators ask the question, “Does cyberbullying take place at the elementary grade level?” With the increase usage of virtual communication, young children at the elementary grade level not only deal with verbal, physical, and relational bullying, cyberbullying is also a safety concern.

In a qualitative study of bullying at the elementary school level (Hazel, 2010), school staff and fourth grade students described bullying during a focus group with regard to safety, or lack thereof. The participating fourth grade students revealed that bullying occurred mainly during recess by fifth and sixth graders. Some of the students revealed that they became anxious and unable to concentrate on class assignments, faked an illness to stay home, and were relieved to know older students were not on the playground with them at the same time. Contrary to the students’ report of an unsafe environment, school staff indicated not knowing of students’ safety concerns as they indicated their stress from focusing on standardized testing, which allows less time to monitor behaviors. From the findings, it was evident that students and school personnel perceptions of bullying were not the same.

Cyberbullying is increasing among young children, which impacts the academic, social and emotional well-being of elementary grade level students. According to D'Antona, Kevorkian, and Russom (2010), cell phone usage of third through fifth grade elementary school students revealed that unsafe cell phone practices could lead to cyberbullying, as a victim or as a bully. Students at a young age are unaware of the dangers of virtual communication (i.e., texting, sexting, blogs, twitter, facebook, instagram, email) and what constitutes cyberbullying. The findings of the study revealed that "27 % of third through fifth grade students worried about being bullied online and approximately 6.3 % responded with receiving mean or hurtful text messages" (D'Antona et al., 2010, pp. 524-526). According to the researchers, students benefit from safe online practices when educators receive cyberbullying prevention training that is used to educate young students along with parents regarding safety of electronic communication usage.

**The Middle School.** Bullying behaviors become more prevalent at the middle school level (Kueny & Zirkel, 2012; Milsom & Gallo, 2006). Accordingly, researchers recommend that middle grade level educators increase their knowledge of anti-bullying laws (Kueny & Zirkel, 2012) and intervention/prevention strategies (Milsom & Gallo, 2006) to promote a bully free school environment for students to learn. With middle school students entering the adolescent period, the transition usually results in trying to 'fit in' or 'impress' each other. Based on the NCES (2013) report, students in the middle grades were bullied more than any grade level of students during the school term 2010 – 2011 with most of the bullying occurring in the classroom and in the hallway or stairwell (NCES, 2013).

Bullied [middle school] students are often reluctant to come forward to tell an adult when assistance and intervention is needed. Two methods of identifying victims of bullying are surveys to self-report and peer nominations (Cornell & Mehta, 2011; Phillips & Cornell, 2012). Cornell and Mehta (2011) studied middle grade students' responses from a confidential self-report survey initiated by the counseling staff, which revealed that approximately 50% of the students who reported being a victim were actually bullied. The findings noted that with self-reporting, caution of accuracy of responses must be reviewed and determined with a thorough interview by the counseling staff (Cornell & Mehta, 2011). Although [middle school] students may not be truthful when completing the surveys (i.e., random marks, joking), students who may not be identified as a victim by any other method are likely to receive counseling to address concerns. Also, an additional method to identify a victim using peer reporting usually identifies the same victim from the self-reporting surveys (Cornell & Mehta, 2011; Phillips & Cornell, 2012). Most important, student [middle school] victim identification proves difficult when victims or bystanders do not come forward with information.

**The High School.** Research revealed that students bullied during high school begin to decline during the junior and senior high school years (NCES, 2013). Senior high school students were bullied less than all grade levels with junior and senior high school grade level students reported being bullied less in the following locations: restroom/locker room, cafeteria, school bus during the school term 2010 - 2011 (NCES, 2013). Although high school students are bullied less than other grade levels (as cited in Kueny & Zirkel, 2012), students continue to be confronted with verbal, physical, relational, and cyberbullying within the school environment.



When bullying continues without perceived administrator and school personnel intervention, [high school] students develop methods to handle persistent bullying and harassment. DeLara (2008b) argued that [high school] students used ‘cognitive coping strategies’ when confronted with unwanted bullying behaviors such as “do nothing, utilize various cognitive mechanisms (i.e., take it), tell an adult, or retaliate” (pp. 72, 89). Playful teasing of a student with intentions of causing hurtful feelings is an act of bullying disguised as normal play. For example, a bully singing a song about ‘porky pig’ to an overweight student followed with the statement ‘I’m just teasing’ and the victim accepting the bullying by responding with the statement ‘s[he] is just teasing.’ Mills and Carwile (2009) argued that teasing can be a positive or negative behavior:

Teasing is a communicative act that challenges a target’s sense of identity, instrumental goals, or the nature of the relationship between the participants yet, by invoking play or humor, concurrently provides alternative interpretations of the content. In other words, by its very nature, teasing requires a balance of contrasting forces, and the embedded contrast produces a by-product, ambiguity, that must be elucidated by the participants’ interaction. In some instances, the play is dominant and the challenge mild, thus, there is little ambiguity, and it is likely that the tease will be understood as affiliative. In contrast, the challenge can be dominant, while the play is mild, and the tease can be seen as divisive.

Yet, in many cases, it is the presentation of nearly equal amounts of both play and challenge that lead to the ambiguity associated with many teases. (p. 287).

When students believe that acceptance of bullying behaviors and constantly devising coping strategies to survive bullying tactics is normal, school personnel must intervene

by providing effective intervention/prevention bullying programs to promote a safe school environment (deLara, 2008b).

### **The School Administrator**

The role of the school administrator is that of a leader who is responsible for setting the climate of the school environment as either safe or unsafe (Sadler, 2011). Often, school administrators view their respective schools as a safe environment with regard to bullying behaviors. In a survey consisting of 75 administrators (Flynt and Morgan, 2008) that responded to whether bullying behaviors toward students with disabilities was problematic, 88% of the administrators viewed bullying behaviors within their respective schools as minor (p. 189). Because the behaviors were nonviolent, such as teasing, name calling, and verbal threats, the administrators deem the behaviors as not representing a major problem within their schools.

In a study by Ashford, Queen, Algozzine, and Mitchell (2008) reported discipline problems that are most common by means of ranking behaviors on a survey revealed that the actual discipline problems reported to the state's student data base by administrators mirrored most of the students', parents', and teachers' perceptions of discipline problems. The findings reported the 10 most common discipline problem incidents were: "(a) rule violation/classroom, (b) disruptive behavior, (c) rule violation/administrative, (d) tardiness, (e) non-compliance, (f) skipping, (g) bus rule violation, (h) disrespect toward a staff member, (i) failure to report for detention, and (j) profanity toward another student" represented 82% of all the schools within the school system (Ashford et al., 2008, p. 229). With these discipline violations coded as non-violent, all of the discipline violation incidents were noted as minor. Because the consequences included phone calls to

parents, detention, and face to face conferences, the findings concluded that the schools were safe. It is important to note that none of the school discipline problems included a behavior incident of bullying.

The outcomes among administrators' perceptions are often a consensus confirming their school environment as safe. In contrast to the results, to accept that this is a concern, many administrators must first acknowledge their lack of knowing what behaviors constitute bullying as well as viewing any bullying behaviors as a minor problem. According to Harris and Hathorn (2006), when bullying is minimized as a minor problem, bullying behavior becomes difficult to control by the school personnel.

While there is a need for administrators to recognize all types of bullying characteristics, certain demographics such as gender, work experience, and race may explain reasons some administrators neglect to supervise student bullying. Harris and Hathorn's (2006) study of middle school principals' perceptions of bullying revealed:

Female principals [administrators] were more likely to be aware of things being stolen than were male principals. Principals with 4 to 10 years of experience were more likely to notice children being left out than were those with less experience and those with more experience. Most principals believed that to decrease bullying on their campuses, some form of punishment should be applied immediately and automatically to the bully. This appears to be more so for older principals than for younger principals. Minority principals appeared to be more aware of bullying in the classroom and at initiations of clubs and teams than Caucasian principals. (pp. 63 - 65).

To understand the impact of bullying, administrators must acknowledge that bullying does occur within the school environment of the physical building, school bus, and any environment related to activities of the school. Sadlier (2011) noted that the administrator from this study acknowledged and vowed to address and combat the issues of bullying and harassment by assembling the staff to “create a culture that emphasized a school climate of respect, family, and caring” (p. 195). Also, according to the researcher’s findings, another layer to create a safe school climate provided by the administrator was having the school personnel and student body participate in bully prevention training directed by an outside prevention education team (Sadlier, 2011). At times, it is imperative when the school leader must recognize that outside expert assistance is warranted. Sadlier further stated, “As the leaders of schools, principals cannot disregard the critical responsibility and unique opportunity they have to introduce and reinforce an alternative attitudinal and behavioral paradigm that teaches tolerance of mutual respect of differences” (2011, p. 196).

As society becomes more aware of student bullying in schools, and as they denounced the constant reoccurring bullying behaviors, legal actions are pursued against school staff and the school systems by parents of victims. Administrators, as well as school personnel (i.e., school bus drivers, teachers, counselors), are legally held accountable for the safety of students within all areas of the school environment. “Educators have been assigned three legal duties by the courts while children are in the functional custody of the school – to instruct, supervise, and provide for the safety of students” (Essex, 2011, p. 194).

Further information from the study revealed that “educators act in loco parentis (in place of parents) . . . which places an affirmative obligation on school personnel to anticipate or foresee that certain acts involving student conduct maybe harmful to other students” (Essex, 2011, p. 194). Because of educator liability, the importance of correctly identifying types of bullying behaviors is imperative. According to Kueny and Zirkel (2012), because of the constant additions and changes to anti-bullying laws, [all] grade level educators have the responsibility to update their knowledge of new components of the laws to effectively provide a safe school environment for students. Thus, as the leader of the school, the responsibility of the administrator is to assure that each school personnel are properly trained to protect students from bullies within the school environment.

### **Summary**

The review of literature provided research of bullying behaviors, specifically within the environment of the school bus. This study investigated the connection between students who bullying on the school bus and school bus drivers perceptions of the behaviors on the school bus. School bus drivers are in an important position to make a difference in the lives of students and the community to promote safety during the school bus ride. In addition, the characteristics of the bully and victim were explored to indicate that bullying impacts the social, academic, and emotional success of the victims. Until school bus drivers participate in the planning and discussion of monitoring bullying behaviors on the school bus, the school community will be at a loss as to how they can redirect and stop bullying behaviors in this environment. Clearly, there is a need for further research to (a) understand why students use the location of the school bus as an

opportune environment to bully, (b) examine school bus drivers' experiences with student bullying, and (c) explore effective management methods to decrease and stop student bullying on the school bus. With the data obtained from this study, future qualitative and quantitative research is needed to build upon the results to address the gap in literature of student bullying on the school bus.

## **CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY**

A qualitative approach with a phenomenological design is best suited to understand the phenomena within education disciplines (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Creswell, 2007, 2013; Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007; McMillian, 2012; Scriber & Asner-Self, 2011). The purpose of the study is to understand and explore the school bus as an opportune environment where bullying occurs. This study captured the “voices” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 201) of experiences of school bus drivers as they described bullying behaviors on the school bus while driving students to and from school. This section consists of a comprehensive outline of the research methodology used to execute this study: (a) design description, (b) researcher’s role, (c) setting and participant sampling, (d) procedures, (e) data collection instruments, (f) data analysis, and (g) ethical considerations.

### **Research Design**

I utilized a qualitative phenomenological design to study the phenomenon of student bullying on the school bus. Creswell (2007) reported that “a phenomenological study describes the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or phenomenon” (p. 57). The participants described their accounts of events and occurrences of what it was like to be a school bus driver transporting students who participated in bullying on a school bus. Phenomenology is the “study of the world as it appears to individuals when they lay aside the prevailing understandings of those phenomena and revisit their immediate experience of the phenomena” (Gall et al., 2007, p. 495). The phenomenological design was also appropriate for addressing a small group of participants who shared the same experiences of describing the essence of bullying

(Creswell, 2007). Based on Creswell's (2007) experience with qualitative research, the phenomenological design is often used to study phenomena related to educational research. I used this research methodology to report the "what" and "how" experiences (McMillian, 2012; Moustakas, 1994) of the study to provide a voice (McMillian, 2012) for participants through in-depth interviews along with questionnaires and school discipline reports. The outcome was to describe the meaning of each participant's experience that focused on capturing the school bus drivers' perception and understanding of the phenomenon "bullying."

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided this study:

1. How do school bus drivers describe their experiences with student bullying?
2. What perceptions do school bus drivers have of parents, administrators, and management rules to prevent student bullying on the school bus?

### **Researcher's Role**

As the researcher, I assumed the role of "human instrument" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) for this research study. Schreiber and Asner-Self (2011) defined instrument as "anything [people or object] used to collect data" (p. 126). Lincoln and Guba (1985) further emphasized "... using humans as the primary data-gathering instruments . . ." (p. 39) as a pertinent feature of qualitative research. Creswell (2013) mentioned the importance of "relying on the researcher as key instrument in data collection" (p. 46). The "human-as-instrument" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) allows for interactions between researcher and participants with the "... goal to better understand human behavior and the human experience" (Bogan & Biklen, 2003, p. 38).



It was also vital that I reveal my position regarding bullying behaviors. As a precaution, measures were taken to ensure that personal biases would not emerge or interfere with data collection and data analysis. Because bullying is a problem within schools, there was an enormous impact on the academic, social, and emotional success of targeted victim(s), and the thought of students missing a positive school experience led me to investigate the phenomenon *bullying*. I utilized three data collection methods to gain insight of bullying from the perspective of school bus drivers by means of administering a questionnaire, asking open-ended probing questions, which were audio recorded and reviewing school documents of school bus violations.

### **Site**

The location for this research was conducted in southeastern United States. The school system is located in a densely populated metropolitan area consisting of 19 school clusters in various communities reflecting a diverse culture and socioeconomic school system. Grade levels within the targeted school system consist of pre-kindergarten through twelve. The SDOE (2013) reported that the student ethnicity/race demographic for the 2010-2011 school year included (71%) Black, (12%) Hispanic, (11%) White, (5%) Asian and (2%) Multi-Racial.

The targeted school system complies with the State Bullying Law. The school system's extensive bullying program provided information to students, parents, and school communities of bullying policies and school rules to ensure students are safe and learning in a bully free environment. Parents and students gain access to information through the school system's website, code of conduct handbook, and school system employees. The policy describes bullying behaviors, method of reporting and responding

to bullying, and the consequences to the bully. All school staff is required to attend training on types of bullying and methods to respond and report-bullying behaviors, afterwards the school employees signs a statement acknowledging training. Equally, students receive bully prevention education regarding school bullying activities of school bullying rules that are outlined in the school district code of conduct handbook. All students signed an anti-bully pledge acknowledging that they received information about bullying. Each member of the school staff is required to conduct bullying awareness activities (role-playing, view videos, engage in discussions) with the student body and enforce bullying rules. In addition, all students are encouraged to talk to a school staff member if they are a victim of bullying or witness bullying.

The State Department of Education (SDOE) established guidelines for local school systems to follow prescribed rules, regulations, and laws set forth by the state transportation system (2013). According to the SDOE (2013), the overall number of students transported within the state on the school bus during the fiscal year of 2012 was 1,034,828 million. The student count consisted of a one-day snapshot of student ridership. It also noted that funding for transportation is provided for each local system for students who live more than a mile and one-half from the school. However, local school systems can determine the actual distance a school bus will travel to transport students to and from school based on whether there are limited or no sidewalks, busy intersections, excessive traffic speed, or other factors that contribute to unsafe walking conditions. In addition, the SDOE (2013) does not set limits on travel time that students are on the school bus. Travel time is determined based on student's age, grade level, and agreement with parents at the local school system level. In addition, the number of

students riding school buses range from 12 to 90 with an average of 72 students per school bus. Because each local school system consists of rural, urban, and suburban areas, they have the flexibility to meet the needs of the community they serve.

According to the target school system, over 65,000 students attending the school system use the school bus as transportation to and from school. The number of students per bus varies, ranging from a seating capacity of 35 to 72 passengers, which is based on grade levels (elementary, middle, high) and size of the student. For example, the number of students on a 72-capacity school bus with 24 seats consists of approximately 48 middle and high school students sitting two per seats and 72 elementary students sitting three per seat. The number of riders depends on the route and size of the school bus. For example, on one route, elementary level students may average 60 per school bus and 40 students at the middle and high school level. At times, the school bus will reach seating capacity for the elementary, middle and high school grade levels. In addition, the target school system reported that travel time is determined by the distance from the home bus stop to school. Students who live more than one mile from the school are permitted to ride the school bus with an average travel time of 20 to 45 minutes. The travel distances from the bus stop to school or vice versa range from no more than a mile and one-half to approximately less than 12 miles. The ride time for students depends on the distance from school incorporated with the number of school bus stops, traffic conditions, and/or weather conditions.

### **Procedures**

The procedures to conduct this study comprised of thoroughly planned steps. The first step entailed obtaining approval from the school system's Institutional Review

Board (IRB). An application to conduct research was submitted to the school system's Department of Research. The school system's IRB committee reviewed the application to ensure that the study (a) met the procedure guidelines, (b) benefitted the goals and mission of the school system and community stakeholders, and (c) consisted of appropriate supporting documents (i.e., proposal, letter of institutional endorsement [see Appendix A], data collection instruments, informed consent letter). I was approved by the Department of Research with a letter of approval granting authorization to collect data from the respective school system (see Appendix B).

The second step was to secure IRB approval from Liberty University. I submitted the IRB application with supporting documents (i.e., school system letter of approval) (see Appendix B), recruitment script (Appendix C), informed consent letter (see Appendix D) to the IRB committee. With the information submitted, I was given permission by the IRB to proceed with the research with a letter of approval (see Appendix E). Therefore, I began the process of organizing methods to contact potential participants.

The third step consisted of contacting the school system to begin recruitment for volunteers to participate in the study. The Chief Transportation Officer for the school district granted permission for me to contact school bus drivers and collect data. The Director of Transportation directed and approved the process of obtaining contact information of the school bus drivers. Several methods to contact school bus drivers were used to ensure that they would have an opportunity to respond if interested in the study. The methods of recruitment consisted of (a) email, (b) face-to-face meetings, and (c) and personal telephone calls. Each school bus driver was contacted first via email,

with an invitation to participate in the study. After a period of three weeks, a second method to obtain potential participants consisted of face-to-face contact. Once interested potential participants verbally agreed to volunteer for the study, the process of obtaining a signed informed consent form began. I contacted each potential participant via a telephone call to further discuss a time and place to meet to discuss the procedure involved to collect data. During the time of meeting, potential participants had the opportunity to ask questions, review, read, and sign the informed consent form if interested in participating in the study. Once the participants signed the informed consent form, I began to collect data from the volunteer participants.

### **Participants**

The participants for the study consisted of seven school bus drivers. The goal was to select 10 participants. Researcher Polkingham (1989) recommended a range of five to 25 participants and Creswell (1998) and Moustakas (1994) recommended 10 participants. Data saturation was reached with seven participants. According to Bogen (2003), data saturation is defined as “the point in data collection where the information the researcher gets becomes redundant” (p. 258). With the seventh participant, the information from the data became repetitive with no new information regarding student bullying behaviors on the school bus; therefore, the researcher concluded participant recruitment. Each participant agreed to volunteer to tell their respective stories of student bullying on the school bus. The participants’ age range varied. To ensure confidentiality of participants in the study, their specific age, gender, and race was not identified. The participants’ years of school bus driving experience ranged from two to over 20 years. All seven school bus drivers met the inclusion criteria set exclusively for this research. First, each

school bus driver had firsthand experience observing bullying behaviors on the school bus. Second, the participants consisted of school bus drivers who worked consistently during the school year with a regular designated bus route to and from school. Third, their transportation routes consisted of a cluster of schools: elementary, middle, and high schools within a school day. The final criterion was that school bus drivers' employment with the school system was full time with a minimum of one year of experience. The minimum experience ensured that the selected school bus drivers were familiar with the students, bus routes, and knowledgeable of all school bus training requirements. There was no preference in the participants' age, race, or gender to participate in the study. School bus drivers excluded from the study were part-time, substitute, or temporary drivers.

The sampling procedure used for the selection of the seven participants for the study was purposeful sampling. Johnson and Christensen (2012) defined purposeful sampling as "a nonrandom sampling technique in which the researcher solicits persons with specific characteristics to participate in a research study" (p. 231). For this study, two types of purposeful sampling were used to select participants consisted of criterion and snowballing.

Each participant met the inclusion criteria of experiencing the phenomenon of bullying on the school bus. Six of the participants were selected by means of criterion sampling. Criterion sampling identifies participants with specific characteristics that are exclusive and defined within the study (McMillian, 2012). One of the seven participants was acquired via snowballing sampling. Snowballing sampling is the "selection of participants based on the recommendation of other participants" (McMillian, 2012, p.

107) who met the criteria in the study. By using purposeful sampling, the “researcher select[ed] individuals . . . because they [are] particularly informative about the topic” (McMillian, 2012, p. 105), which ensures that “participants will be ‘information rich’ with respect to the purposes of the study” (Gall et al., 2007, p. 178).

### **Data Collection**

I collected data from the seven volunteer participants along with collecting aggregated data of school bus incidents from the school system. Data collection consisted of three methods: (a) a questionnaire, (b) semi-structured interviews, and (c) school documentation. I discussed each data collection method in detail with the participants. First, I administered the questionnaire to each participant. Second, upon completion of the questionnaire, I immediately conducted the semi-structured interview with the participant. I completed both collection methods involving the participants within the same setting. School personnel aggregated school documents concurrently during participant data collection. I took full advantage of collecting data from the participants and compiling data simultaneously.

### **Questionnaire**

A questionnaire is “a written document containing statements or questions . . . to obtain subject perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, values, and perspectives, and other traits” (McMillan, 2012, p. 154). I administered a questionnaire (Appendix F) to each of the participants consisting of four types of statements requiring responses derived from (a) a ranking scale, (b) open ended statements, (c) closed ended statements, and (d) Likert scale. I constructed the questionnaire to align with the research questions because there was not an existing questionnaire meeting the criteria for the study in prior academic

journals, books, and dissertations. The participants answered basic demographic questions to identify their age, gender, and length of service of employment as a school bus driver. Some of the demographic information was masked with a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality among the participants. Additional questions revealed information such as describing bullying experiences, types of bullying, and feelings regarding bullying behaviors on the school bus. The questionnaire was administered by means of paper and pencil for convenience and easy usage. Questions were short in length to allow ease in answering each question.

### **Semi-Structured Interviews**

The method of interviewing individual participants consisted of a semi-structured interview with 14 open-ended questions (see Appendix G). Gall et al. (2007) defined semi-structured interview as “. . . the interviewer asking a series of structured questions and then probes more deeply with open-ended questions to gain additional information” (p. 653). Individual interviews were audio taped using a recorder to capture lived experiences of the participants. During the interview, two audio recorders were used as a precautionary measure in case technical difficulties may occur. Open-ended questions allowed each participant to elaborate their feelings more freely regarding the phenomenon of the study. Qualitative studies generally use this questioning format for educational research, which allows “probing, follow-up, and clarification” (McMillian, 2012, p. 168).

For clarity, a peer educator who is knowledgeable of bullying behaviors reviewed the proposed open-ended questions. In addition, a school bus driver who was not affiliated with the study sampled the interview questions as to determine easiness and



understanding of questions. The research committee also reviewed the open-ended questions and questionnaire. The reviewing of the interview questions occurred prior to submission to IRB and the sampling of interview questions occurred after IRB approval. This allowed the researcher to adjust interview questions if needed.

Seven volunteer participants were interviewed individually to collect data via audio recording. The interviews took place in the following locations: five participants interviewed individually in a secluded room in the school system buildings (ranging from 16 to 87 minutes), one participant interviewed on the school bus (48 minutes), and one participant interviewed in a public library (53 minutes). The sites chosen were located within the target school district, which is convenient for the participants and the researcher. A professional transcriptionist transcribed each of the participant's audio interviews verbatim. Once the transcription was completed, I followed-up by reviewing the audio and transcription interviews at least three to five times for clearness and accuracy.

The open-ended interview questions addressed the two research questions. Questions one through four and 11 through 13 addressed research question number one. Questions five through 10 addressed research question number two. Question number 14 summarized the participants overall suggestions to prevent bullying on the school bus. The following are examples of the open-ended interview questions:

1. Describe bullying behaviors that you have observed on the school bus.
2. How do you respond to bullying behaviors on the school bus?
3. What is the reaction of a student who is bullied?
4. How do you respond when a student(s) displays aggressive behavior towards

you?

5. Describe the support you received from parents after the student has been reported for bullying?
6. What support do you receive from administrators? Explain.
7. What support would be helpful from the parents of bullies?
8. What support do you receive from administrators about student bullying? Explain.
9. What management method(s) is/are the most and least effective to prevent student bullying? (rewarding, video-monitoring, parent support, discipline referral) Explain.
10. What type of training do school bus drivers need to respond, intervene, and prevent bullying?
11. What impact do student bullying activities have on safety while driving?
12. Describe your feelings of students who bully during the ride to or/and from school.
13. Why do you feel that students use the school bus as an environment to bully?
14. What suggestions do you have to stop bullying on the school bus?

### **School Documents**

Documents are defined as “written records” and “commonly used to support data obtained from interviews” (McMillan, 295). Documents are also one of the preferred methods to obtain data for a phenomenological research design (Creswell, 2007). The school documents addressed research question two in which administrators used various discipline methods to prevent further student misbehaviors on the school bus. The target

school system maintains past records of school bus infractions. I acquired archival document data by means of contacting the Office of Student Relations. School personnel assisted with the request to query a report of disciplinary data of student bus violations. Based on the school system's procedures, the school personnel aggregated data from discipline referrals, which furnished a report of system wide discipline behaviors on the school bus. The aggregate data were used to indicate incidences of school discipline, which would include incidences of bullying on the school bus. From the aggregated data, all identifying student information (i.e., names, identification numbers), discipline behaviors, and the school system name was excluded as described by IRB privacy and confidentiality guidelines. The data provided information regarding occurrences and consequences of behavior violations on the school bus.

### **Data Analysis**

#### **Horizontalization**

The transcribed data were analyzed using Moustakas's (1994) approach. Horizontalization "identifies every horizon or statement relevant to the topic and questions as having equal value" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 118). From the statements, clusters of meanings were developed and grouped into themes. Themes were developed into "textural descriptions" then "structural description." The written description of "what" the participant experienced (textural description) and "how" the participant experienced the phenomenon (structural description) described the essence of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013, p. 82).

## **Coding**

Gall et al., (2007) identified coding as “. . . segments of data assigned to one or more categories” (p. 634). Creswell (2013) also recommended using in vivo codes to link specific words to code labels during the coding process. In vivo coding is more direct and specific than other coding methods. Creswell (2013) noted, “. . . forming codes represents the heart of qualitative data analysis” (p. 184).

I found it simpler to manually code the data instead of using a qualitative data analysis software program. Throughout this process, using memos assisted with documenting new thoughts and remembering prior information. I used color schemes to distinguished the different categories as an organization tool. Also, during the data coding analysis, I underlined and highlighted significant statements related to the participants’ experiences that were read three to five times for clarity. Following the readings, meanings or themes were formulated from the codes and clusters of themes were grouped based on commonalities (Creswell, 2013). However, there may be instances when themes may not connect with another theme, suggesting further research for the unconnected theme or themes. From the grouped themes, I generated a narrative report for interpretation (Creswell, 2013).

## **Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness establishes the quality, rigor, and confidence of research. Schwandt (2007) defines trustworthiness as “quality of an investigation (and its findings) that made it noteworthy to audiences” (p. 299). Lincoln and Guba (1985) devised a set of criteria to establish trustworthiness in qualitative research. The four criteria to establish trustworthiness of the study included: (a) credibility, (b) dependability, (c) transferability,

and (d) confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Throughout the research, the researcher maintained trustworthiness by employing methods such as triangulation, member checking, and audit trail to ensure a trustworthy study.

### **Credibility**

Credibility clarifies the accuracy of the study and is aligned with internal validity in quantitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I established credibility with triangulation, prolong engagement, member checking, and peer review (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Prolonged engagement is defined as “the investment of sufficient time to . . . learn the culture . . . and build trust” (Lincoln & Guba, p. 1985, p. 301). To establish trust prior to beginning the study, I reviewed literature of bullying behaviors on the school bus, viewed media stories regarding school bus drivers and bullying, and engaged in conversations with the school bus drivers regarding their daily duties to get a sense of the setting. This allowed for the opportunity to learn of the phenomenon ‘bullying’ with regard to the participants’ work setting before I engaged in the study. Particularly, because the participants acknowledged that my goal was to give voice to their concerns, the participants spoke more freely during each of their respective interviews.

The various methods of data collection ensured trustworthiness of the study through triangulation (Creswell, 2009; McMillian, 2012). Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated that trust can be obtained with triangulation by means of “different data collection modes” (p. 306). I triangulated the research with a plethora of “rich data” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003) collected from the participants’ responses to questionnaires and face-to-face individual interviews and school documents. The process of member checking confirmed the participants’ responses for accuracy (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Creswell,

2009; Schreiber and Asner-Self, 2011; Schwandt, 2007). The member checking allowed participants to verify their comments. Verification of each participant's transcription from the interview ensured accuracy checked by means of reviewing, correcting, and sharing feedback of collected data to gain accurate interpretation of the data (Creswell, 2007, 2013; Gall et al., 2007). I consulted with two fellow academic peers with knowledge of the phenomenon and research procedures. The peer review consisted of advice and expertise to review findings for accuracy and to confirm that specific guidelines were followed (Creswell, 2007; Pyczak, 2008).

### **Dependability**

Dependability correlates to reliability in quantitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Establishing dependability "ensures that the research process was logical, traceable, and documented" (Schwandt, 2007). I gained dependability through an audit trail documenting procedures used in data collection methods, in-depth record keeping, and details of data analysis (Gall et al., 2007). During the research, I maintained a comprehensible log that entailed all aspects of details regarding the study to ensure thorough documentation of the study.

Another aspect that I used to increase dependability consisted of memoing or note taking as a means to document the setting and tone observed during the individual interviews not captured via audio recording while interacting with the participant. The researcher maintained memos or notes during the research to record dates, times, settings, expressions, and reactions to refer to during each stage of the research and after the research. In addition, the process of memoing was a valuable tool for "taking notes throughout the process of coding" (Creswell, 2013, p. 90). I stayed abreast of the

research progress with daily examination of memos. As the human instrument with an abundance of data to analyze, maintain, and organize, I relied on memoing as a method to “read through text, make margin notes, and form initial codes” (Creswell, 2007, p. 157) of important details.

### **Transferability**

Transferability is parallel to external validity in quantitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Research that is qualitative usually renders difficulty in transferring to “. . . other participants, settings, instruments, interventions or procedures (McMillian, 2012, p. 305) because of the specific context of the study. To approach transferability, a thoroughly planned research design included concrete procedures to obtain data. Thus, I presented ample rich descriptions throughout the study from the responses of the questionnaire, individual interviews, and school documentation regarding the phenomenon. However, the basis of transferring the context of this study to the context of another study is contingent on whether “thick description” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) from data collection is comparable to the respective study. Thick description was first introduced by Geertz, and is the “rich information that brings to life the scene you are describing” (Schreiber & Asner-Self, 2011, p. 196). Each participant recounted details of their respective experiences within the setting of their work environment. Participants were totally involved during the meetings and interviews, which were observed through body language, specific details, and tone of voice. The passionate details of the stories were captured from the verbatim responses.

## **Confirmability**

Confirmability is equivalent to objectivity in quantitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I established accuracy of the research with an audit trail and data triangulation to avoid bias (Creswell, 2009; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As the human instrument, personal feelings and opinions of the phenomenon revealed information as not to inflict bias within the research findings (Creswell, 2009; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I increased confirmability with triangulation by collecting data via interviews, questionnaire, and school documents to gain evidence of results. During the study, the participant provided detailed interviews that described accounts of experiences and completed questionnaires with responses to observations and occurrences of the phenomenon. Aggregated school documents disclosed data that revealed occurrences of the phenomenon.

Another method that I used to establish confirmability was an audit trail. An audit trail consists of procedures, method collections, and data analysis used to recheck content and results of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I maintained notes of events, times, and thoughts throughout the research. As the research progressed, I referred to previous notes as well as documenting new thoughts and ideas as they emerged.

**Triangulation.** Triangulation ensured that integrity was established (Schwandt, 2007) by “cross checking” the validity of findings using multiple sources (Pyrzczak, 2008). To safeguard the study, I used methodological triangulation to validate for trustworthiness. The three methods used to triangulate the study included: (a) school documents, (b) semi-structured interviews, and (c) a questionnaire. I analyzed the data of the school documents and responses from participants, whereas details regarding the



phenomenon that the participants experienced began to emerge. With the understanding that I used the information from the three data collection methods and “themes are established based on converging several sources of data from participants, then this process of [triangulation] can be added to the validity of the study” (Creswell, 2009, p. 191).

### **Ethical Considerations**

The safety, respect, and integrity of participants are of the utmost importance while involved in this research study. Every safety measure was taken to protect participants, which was not compromised for the benefit of results. First, for the safety and ethical treatment of the participants, Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was secured prior to data collection (Gall et al., 2007). The IRB monitors research to ensure that participants were not exposed to harmful risks during the study. Second, once the IRB approved the study as ethically stable, I secured the school system’s permission to obtain data from school bus drivers. All participants received a written informed consent letter detailing the purpose of the research. Each participant signed a written informed consent form (Appendix B) before participating in the research. The informed consent form detailed pertinent information included (a) purpose of the research, (b) data collection methods, (c) risk and benefits, (d) confidentiality of participants, and (e) volunteer agreement information. Third, I began data collection. Fourth, the data were analyzed, which was reported in chart and narrative form.

Security and confidentiality for participants and data were a crucial factor for the study. Each participant was reassured that responses will be confidential. Pseudonyms were used to mask identities of participants, students, and any individuals involved in the

study for privacy. Electronic data were secured using a password, which was backed up on an external drive. Both the external drive and paper files were locked in a file cabinet at my home. In addition, participants were not pressured for information, and they had the right to withdraw from the study if they desired without retribution. At the completion of the study, all recorded data from files, interviews, and documents will be destroyed three years after the conclusion of the defense of the dissertation.

## CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe and understand the phenomenon of student bullying within the environment of the school bus as perceived by school bus drivers. A phenomenological design was employed for the study to support the purpose and methodology of this study. The focus was to analyze data from selected participants within the education arena as they described the shared meaning of their lived experiences of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). The analyzed data was collected from a questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, and school documents. The data collection instruments were aligned to the research questions. The following research questions guided this study:

1. How do school bus drivers describe their experiences with student bullying?
2. What perceptions do school bus drivers have of parents, administrators, and methods of management to prevent student bullying on the school bus?

I used Moustakas's (1994) approach to analyze data by highlighting significant statements, grouping meanings of themes, identifying textural and structural descriptions, and presenting a narrative of the essence of lived experiences (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). This chapter consisted of an overview summary of participants with an individual profile of each participant. All of the participants were assigned pseudonyms to mask their identities. I analyzed the data of each questionnaire, semi-structured interview, and school document to address each research question. The seven participants recounted lived experiences of their perceptions of student bullying behaviors with detailed descriptions of driving and safety concerns regarding

administrators and parental support, and the effectiveness of management methods to prevent bullying behaviors on the school bus.

### **Participant Summary**

Seven school bus drivers volunteered to participate in the study. I confirmed that each of the school bus drivers met the inclusion criteria for the study (i.e., full time employment, minimum of one-year school bus driving experience, designated route). All the participants drove a school bus in the targeted school district. The range of school bus driving experience for the seven participants was two to 24 years with an average experience of 11 years. The questionnaire requested the gender and age range of the participants; however, the information was not included with the participant demographics or descriptions to ensure confidentiality. It is also important to note that each participant was assigned a pseudonym to mask the identities throughout the study.

## Participant Overview

Table 1

### *Overview of Participants*

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<b>Participant</b>	<b>Grade Level Route</b>	<b>Years of Driving Experience</b>
Taylor	Elem/Middle/High	13
Francis	Elem/Middle/High	11
Marion	Elem/Middle/High	8
Mel	Elem/Middle/High	11
Reese	Elem/Middle/High	2
Terry	Elem/Middle/High	9
Cal	Elem/Middle/High	24

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## Individual Participant Profile

### **Taylor (Driver 1)**

Taylor is a school bus driver with 13 years of experience transporting students to and from elementary, middle, and high school. In previous years, Taylor has volunteered in elementary schools between morning and afternoon routes. During the time with the students, there were daily teachable moments that included educating and engaging students with topics ranging from academics, problem solving, respecting others to safety procedures on the school bus. Taylor is committed to the craft of transporting, and has an

extensive knowledge of local, state, and federal transportation laws and is also a certified professional driver who transports cargo and other freight.

**Francis (Driver 2)**

Francis has 11 years of experience, and is a driver who transports all grade level students. Francis is also concerned with each student's well-being and delights in occasionally giving treats to students as they exit the school bus at the end of the day. The flexible scheduling along with holidays and summers off was a deciding factor to pursue driving the school bus, which was a second career for Francis.

**Marion (Driver 3)**

Marion has driven the school bus for eight years, transporting kindergarten to twelfth grade students. Marion expressed that driving the school bus is a fulfilling goal to reach students to motivate and encourage them with discussions of subjects such as self-esteem, making friends, and respect. In addition, students are encouraged to have power thoughts every day during the morning ride. Marion is also an active participant with an anti-violence program that works with youth.

**Mel (Driver 4)**

Mel drove the school bus for 11 years with routes that included elementary to high school grade level students, and has observed students throughout the years from kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade as they grew and matured to become their own individuals. The flexibility of work hours allowed Mel to attend to children's school activities.

**Reese (Driver 5)**

Reese has been employed with the school system as a school bus driver for two years on a route that included driving students on all grade levels to and from school. Reese spoke openly about the experiences and observations of student behaviors encountered while driving the school bus.

**Terry (Driver 6)**

Terry has nine years of experience driving students of all grade levels to and from school. Throughout the years, a collaborative camaraderie with students has been established from a daily routine of greeting each student as they enter the school bus and upon exiting with words of encouragement. Working as a school bus driver is a second career for Terry.

**Cal (Driver 7)**

Cal is a veteran school bus driver with over 20 years of experience who has transported students ranging from elementary to high school grade level. Cal has driven numerous routes within the school system. Cal noted that driving the school bus was a way to work flexible hours to care for a family and to pursue other career interests.

**Summary of Questionnaire**

I administered a questionnaire to each school bus driver to acquire basic demographic information (i.e., gender, age range, years of driving experience) for the participant overview and to obtain the school bus drivers' experience of student bullying on the school bus. However, because of the close camaraderie among school bus drivers within the school system, exclusion of gender and age range ensured confidentiality. I administered the questionnaire via paper and pencil to alleviate the need for a computer

because of moving from one site to another to the various data collection sites and to make it easier for participants to complete the questionnaire who were not familiar with using a computer.

Each of the school bus drivers were given the same questionnaire, in which they responded to 23 statements regarding their respective experiences about student bullying behaviors and occurrences of student bullying within the past year on the school bus. The questionnaire consisted of a definition of bullying with types of bullying behaviors and examples of each type. Also, two of the participants took advantage of the section to add additional comments related to one or more of the statements from the questionnaire.

I analyzed each questionnaire by reporting the answers from each participant along with any additional comments. The results of the questionnaire described participant experiences with student bullying and their perceptions of parents, administrators, and methods of management used to prevent student bullying on the school bus. Each of the statements from the questionnaire was aligned to one of the guiding research questions. Statements one through eight and 12 through 16 aligned with Research Question One: How do school bus drivers describe their experiences with student bullying? Statements nine through 11 and 17 through 23 corresponded to Research Question Two: What perceptions do school bus drivers have of parents, administrators, and methods of management to prevent student bullying on the school bus? Participants provided additional comments to elaborate their concerns relating to specific statements, which were integrated into each of the participant's respective individual interviews.



All seven participants answered the questionnaire from their respective experiences, perceptions, and occurrences of student bullying on the school bus. I analyzed the data based on the selected choices for the statement. However, four participants chose not to answer specific statements and four participants chose to answer a statement(s) with two contrasting answers instead of selecting one answer. Therefore, when the participant answered ambiguously, the answer was eliminated from the results as being inconclusive because of contrasting answers or two answers, for example, when participants chose contrasting answers (i.e., yes and no or sometimes and never) for one statement.

The findings of the questionnaire revealed that all seven participants observed verbal and physical bullying behaviors, whereas three (Drivers 1, 4, 7) of the seven also observed relational/social bullying. The participants reported occurrences of bullying on the school bus for the last 12 months in which five (Drivers 1, 2, 3, 5, 6) of the seven participants reported observing bullying behaviors daily 1-3 times with two participants (Drivers 4, 7) observing bullying four or more times. In addition, four participants (Drivers 1, 2, 5, 6) observed bullying 1-3 times per week with one participant (Driver 4) observed bullying 4-6 times weekly while two participants (Drivers 3, 7) chose not to answer.

The participants were unanimous that bullying occurred during the afternoon route on the school bus. Although some of the participants (Drivers 1, 4, 5, 6, 7) reported observing bullying during the morning routes, all seven participants reported that bullying always occurred during the afternoon routes. Each of the participants recounted that they always reviewed school bus rules with the students. The participants noted that

they were not certain if disclosure of bullying activities on the school bus was reported to the school staff. All of the participants reported that students sometimes informed the bus driver of bullying with the exception of one participant (Driver 6) because of contrasting answers. Four participants (Drivers 1, 2, 3, 5) were unsure if students reported bullying to school staff along with one participant (Driver 6) choosing contrasting answers and one participant (Driver 7) did not respond.

The statements regarding how the victim responded to bullying and how the school staff reported bullying allowed for multiple responses. All seven of the participants responded to both statements with one or more responses. The participant responses for victim's actions were as follows: four (Drivers 4, 5, 6, 7) responded to the choice: do nothing, six (Drivers 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7) responded to defend themselves, two (Drivers 4, 7) responded with the choice: stop riding the bus, three (Drivers 2, 4, 6) chose the response of other and answered with written statements: (Driver 2) wrote: try to defend themselves, (Driver 4) wrote: sometimes they become a bully, (Driver 6) wrote: cry and sometimes they tell me. Additionally, participants reported bullying to the school staff as follow: (Drivers 3, 4, 7) chose teachers, (Drivers 4, 6, 7) chose counselors, (Drivers 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7,) chose administrators, (Drivers 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7) chose handle myself, (Drivers 1, 4, 5, 7) chose other whereas (Driver 7) wrote supervisor and (Drivers 4, 5, 7) wrote parent.

The following responses reported whether bullies continued or stopped their behavior once reprimanded by the school bus driver or an administrator. Three participants (Drivers 1, 2, 5) responded yes to the statement that inquired if students continued to bully when reprimanded by the school bus driver, while one participant

(Driver 6) chose the answer no. Two participants (Drivers 3 and 7) chose contrasting answers and one participant (Driver 4) chose not to answer, but wrote ‘sometimes.’

When inquired whether students continued to bully when reprimanded by an administrator, four participants (Drivers 1, 2, 4, 5) reported yes, and one participant (Driver 3) selected the answer no while two participants (Drivers 6 and 7) selected contrasting answers. Five of the participants (Drivers 1, 2, 3, 4, 5) reported that they have had to stop the school bus to handle bullying behaviors before reaching the bus stop or school as two participants (Drivers 6, 7) chose contrasting answers. The participants’ choices for the aforementioned statements required an answer of either yes or no.

However, some participants answered both yes and no as a choice, therefore, the data deemed inconclusive for that participant’s choice. Five participants (Drivers 1, 3, 4, 6, 7) reported that they intervened when bullying occurred with two participants (Drivers 2, 5) reported intervening sometimes. Five of the seven participants (Drivers 1, 2, 5, 6, 7) reported that they were bullied verbally. (Drivers 1, 2, 7) reported verbally bullying occurred 1- 3 times and two participants (Drivers 5, 6) reported verbally bullying occurred 4-6 times. Two participants (Drivers 3, 4) reported that they have not been bullied.

Six of the participants (Drivers 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7) stated that administrators sometimes consulted with them when students were reported for bullying by them, as opposed to one participant (Driver 2), who reported never being consulted with regard to the bullying. Four participants (Drivers 2, 4, 5, 6) stated that administrators never included them in discussions regarding bullying and rules with one participant (Driver 3) reporting sometimes, whereas two participants (Drivers 1, 7) responded with contrasting choices. One participant (Driver 7) reported agreeing that bus drivers should be included

with discussions regarding school bus rules with administrators with six participants (Drivers 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6) strongly agreeing. Six participants (Drivers 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7) recounted when students reported bullying to them, sometimes the students stopped, as opposed to one participant (Driver 5), who reported that the behaviors never stopped. Participants reported various answers to the statement that inquired whether administrators follow through with discipline actions of bullies submitted from discipline referrals. The responses of the participants included: one (Driver 6) strongly agree, one (Driver 3) agree, one (Driver 5) disagree, three (Drivers 1, 2, 7) contrasting answers, one (Driver 4) did not choose an answer, but wrote that each administrator is different. Two participants (Drivers 3, 6) reported agreeing that they received sufficient bullying training, four participants (Drivers 1, 2, 5, 7) disagreed, and one participant (Driver 4) strongly disagreed. The management methods of participants ranked collectively from most effective to least effective: parent support (P), discipline referral (D), video monitoring (V), and rewards (R). Individual ranking order of management methods of each participant from most effective to least effective: (Driver 1) PDVR, (Driver 2) RP, (Driver 3) PDVR, (Driver 4) VPRD, (Driver 5) VDPR, (Driver 6) DPVR, and (Driver 7) PDV. Some participants chose not to rank some of management methods.

Taylor included several written comments on the questionnaire relating to bullying behaviors on the school bus. Taylor wrote:

I am one who believes that the student's behavior can be corrected if there was more parental support. It starts at home. If there are any emotional issues with a student, it should be addressed or the bus [driver] be briefed. We never know who is riding the bus [ . . . ] then one could possibly correct their behaviors or

actions. Bus driver take on a grave responsibility on a daily basis. Not only driving a 25-55 ton bus, managing/monitoring the behavior of the students, but also dealing with the parents/general public. I also get my students involved, and ask if they see any one being mistreated, if so they need to report it to me so that I can address issues quick fast and in a hurry. The students are our eyes and ears also. It would be nice if all administrator(s) across the [school system] would be on the same [page] when it comes down to handling disciplinary issues. I am a driver who has the time to discuss with the students that ride my bus . . . (a) respecting others, (b) be kind to each other, (c) being my brothers' keeper, (d) Q & A or creating situations or scenarios and then talking the right /wrong or best way of solving the issue. . . .We play an important role in the education game.

### **Summary of School Documents**

Aggregated data conducted via school office personnel described a snapshot of school bus misconduct violations and respective disciplinary actions of elementary, middle, and high school level students. The data collection of the reported school bus incidents represented the past school year of 2012 – 2013. Based on the school systems code of conduct guide, there is not a specific code for school bus bullying. The data collected from the school system reflected all misconduct violations that occurred on the school bus. Therefore, the bus misconduct violations consisted of all of the school bus discipline rules ranging from bullying, inappropriate language, throwing items to assault, which can clearly fit within the classification of bullying.

Data were aggregated for school bus misconduct violations at both the school level (see Table 2) and district level (see Table 3). The schools listed in Table 2

consisted of two schools at each grade level (elementary, middle, and high). The schools were selected to represent students who ride the school bus throughout the school system. The difference between the school level and district level violations depended on occurrence and type of violations committed by the student which determined the disciplinary action. The school level disciplinary actions may result in warnings, conferences, interventions, student contracts, in school suspension (ISS), out of school suspension (OSS), and school bus suspensions that were administered by school staff (i.e., teacher, counselor, administrator) for the student. The district level actions were more severe to include long-term suspension, which may result with student(s) attending an Alternative School or permanent expulsion. This is decided at the district level by means of a due process hearing. All disciplinary actions or consequences follow the school system's code of conduct guide.

Table 2

*School Level Bus Violations*

School	Number of Incidents	Disciplinary Action
Elementary A	0	
Elementary B	9	Warning, Conference, Bus Suspension
Middle A	48	Warning, Conference, Bus Suspension*
Middle B	27	Warning, Conference, Bus Suspension*
High A	0	
High B	14	Warning, Conference, Bus Suspension*

*Note.* School year 2012 – 2013. Some schools may not submit minor incidents into the data discipline system, opting to conference or assign a student contract. \*Majority of students.

Table 3

*District Level Bus Violations*

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Grade Level	Number of Incidents	Disciplinary Action
6	5	Based on hearing
7	10	Based on hearing
8	10	Based on hearing
9	5	Based on hearing
10	2	Based on hearing
11	2	Based on hearing

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*Note.* School year 2012 - 2013. Due Process Hearing determine disciplinary actions



## **Summary of Interviews**

Each participant was interviewed after completing the questionnaire. The interviews were held in a private setting within the target school system or the public library. The sites chosen were convenient for the participant's work schedule and work location. Each interviewee met with the researcher face-to-face to answer 14 open-ended questions. The questions were aligned to the research questions that guided the study. The interviews were to gain insight and understanding of student bullying within the school bus environment. Individually, the seven participants described their experiences with student bullying on the school bus and their perceptions of parents, administrators, and methods of managing student bullying. Each participant was willing and forthcoming to tell their stories based on their respective observations, perceptions, and experiences of student bullying behaviors they encountered as a school bus driver. There was also a consensus among the participants that they felt it was important that they were given the opportunity to voice their concerns. Mel stated, ". . . people need to know . . . what's going on . . . because we have never heard anybody wanting to write anything about a bus driver – ever."

## **Summary of Themes**

During the data analysis of the school documents, questionnaire responses, and semi-structured interviews, five themes were identified from the findings. All of the participants' semi-structured interviews were transcribed verbatim by a professional transcription service. I reviewed each transcript by reading and listening to the audio recordings to reflect on the stories that the participants' encountered of the phenomenon. A color scheme was used throughout the analysis for organization (i.e., file folders,

highlighters, ink pens). I wrote notes documenting thoughts and highlighted words on each of the transcripts. I again read each transcript multiple times. During each of the readings, I underlined significant statements or horizons (Moustakas, 1994) and continued to write notes in the margins of each transcript. Next, I assigned meanings from the significant statements or horizons that were grouped together based on commonalities referred to as the “cluster of meanings” which I interpreted in naming the themes (Creswell, 2007, p. 61). Creswell (2013) stated, “Themes are broad units of information that consist of several codes aggregated to form a common idea” (p. 186). Creswell (2009) suggested that five to seven themes were common for qualitative research studies that may include subthemes, quotations, and various perceptions from participants (p. 189). I identified nine themes; however, after reviewing the nine themes, they were condensed into five themes. From the five themes, descriptions of the experiences were developed: textural description and structural description, which described what and how the participants experienced the phenomenon, respectively (Creswell, 2007, p. 236-237). I included quotations from the participants’ interviews that described what and how they experienced student bullying and their perceptions of parents, administrators, and methods of management that would prevent student bullying within the environment of the school bus.

The following five themes were identified from the participants’ responses to the questionnaire and individual interviews. It is also important to note that three of the themes were subdivided (i.e., bullying behaviors: student bullying and bullying driver, supervision: supervision challenges and sole supervision, total support: increasing parental support, increasing administrator support, and increasing management support).

I felt the magnitude of the participants' experiences from the tone and description of the setting as each participant told their respective stories as they experienced the phenomenon of *bullying* on the school bus. Therefore, it was important that I report each participant's account of their experience verbatim. The five themes were:

1. Bullying Behaviors
2. Supervision Challenges
3. Distractions and Safety
4. Total Support
5. Essential Training

### **Individual Interviews**

**Student Bullying: All school bus drivers observed student bullying behaviors as they drove students to and from school.**

All participants reported observing bullying behaviors on the school bus. It was noted that most victims were reluctant to tell because of the ramifications of further bullying. Participants mentioned that the time of day and grade level was a factor for student bullying behavior. Although participants reported that bullying sometimes occurred during the morning ride to school, all seven participants stated that bullying occurred during the afternoon ride. In addition, school documents along with individual interviews indicated that the highest number of bus misconduct occurred at the middle school level. Participants also indicated that victim reactions to bullying range from crying to trying to defend themselves.

**Taylor**

I've seen some physical stuff, pushing and shoving - punching - um that kind of thing. Usually, it's a verbal thing [. . .] the intimidation factor - um. If they can't seem to push and shove or humiliate verbally you know the intimidation factor comes in. And you basically just have to watch or manage what's going on in your bus and ah go from there. Crying I've seen that - um and usually, it will start either with the crying or shying away. Probably the shying away first, and then the crying, and then the outburst if they're fed up.

**Francis**

The bullying behavior will be like one child hit another child and then that child will say ah ah [male student] hit me. Another incident of bullying [. . .] oh, yes, that was this boy in the elementary school and he was a real big bully [. . .] he was notorious for fighting folks. Fright - Fear - Panic. They - I mean they're scared (pause). Some of them [victims] will and some of them won't [tell]. Some just keep quiet and hope that it will go away, I guess. But um other children on the bus will tell you, you know, what's going on. But a lot of the children who are being bullied, they're too - too afraid to tell anybody.

**Marion**

Well, there was this one little boy. He was just sitting in his seat on the bus and another little boy just came up and just started hitting him for no reason. I don't know why. He just started hitting him and I got up and I stopped him - no, separated them. And there was this little boy. Ah, he's a kindergartener. He just hits this little boy on the top of the head and the boy was bigger than him. That's the kid I have problems with always

hitting people and I've talked to his parents, but it still haven't worked - The reaction?

Um - normally with the elementary they either start crying or they come and tell me that a kid hit them. Middle school? That particular kid – I don't think [student] did anything. I don't recall him hitting back.

**Mel**

Um - pushing I've observed children trying to make other children give up their seat or um if they got to the seat first not - not wanting to slide over and share the seat. They want to have a seat by themselves. Um - mean looks - where pushing - saying – making derogatory statements like you know what happened last time. I've pretty much observed it all. I've observed hitting, so I guess that's physical. Um - like I said, mean looks and threats. Yeah, I remember - um one student - um he was so afraid to tell me that this student was - punching him in the side and I would always wonder because all the – my children have assigned seats and he always just had this panicked look on his face, but he didn't the previous year. But the next year, when this student started riding and um so I just kept him on the bus after we got to the school and unloaded. And I asked him – I said, what is going on with you, [male middle school student]? And he said nothing. I said, something is going on, what is it? And then he told me that the boy would ah – because he sat by the window, so he would elbow him in the side and he would – I never observed it, but he told me. So when I don't see it you know I have to write it up as to what the student said. But I did notice a change in him [. . .] in my 11 years of driving I have never had a student [victim] to come forward on their own – well, I shouldn't say that. It's been very rare that they'll just tell me. They never just tell and you think that they would, but – especially middle school – and elementary school – uh hum. They

don't just tell. That's something you have to notice. Sometimes – sometimes they'll try and defend – they'll try and stand up for themselves, but if it's one or more – sometimes they just take it.

**Reese**

Well, I've seen kids bullying each other, bullying me. Um - I had one girl last year – she had this other girl that she just constantly bullied. And so I seen that. I've seen them - um bully me try to tell me what they're going to do to me. I mean, I've been called every curse word you can name [expletive] – one – one kid – I was telling him to have a seat because the bus was moving. He said, [expletive] you old [expletive]. And – and this is something that happens every day. One kid going to say something like that to me. And the little girl that was bullying the other little girl – she told me that she was going to get me fired and tell the school that I was bothering her and – all the time – she was bullying the other little girl. The one that say [expletive] is high school. The one – the girl bullying the other girl is - uh middle school. [Reaction of student bullied] Uh - some of them cry, some of them just sit there and take it, and some – they try to fight back, but then once they start fighting back the bull[ing] get even worse, so they just sit there and be quiet.

**Terry**

Last school term, I had a brother and sister, the sister being the oldest and the brother the youngest. And he would sit near my window - would yell at students walking past him, What are you looking at? Don't look at me. I'll beat you up. You're ugly. You stink. And then he would actually get out of his seat, over his sister, and follow these students down the aisle. And at this instance, he slapped a kid. After I'm going down the aisle to

find out and get kids seated and everything and immediate denial after. I didn't do that. I didn't do that, all of this type of behavior. And then his sister reiterates to the point oh, he's not doing anything wrong. [. . .] And then the sister would say, You're lying. My brother did not slap you. Elementary. It was elementary [students]. He would always pick on the smaller kids that he knew that he could intimidate with no problem. Then knowing he had his sister for a back-up, if one tried to retaliate from what he was doing, and that's how they utilized that whole bullying tactic to intimidate students.

It – it was somewhat on a regular basis until I got – until I - warned them repeatedly numerous times, numerous times, and uh then I consulted the assistant principal at [Elementary School] that - what I was going to do because it's a form of bullying. And she [assistant principal] instructed me to go ahead uh and write up referrals on them. And she actually expelled them from the bus for three weeks. [. . .] Most of them – they are pre-K, first grade, second grade, they cry. They don't try to retaliate in the physical form, especially from the larger kids. What they'll do is just cry. And some will tell me and some will not. They try to get off the bus, and I'm watching intensely [asking] why are you crying? What's wrong? Then they might tell. Some, I hate to say it, in kindergarten or whatever, they don't really know how to tell you.

## **Cal**

There are many kinds of bullying that I have encountered over the years. I have encountered - um students as they get up to exit the bus – one will push one into another and then that one will push one into another and - um then the kids will – they'll surround that person, so you can't really see who's doing what. Then the answer actually was he stepped on my toe and he bumped into me – or something of that nature. So they cover it

up and so you can't really see who initiated it a lot of times. I have encountered students um threatening another student. Um - A couple years back – maybe two - there was a little girl who had some issues and she was hitting kids on the bus. I would put her in the front seat, which – she would get up and go back and hit someone and things of that nature. She had a little girl that was much older than her crying because this little girl was taught not to hit back. Uh – She was slapping her in the face. Elementary school. Okay, ah - just a lot of things – I've gone to the principal and written her up on several occasions and I also tried to work with her - uh grandmother as well – who was her guardian. Um - We mostly – I mostly have a lot of kids on the bus, so I cannot observe just one child and say how they – but I know I have had parents who come to me and they say well, they're not going to ride the bus right now. A lot of times, I find that kids who are going home saying they're being bullied are actually the bullier.

**Bullying Driver: Student bullies targeted school bus drivers as they transported students to and from school.**

Six of the seven participants recounted verbal and/or physical threats that occurred on the school bus from elementary, middle, and high school students. Although all grade levels were indicated, the participants noted throughout the interviews that middle school students contributed to the majority of bullying and aggressive behaviors. The data from the school documents supported the participants' claim of excessive bullying at the middle school grade level. In addition to the comments, two of the participants mentioned that they felt there was no recourse to bullying behaviors except to endure the attacks until the administrators were involved. Even then, depending upon the administrator, bullies may not be disciplined.



## **Taylor**

They'll do anything they can to hurt you. If they don't like your rules and regulations, I'm one that sticks to the book. I'm going to stick to the book. There's no – I like everybody the same. So if they feel like they can't break you, it's like a pack - pack of wolves. If they can't break you, they'll do anything and everything to you. So the throwing, the smart mouth, the spraying, you know - and the cameras didn't seem to help me because if they're down here spraying, how are you going to catch them? Are you going to see a vapor? Everything doesn't have a big burst of cloud, smoke coming out of a can or whatever. You know - So it didn't help me in that incident - I have to watch my actions and my words and stay in control. If they're - they are back there bullying them, they can bully me, too, in the say verbal. That has happened. And under - under no certain terms did I allow them to - to escape (pause) unscathed without addressing it. I'm going to do it professionally, and I'm going to be real assertive when I do it. I'm not going to scream. I'm not going to holler. I'm not going to disrespect you. But I will put you in your place and let you know I'm the adult and you're the child.

## **Francis**

This boy, he was - he was in middle school. And - um - it was – it was during summer school - And she [administrator] said [. . .] from now on out how you [bully] get here is going to be your own way because you will not ride this bus anymore. And so he -he got mad about that. And – um - the last day of school summer school, here he comes. I said oh, no, no, no. You will not ride my bus. You will not ever ride my bus again - I don't care how he gets home, but he's not riding not riding no bus that I'm going to drive. I said no. The principal already told him that he could not ride my bus. I said I'm holding

her to her word. And I'm holding myself to - he is not going to ride my bus - [male middle school student is now in high school] and so when we get to the high school, you know, we line up and we just sit out there with the door open waiting you know on the children to be dismissed. And I had forgotten all about this boy. Here he come - got on my bus. You old [expletive]. You [expletive] you. I mean, he's just calling me all kind of names. And I said, [male high school student], get off my bus. Get off my bus. [Male student] This ain't your so and so and so bus. It's [the school district] so and so and so. I mean, he was just cussing - Then, you know, um he wouldn't come every day. He - he would wait a while and then when I least expected it he would he would be up on me before I could even close the door. And so this one particular day, ah - he came and he got on my bus and he was calling me all kinds of names and whatever and whatever. And ah I just laid on the horn. Bam, bam, bam, beep, beep. [. . .] We had to go to court and everything. And when we went to court, he went to jail. He - he stayed in jail for three months. And then, they said that he would never be able to come back to that school as long as I was driving out of there. And um when we were - I didn't know that he had a weapon. They wouldn't tell me because I probably would have freaked out, but when we went to court - ah - that big resource officer he said we didn't want to upset you until he was in jail.

### **Mel**

Well, first of all, I let the student know that I am the adult in charge. Sit down and when we get to the school I am going to turn you over to either the SRO [School Resource Officer] or an administrator. That's my first line of recourse - is that. And I tell my students verbally - I tell them the law was created for the lawless. If you do not sit down

Mel will have you arrested. Never – never [had] anybody to lunge at me. I have in the past, though, had a little girl say that she would beat my behind, but she never got out of her seat - more so words - just verbal - No, it was just out of anger because - I had written her and her sister up for something they said they didn't do, but they did.

### **Reese**

I've seen them um bully me, try to tell me what they're going to do to me - I mean, I've been called every curse word you can name [expletive] – one – one kid – I was telling him to have a seat because the bus was moving. He said, [expletive] you old [expletive]. And – and this is something that happens every day. One kid going to say something like that to me. And the little girl that was bullying the other little girl – she told me that she was going to get me fired and tell the school that I was bothering her and – all the time – she was bullying the other little girl. If they bully me – after I calm down, I will call dispatch and tell them that I have an unruly kid and then I will write them up and take them to the office - Well, it started off as the same person [bully] and then after the other kids [bullies] see how this person act and how this person get away with it then you might have another kid that join in, so there may be two, three kids that want to start [bullying] acting crazy and talking crazy junk to me.

### **Terry**

Initially, you're shocked because – you - as old as I am, you're shocked because I cannot believe this 12 - 13 - 14 year old is wanting to be aggressive towards me. And you have to think rationally, and like the boy [bully] that wanted to take his backpack off and everything and crying and balling his fists up and wanted – uh - to get into a physical confrontation. The only thing I could do is laugh and say son, you don't know what

you're getting into here (laugh) because I will be the first one to tell you I love kids, but if one strike me, I don't know how I'm going to react. Will it be rational or will it be irrational or will it be a physical retaliation? I'll let anyone know that. And especially some of these kids are as large as I am. So naturally, it – it would be difficult for me to say I will not retaliate physically. That's a difficult question to really, really, really, really get a grasp on because how do one restrain [themselves], and I'm wearing glasses, and this guy punch me, loosen one of my teeth, would I – I played [physical sports]. Now, what am I supposed to do? This kid as large as I am, 200 – I'm serious – 200. I think he's about 215 pounds. And he'd like to stand up and look at me like you want a piece of me? (laugh) Son, good morning to you. Have a nice day at school. Please exit the bus.

### **Cal**

I don't have many students – if they say something to me – there's bullying – they mostly say it behind my back [. . .] And then one will say it, another will say it, and so you can't actually pinpoint who's saying it a lot of times. Uh - The school system says that you should never put your hands on a child no matter what. My opinion is that some of these kids are much larger than I am and 200 pounds is 200 pounds. I don't care what the age is. I don't feel like I should be hospitalized or anything else just because they're a child - I don't believe in – I don't curse children. I don't put my hands on children. I don't disrespect them. At the same time, you're not going to do that to me – because they tell you to wait and report it to the school, but anything could happen between the time it's happening and you get – and you go to the school. I could be hospitalized. I could be in a coma. I could be anything. So tell me I don't have the right to defend myself just

because it's a child. I think you're absolutely wrong. But when children tell – children say something to me I do report it. I report it - I report it to the school. Uh - I've had kids call me [expletive]. So I've had bullying from parents. I've had parents – uh - who send word by their child – if I say one more thing to them they're going to do so, and so, and so to me. I've had parents who block the bus with their car. (laugh) Um - Let's see – what else? I've had parents call me names and parents will tell kids that they don't have to listen to what I tell them to, so I've been bullied in certain ways by parents.

**Sole Supervision: The school bus drivers felt that bullies took advantage of being in a confined environment where one adult was responsible for supervising a large number of students while driving.**

The participants described their experience of being the sole adult on the school bus as challenging. The participants stated that students who disrupt within the school bus environment by bullying did not view the school bus as an extension of the school. Although, the participants reported reviewing school bus rules regularly with the students, the school bus drivers stated that the bullies were adamant to continue as they disregarded school bus rules.

**Taylor**

Because there's nobody to monitor them other than the bus driver.

**Francis**

Well, I guess it's because they know that bus drivers don't have that much control over them.

**Marion**

Because they feel like they can get away with it more so than inside the school system. Within the school buildings we have the administrators there and they get them right then [discipline students] and they feel like school is out – now I got this free time. I can do what I want to do. And they feel like this is open game on the bus. So that's when they take over - It's less controlled on the bus. Yeah, so they feel like – they take advantage of that less control.

**Mel**

Because they have less supervision. You know - it's only one driver and if I've got 50 kids on the bus there's less supervision. They know that they can get away with it because my eyes are not always on them. And then the bus is loud. It's a diesel bus. I've got my radio going. You got your traffic going. You got everything going so they know that they can get away with it. They can whisper to somebody and – you know - just giving them a look is less supervision they know. I think less supervision.

**Reese**

Oh, they [students] told me. They said that - at home they have to do what the parents say, in school they have to do what the school [teachers and administrators] say, so on the bus they don't have to do what I say. So that's when they release.

**Terry**

Close knit. The closeness and you can throw your aggression out there and think it will not be noticed - because of the close knit of the amount of students and where they sit and located on the bus. They [bullies] can throw out these aggressions and won't be heard by

the driver, other kids will not tell on them because of the fear or try to create a fear among other students so they will not tell.

### **Cal**

Um - They realize that it's only you on – on the bus. They realize that administration is not there to intervene nor is the parent, so this is my opportunity to act out.

### **Supervision Challenges: School bus drivers used various methods of responding as they intervened and prevented bullying behaviors.**

All of the participants indicated that there were challenges when responding to student bullying. The participants stated that based on how they responded to students who bullied; the disposition of the victim can change as either positive or negative. Also, when discussing their experiences, participants revealed that they wanted to reassure that each student [victim] felt safe as they traveled to and from school.

### **Taylor**

If need be, I pull it over [bus] and address it – Um - We do have our protocol on the bus, Um - which comes under the - the student conduct – Um - reports that we have. And we have certain – it's called a four step now I believe it was. It used to be the seven steps. And those are on our referrals. – Um - The first one, I believe, is to speak to the child and then with a third party. And then you can reassign them a seat because we have assigned seats on the bus. Reassign them and move them closer. And if it goes beyond that, then we go into the principal [office] or another administrator and see can we speak with the child with them as well. If that doesn't work - then we go to the parent. All that is within the third step. Give them a call and see can we address it verbally, face to face, or on the phone. If that doesn't work, then it goes to the fourth step, which the

administrator then can step in and say yay [or] nay, we need to take you off the bus one, three, ten, seven days at that point. So I try to stay with that protocol.

**Francis**

If it gets to the point where, you know, they're going at it so bad you – you need to pull over. You have to just pull over and try to get the bus under control or either go so far. One time I had to go so far as to call – call the police to come to my bus.

**Marion**

I basically talk to them and tell them not to be doing it anymore. If they're sitting next to each other and they're fighting or something like that I will separate and put them in two different seats. And after talking to them, if it continues then I will write them up or take them into the school and let the administrators handle it. My feelings – Uh - I somewhat get angry because they're disrespecting the other kids on the bus. That's – you're angry, disappointed – yeah – because I don't think any child should ride the bus in fear. And so it - it kind of, angers me, so I want to nip it in the bud right then. If I see something happening like that because I don't want a child getting on my bus being fearful. So it – it angers me when they do something like that.

**Mel**

Um - when I see it and when I can catch it - I immediately call it out. I call the person's name out and I – if they're not already in the front of the bus I bring – I make – I'll pull over or I'll slow down and make them come to the front of the bus. The first thing that I do is - is I bring them to the front of the bus and if we're on the way to school I'll keep them on the bus or if we're on the way home I'll tell them the next day you stay on the bus when we get to the school. And I try and talk to them – the bullier. I never try and



keep them together because the person that's being bullied, often times, won't talk. So I ask the bully at first what's going on? And they always say nothing – always. So I let them go and then I have gone – before – inside the school and found the other person. And they're like, no, well, it's okay [Driver Mel]. I said, no, because I saw that person – I heard what that person said to you, so now that I've heard it myself I am bound – I have to write that up and I have to report it. And so sometimes they'll break down and tell, but sometimes you have to pull it out of them. And so after that then I call both sets of parents and I – after I've talked to both sets of parents I let both sets of parents know that I'm writing this up as bullying. And of course, the parent of that child is - I'm saying is bullying is upset, but I told them I have to write down what I observe. So – and I'm bound by not just school policy, but I'm bound by law to report that. Even – and then she said, well, how do you know what's going on? I said, well, what I do is if I didn't witness it I'll say I suspect it you know or something is different. So I write it up. And then after I talk to the parents I write it up and turn it – hand it into the administrators - Oh, my God. You – you really have mixed emotions because it's, like, I know this is a child, but I also know this child understood what I said to him. So now I'm getting frustrated with him when I don't need to be frustrated because I need to be focused and calm because I – I got 46 other kids on the bus including myself. But this one child is just making it difficult and they don't realize that the bus driver does not need all of that distraction behind them because it's – your life is at stake as well. And I tell my children [students] – I said, listen, you put your life in my hands twice a day, five days a week. I need y'all to behave because I don't need to be upset or aggravated or agitated because I'm driving.

**Reese**

If they're bullying another kid then I will - you know - try to get them to leave them alone, then I will write them up, take them to the office, and call the parent – Hmm - Sometimes I want to quit. Sometimes I just want to pull over the bus and discipline the way I would my kid because I can tell that a lot of them don't have discipline at home. And I – I personally feel like it's not enough discipline period, so I get upset and I try to control myself and I pull the bus over. That's all I can do.

**Terry**

I personally – I try to – first of all, - you - recognizing that fact that they are bullying, and I have had to stop my bus several times to address this issue then not let it go any further. Then get to the bus stop and readdress this issue. And periodically, some of the parents are there in which 90 % of the time, if the parents are at the stop, and you're addressing this issue, they are in denial. The parents are in denial. And then when reality hits that you're wrote up a referral, now they're angry. But on that incident, that's exactly what transpired. My kids wouldn't do anything like that - But overall, I try to protect them [victims] as much as I can. And being very observant about the little, small bullying tactics like I have this young lady that – uh - she's teetering on the edge. I'm just waiting for one more solid incident. I'm going to write a referral on her for bullying also.

**Cal**

Um - Sometimes I will talk to both of them – both parties and try to get down to what actually happened, what actually started it, and I explain to them – um - that it's – it's not nice. You know - That's not the behaviors – I also let them know the rules of the bus. You know the rules. And – um – and – and sometimes I just tell them you know - just

don't talk to each other – period. It's not necessary that you talk to this person. It's not necessary that you even talk about this person. If – if it continues I'll go to administration. Um - Like I said, it depends on the seriousness of it.

**Distractions and Safety: Distractions compromised the safety of school bus driver and students.**

Each of the participants stated that safety is foremost a critical factor while driving students to and from school. The ability to maintain concentration while driving in traffic simultaneously while scanning the rear view mirror to monitor student behavior can cause dangerous consequences. In addition, all of the participants were unanimous that distractions from bullying behaviors compromised the safety of the school bus driver, students, and other motorists. Another important statement from the participants were that the presence of a school bus monitor was needed to assist with deterring bullying behaviors, which would allow the school bus driver to focus solely on driving safely than distractions from bullying behaviors.

**Taylor**

Safety is the key - And if somebody is bullying somebody, intimidating somebody, I've got to pull the bus over in an unauthorized, unsafe environment. So in order for me not to have to do that, there are certain things that are going to have to take place. Respecting others, keeping your hands to yourself, being polite – Um - no verbal stuff, any of that because then that makes me take my eyes off the road. You know - all of that comes along with managing the bus as well. Oh - Oh, that goes without saying. If I'm taking my eyes off the road, and I'm pushing 55 tons of [machine], that's exactly what it is - I have 48 or 49 [lives], including myself, negotiating traffic and all that, it only takes 4

seconds for me to look up from the steering wheel up to the overhead and then focus. While I'm doing that, this bus is moving. (Pause) This bus is traveling, unless I'm at a stop sign, stop light, or at a stop. When I tell you that's the quickest way for somebody to get hurt, maimed, or killed, I can't stress that - And that's our biggest problem on these buses is the discipline on these buses, and these children understanding and respecting what they're riding on. You know what you're supposed to be doing, keeping your hands to yourself, being kind to each other, the whole nine. No intimidating, no - Um - humiliating, any of that. That's a major thing because I've had to pull my bus over in [interstate] because they were throwing, hitting, screaming, blowing - the whole bus cabin filled up with bubbles. And I'm trying to drive and negotiate across this traffic. So I said - like I said, it's not just bullying. (Rapping on table)

**Francis**

[Bullying] Oh, it can cause you to have an accident because - ah - last year - was it last year or year before last - ah that girl that I was telling you about where I had to call the police. Something - something was wrong with that girl uh because she always wanted to fight. [. . .] So when I stopped at the traffic light, I said while we're stopped now go back there and get the paper. She went back there and slapped this girl and dove on the girl and started fighting and going on. I was at the intersection. So I came on across the street and - and just parked in that service station and called the police. And they took her away in handcuffs. Yeah, it does affect that because you can't - you can't keep your head glued in that - that mirror looking back there. You've got to be trying to watch them for a while and then you've got to watch the road. And you've got to watch for other cars and buses and trucks or whatever. So (pause) it's not as easy a job as most

people might think. It could be if everybody's children would – act - get on the bus and act like they had some sense, but you know that's not going to happen.

**Marion**

Ah - Bullying safety? Right now there is – at one time they were cutting up a few years ago. And instead of me keeping my eyes on the road I'm looking up trying to see what's going on with the kids. And that could cause me to have an accident, so it's more, like, jeopardizing everybody's lives. Uh - Probably best to stop [the bus]. If something is going on – it's best to stop. Uh - if you look up and you see something going on and it's something major then it's best to pull over, and stop, and get it under control, and don't just keep going because it can get real wild.

**Mel**

It's very – oh, my God, that is so dangerous because if a student becomes disruptive – you know – if I'm – I'm driving – and I have to have my radio on at all times because dispatch may be trying to get in touch with us for whatever reason. I've got to watch the road and you know nobody wants a yellow school bus in front of them, so they cut us off all the time. So if we were – if we were able to give our students the rules and – um - they followed the rules we could – we could - focus more on safety and traffic because if I've got to look up to see – if I have a big explosion in the back and I've got to look up – what if somebody slammed on brakes in front of me? Then I got to slam on brakes or maybe I didn't have enough time – I've hit the car. Now everybody's thrown forward and – you know - the bus is in chaos. It's – it's very – it's very unsafe. Bullies – bullies create a very hazardous driving condition – they do – and especially when they're very boisterous and loud and sometimes they refuse to move. If I think something is going on

– I’m not moving because I didn’t do anything wrong. You know - I’m in traffic, I’ve slowed down or I’ve come to a complete stop – well, maybe I’m on a two lane highway and I’ve got traffic behind me and I’m trying to get this kid to come to the front of the bus because I believe he’s creating a disturbance back there. You know - what do I do? I’m driving. I don’t have a bus aide. You know - and it’s just – it – it – it can become very frustrating. And then one you’re a driver that’s frazzled it takes a moment to, kind of, bring yourself back together. So it’s - it’s – bullies create a very hazardous driving condition because it only takes one person to get up and start a ruckus. And that can throw – maybe not the entire bus, but a fourth of the bus out of control. That’s all you need is, really, one out of control student, but if you get five or six out of control students – you know - that makes it very difficult - some of the regular [education] drivers could use bus aides as well. I think that would be a great management method because I would be in the front of the bus and the aide could even be in the back of the bus or midway of the bus.

**Reese**

[Safety] High impact because I’m constantly looking in the mirror, I’m constantly looking over my shoulder, and I’m not paying attention to the road as much as I should be because I’m trying to prevent a fight or prevent somebody from being hurt. And so I’m not paying attention to the road, so it’s – it impact that – the safety a lot.

**Terry**

Tremendous impact on safety because rather than concentrating on your driving, you have to constantly try to look in your mirror and monitor the students because you don’t have a bus monitor. So you’re doing this from stop to stop. Stop to stop. And it is

difficult. And these kids know that while I'm driving and making a turn, you might hear a kid start crying. That's when it occurs. They're smart enough to actually look and watch. Then as soon as you're concentrating on traffic and everything, instantly, they go into action and do this. Then when you come out of – or get in a place where you can safely look in your mirror at them, a student is crying. She hit me or he hit me or whatever. They're smart individuals. They [students] know. They watch.

**Cal**

Oh, God. (pause) It can cause so many things because - a kid yells out and you look up [in the mirror] to see what's going on. You can pass a stop sign, you can hit somebody, you can – yeah, or - or – not only bullying, just standing up and you're starting to tell them to sit down and they're still standing up. And you're looking up like this telling them to sit down trying to make sure that they sit down – anything can - happen. Um - The safety – it affects the safety on so many levels – you know. Anything could happen at that given time. Fight break out, they – if it breaks out in front and you're driving they hit you or something like that – it could cause an accident – anything. You – you have no place – you're – you're on a street and there's no place where you can pull over into a safe location. You know - And so you're driving and they're back there fighting – somebody could fall and get hurt. And it's the bystanders who – You know – can get hurt. A lot of things could happen at given times - And the whole ride I'm hearing [Students repeatedly calling the driver's name]. You know - It makes it very difficult to focus on driving - You cannot monitor one child when you have 40, 50 kids, 60 kids on the bus.

**Increasing Parental Support: School bus drivers found that parental involvement or lack thereof has a momentous impact on the whether or not students bully on the school bus.**

All of the participants revealed that parental support and involvement was instrumental in discouraging bullying behaviors on the school bus. The participants described when they communicated with the parents of bullies, bullying behaviors may decrease or cease. Each of the participants felt that parents were not as instrumental with stopping their children from bullying behaviors. All participants expressed that parents of bullies must be receptive to working with the participants to change the behavior of the bully.

**Taylor**

It's usually - thank God, this year, I have been blessed. Um - The parents that I have spoken to because I do try to meet each and every one of them at the beginning of the year, let them know who I am, what their expectations are, and that I'm going to be the one driving your child. And I will deal with anything that I need to so usually, the parents, this year for me, they've been wonderful. If I call them or if they're at one of the drop offs or shuttles or whatever, if I ask to speak to them or wave them over, they come, we address it, and usually, the parents correct it right then and there, give me their phone number, or say if you have any other issues. In the past, I've had some that did not want to hear anything that their child did that was incorrect. [. . .] And I believe that if they allowed the parent to come to the bus and say hey, how's - how's he doing? Um - Is there anything I can help you with? If we can just get back to that - You know - that will help a lot because a lot of times, if the parents are waiting there in their car, sitting in



cars, and children go from the bus to the car, there's not any kind of - You know - communication. And like I said, I believe parents are the key to this thing bullying. A lot of them don't know it because children - and I'm finding in the middle school area, they're still elementary, and they're trying to grow up. So they want to get into the clique, whatever the clique would be, the pretty girl, the - the - Uh -basketball player, football player, the athletics, the singing, whatever, they want to be in the center, or they want to be the head. So that drives a lot of the bullying as well. And - Um - if we can get back to the parents coming and checking and knowing that I'm going to check and see how you're doing on the bus, in school, wherever, that's - that's the key to me to all of that. They just need to get back to basics. They need to be able to come and talk just as if in the schools, you all have the nights [PTA] where they come in [. . .]. Fortunately, I am a driver who can kind of put my hands on [meet] a lot of my parents. I've got a rapport with them, so they know that if something is going wrong, I'm going to address it immediately be it talking to them verbally face to face or on the phone or whatever. They know I love and care for those kids. And I'm not going to let them as I tell my children [students] I'm not going to allow you to disrespect yourself or anyone else. So that's how my parents [understand] me, and I've been so fortunate this year.

**Francis**

Um - that boy [middle school student] [bullying towards driver], his mom - uh - (pause) I don't know what she did to him, but I haven't had any more trouble out of him. [. . . ]  
Um and she had called me cause she said she wanted to meet me. She was at the bus stop I guess it all depends on what kind of mood the parents are in. What that lady [parent] did. Whatever she said, I don't know what she said to her son, but I haven't had any

more trouble out of him on the bus. In fact, when we have to do the – uh - back door evacuation, he's the first one that wants to help me – uh - evacuate the kids.

### **Marion**

Parents normally say I'm sorry. I apologize for his behavior. I'm going to talk to him and it shouldn't happen again. Basically, if they just talk to the child and tell them to stop it.

### **Mel**

[Support received from parents] – to tell that the child bullied - the support is almost none. I have had to call some parents and they say, well, I'll speak to my child about that or something, but most of the time they're very defensive of their child. Like, my child is not doing that - I've had a few that would say, well, I'll speak to him when he gets home and let's get both sides of the story. And sometimes I've had parents to come up to the school and meet the bus once we've gotten there and say I want to resolve this. But most times, they're very defensive of their children. [Parents should] try and find out what's going on first before you just automatically believe your child - if I call you and say I need some help. There's a problem. And I always start it off with I need some help because it, kind of, diffuses what I'm going to say to the parent because I'm getting ready to say something negative about their child. So I have learned – I didn't know this in the beginning, but I've learned over the years that if I say I need some help then they're more calm - and they're listening. But still, when I tell them what's going on they still get a little aggravated. And – and for the most part, if I just keep talking to them very calmly they'll calm down – like, you got some that just don't believe it. They believe their child.

But, I mean I have to report it the way I saw it or the way the child reported it to me. But if I see it I stick to my gun because I don't – I'm not going to lie on your child.

**Reese**

Most parents tell me - that the kids act like that at home. And so – I only had one parent that told me that he would take care of it. And it didn't last for a minute and then when I called him back and told him that kid was still bullying and still acting crazy on the bus he just said that he have this problem at home and he don't know what to do about it.

Well, in the elementary level they will say that they'll take care of the kid, but it don't stop - because the kids know that the parents are not around right then, so they continue to do it. And once you tell the parents when they get home, the parents just say I'm going to handle this and I don't know what happens from there. Um - I want for them to sometimes – uh - meet their kid at the bus and see how their kid is really acting or just go to the school and observe the kid - just follow up on what your kid is doing because a lot of these kids – I asked one kid – I said why do you all act like that when your parents are not around? Because we can't do it at home and we can't do it at school, so we do it on the bus.

**Terry**

None. They're [parents] in disbelief. Then they automatically arbitrarily think the bus driver is lying. That's the normal route they'll take. Why am I being punished because of my kids? Like the grandmother was walking every morning rain, snow, cold. I mean, it was cold [grandchildren suspended off bus for bullying]. She got – what it was, she got tired of walking exactly one mile to the school, and then got to return herself back to home. Then in the afternoon, she had to walk up, get the kids, and walk back. And – and

I think it was more being humiliated by the buses passing her seeing she walked with her grandkids than anything [. . .] I only saw the mom one time when she – I told the grandmother I wanted to meet her at the bus stop that afternoon about her kids. And what she was so angry about because she had to get out of work and come check on her kids at the bus stop. And to me, that was showing aggression towards me because mostly you are lying. [Parent yelling] My kids are not lying - Her own children with the grandmother standing there. The mother using profanity towards her own kids because she had to actually be off work to meet me at the bus stop for me to tell her how her kids were acting. So her retaliation was aggression towards her own kids using profanity, threatening to - whatever. Discipline is no problem, but take it home and do it. (laugh) But that's the way I – and that was – believe you me, it would really deter a lot of kids from bullying, doing a lot of whatever, if the parents have a discipline procedure at home they use. (laugh) Not abuse but discipline - Stern discipline. Very, very stern discipline at home - Very much so - because I get word to your parent, you know you're going to be disciplined at home that would deter that.

### **Cal**

Most of the time I don't get any response from the parent. There have been occasions where the parent will - will throw it back on me, or it's my fault, or I'm being – if they're – especially if they're a parent of non-color - accusing me of being - uh – racist - not realizing [my race] - And I reported him and the parent wrote a letter – a four-page letter not really dealing with the issue - I was trying to – I was asking the parent not to just call the child across the street because she was not following the directions as well -Yeah. I've had kids who tell me they was going to have their parent – uh – (pause) just do

something or, in other words, if I make them follow directions they was going to – you know – I’ve had a situation on the bus at one time – and these were high school kids that was doing something that was totally inappropriate and I asked the young lady to come up front – um - and she wouldn’t. And I asked her to take a seat and she wouldn’t. She totally ignored me. So I was too angry at the time to speak to them, so I waited till the next morning. When they got on the bus I said, sit down – sit in the front of the bus. And WHY was the response I get – because I asked you to sit at the front of the bus. I want you to stay on the bus so I could – you know - talk to them in private. Well, they both did what I asked – so - she called her – I can’t remember if it was her aunt, or her mother, or whomever, guardian. And when I got to school I was met – uh - by security (pause) who told me that their mom had called the school – not only had called the school, but had called – uh - the [school system] administration downtown and said that if I kept her daughter on the bus there was going to be a problem (laugh). Okay, and she had faxed everybody. She had faxed [school system], she had faxed the school, downtown [school system] not knowing what had actually happened. So I told [school system administrator] what happened. I had written it up. I was called into his office and I explained to him what had happened. I had said, well, I need to talk to the parent. I’ll talk to them. He advised me not to talk to the parent. The school advised me not to talk to the parent because the parent would turn around. So [School System Administrator] – and this parent insisted, basically, that I be removed. And [School System Administrator] had to explain to this parent this bus driver did absolutely nothing wrong. He stood up for me - I don’t know what they [parents] can actually do. Uh - Again, I would expect them to take some - type of - action at home, uh - to talk to the children. I do realize that

a lot of these parents have issues of themselves and they haven't been taught – um - a lot of values. If you haven't been taught values yourself you can't instill values.

**Increasing Administrator Support and Communication: School bus drivers felt that a lack of support and communication was a major concern when addressing bullying on the school bus.**

All of the participants suggested that needed support and communication from administrators was lacking. Participants pointed out that outcomes may be positive or negative, depending on the administrator. Although there were set school bus conduct rules and consequences, discipline was at the discretion of the administrator. Another concern perceived by school bus drivers was needed communication from administrators, such as consulting with school bus driver, providing feedback regarding the outcome, following through with disciplinarian actions, and input regarding school bus rules.

**Taylor**

Like I said, fortunately, the one that I have, the administrators out there at the school, they have been excellent. Um - They jump right on it if there's something I need to address, whether it be behavior or bullying or any form of that. I'm fortunate. I'm one of the fortunate ones. Yes. If they just would come and – just say in the bus lane, if they're there, I know they do the little referral type thing - if that continues, and I can't deal with it or need to deal with it, don't have to deal with it, then I think the administrator needs to get up on the bus and address the entire bus and go over what it is what they will, what they won't, and the consequences - And stick to it. And stick to it.

**Francis**

Well, I told you we have good support from the elementary school and the high school, but nothing from the middle school - except for that man and [male school staff]. He helps out, but I don't know what his title is - I think he might be a counselor or something. Take them off the bus for a certain amount of days. Make the parents find a way to get them to school. And then the parents would - would chastise them better if they have to find a way to get them to school.

**Marion**

Uh - they [administrators] will talk to them and ask me about - reassign the seats to them [bullies]. So move them around on the bus. They get assigned seats. They suspend them out of school some time or in school suspension. And they will give them warnings and stuff like that. Give them a warning - yeah. Yeah, they would be supportive, yes. Uh - give me some feedback because sometimes, when I write them up and take it in they don't always come back to me and give me the results of what happened when they talk to the parents, or if the kid gets suspended - because at one time they may discipline the child, or suspend them, or something and they don't tell me. And so I'm, like, left in the dark. I'm going, okay, I wrote them up, I told them about it, what's happening? I don't know. And when I question them they [administrators] would tell me it was a private matter and they couldn't tell me because of the privacy act thing. You can't discuss what goes on with the kids and stuff like that. So - uh - that was happening at one time. Now, I think they're [administrators] a little bit more open in letting us know what's going on. Well, now they are. But at one time - they would not - Yeah, they would not tell me.

They would say they were going to handle it and stuff like that, but they wouldn't tell me the outcome.

**Mel**

Oh, God. That's a different level. For elementary school you get pretty good support. My middle school – they [administrators] almost don't want to deal with it. They almost just want you to put the children on the bus, take them home, get them away from the school. Yes, and I find that very – it's very sad to me and disheartening because eventually, something ends up happening - you know - to where you could've prevented this big fight. But for the middle school tier – they don't want to deal with it – not – not at my middle school. They don't — they don't want to deal with it. High school is a little different. High school they deal with it head on. My high school they deal with it head on. They'll call the students in, they'll call the bus drivers in, they'll call the parents in – they'll get everybody involved that they need to get involved. But middle school is just – I don't know what that – that age group – I don't know what that is with the parents. I know the children are going through a change, but they don't deal with it very well to me. You get very little support – very little support. And that's where you need the most support in my experience - First of all, to listen to what the bus driver is saying and the child that's being bullied. Listen to what they're saying because if we're both saying the same thing then there's a problem and it could become worse. If the administrators were willing to really hear what we were saying, versus, oh, another write-up [discipline referral], another write-up. That's how they look at it. Oh, another write-up – another write-up. But – you know - it's not good – I've never been bullied, but I've seen others bullied and I know people that have been bullied and they said it is the most



horrible, lonely feeling. [. . .] That middle school level is – it's rough. [. . .] But – I mean - if I'm writing him up and I'm saying that he's bullying somebody – that's different than me writing him up and saying that he won't sit in his chair- or I ask him not to eat on the bus and he's eating on the bus, or I ask him to sit in his correct seat and he won't sit in his correct seat. I mean - children do things so I don't mind. If I look up and one of the students – I'll say go to your seat. Get back to your seat. But if I'm writing a student up for bullying I think they ought to take that most serious. Children kill themselves because they're being bullied. I mean - we see it in the news all the time. And I just cannot imagine that if I knew something like that and didn't report or do something about it – but the administrators – I think they just look at it as another write-up because you – you do write up middle school children probably a lot more than you do any other level. But when it's something that serious, I think, they should take the time to not look at it as just another write-up.

### **Reese**

Mostly talk, mostly we'll [administrators] take care of it, we'll handle it. And we have to write them up maybe five or six times before they finally tell them [bullies] that - you know – kick them off the bus. That – they'll suspend them after five write-ups. And a lot of the times, when you take them in the office, the first thing they say is, oh, it's you. They know it's the bully. They know it's the person, so we – we really don't get any support. Suspend them from the bus for a couple days and if they come back and do the same thing suspend them for the rest of the year because they – they don't stop when they come back. Doing the same thing – bullying and acting up.

## **Terry**

Thus far, elementary school [administrators] very helpful. Middle school [administrators], questionable. Why I say questionable - well, this one assistant principal, he - um - has been removed from school [. . .] Virtually, no discipline. He wouldn't even slap him [bully] on the wrist. He would come to the bus driver and try to make a joke. (pause) The kids fighting on the bus, you return to the school, they was his grade level, well, uh - uh - could you take him home today? The other schools call the parent to come get your kid after fighting on the bus. But he would always try to convince the bus driver to take him home because he didn't want to babysit them until the parents got here. And that's a technique quite a few of the schools and the administrators use so they can go home rather than taking care of business because these kids fighting and tearing your bus apart. So then you're supposed to return with the bus to the school. We're not allowed to touch the students, even if they are fighting. But the administrator can come in and separate them and take them off the bus. Immediate action - Immediate action because that would deter that - and it should not have to be written up in a referral form. Take the word of the bus driver that bullying is transpiring on your bus. Why should I have to write up a referral, then go through the process of - then you, of course, in essence, is the bus driver lying? So to alleviate that, initially, if he's bullying, okay, we'll take care of this problem now. Why should I have to write up a referral? And then if the administrator is going to say - uh - okay, this [driver] he writes up so many referrals. This person don't write up but one a year - I'm going to take that one because being lackadaisical is not the proper way to administrate. If a bus driver or teacher said this kid is whatever, take charge immediately of that situation. Why should I have to write up a

referral? I should call in and say meet my bus. I have a problem. Now, here it is. Take care of it. Okay. You got the names and whatever, and why should I have to spend my time to write up a referral, and you make a judgment of whether this is proper or not?

**Cal**

It depends on the administrator. You have some administrators who are more hands on and then you have some administrators who are very lax. Either you want me to write them up (pause) or I'm harassing the kids – you know - by writing them up – you know – uh - because [administrators] you don't want to deal with the issue or you have so many that you're dealing with that it's just too much for you to handle.

**Increasing Management Method Support: School bus drivers relied on management methods consisting of rewards, discipline referrals, administrator support, parental support, and video monitoring to prevent and stop bullying on the school bus.**

Participants used one or more management methods in their effort to alleviate bullying on the school bus. Participants acknowledged that with their chosen management method(s), factors such as grade level, routes, time of day, tolerance level, and number of students reflected the outcome of the effectiveness of each management method.

**Taylor**

If they [parents] are supportive and those children know my mom or my dad is coming to check - to see how I'm doing with my behavior, if there's anything they can do to help the driver, no problem at all. But I'm sure you know we've got a lot of parents that don't do that. They don't come to the bus - And when you call, they're rude - When the parents get involved and the parent will go to the administrator, oh, it's just the bus

driver. And you never come back and to respond to the bus driver or even listen to the bus driver. They [school bus drivers] write reports and write referrals and write referrals and write referrals, and nothing gets done. And there's a triple copy to it. One goes there. One goes in the file. Then one goes to the bus driver. A lot of bus drivers never get it back because it's either tossed [trashed] - or it's not dealt with. And I don't know if - if it's a reflection on your school, if it has to do anything with money or just your school. I don't know when people [administrators] are getting reports [referrals] - I know they have to turn them in. Um - Is there a consequence for them having too many disciplinary issues at their school? Does that bring down heat on the administrator and the school? [Video Monitor cannot capture images] The type of bus that I have, one of the newer ones, the seats are extremely high. Some, the high schoolers, you can barely see here. So if I'm driving, and this is all I see (raising hand) I don't know what's going on here. And the little ones, you can't even see them at all basically, unless they're sitting right up close to you. So you don't know what's going on. That's why I said the students are my eyes and my ears. I can either seat you in the number that you want you to go in, or I'm going to give you the option to sit by your buddies. Okay. That's your reward from me. Now that's my reward.

**Francis**

The most helpful would be the referral. If the principal would do something, they would stop - the referrals would stop it because they know that principal you know has it in his hand to do whatever he wants to do. My cameras never worked right from even when the bus was brand new. When they brought it out and my camera - either the audio wouldn't - wouldn't come through or the - the pictures wouldn't come through. So my camera

was never any good - if the camera was working, yeah, it would help cause they couldn't lie about what they do. Like that little boy throwing, they would have caught that. Because I told you there is no problem with the elementary and the high. It's just middle. And I bet any other drivers that you can get to take this survey would tell you the same thing. Mornings are fine with all of them. Mornings are fine, but afternoon is - middle school - is - they just bad.

### **Marion**

I think parents and then the - the administrator because if you get a hold of the parents - parents don't want their children to cut up [bully]. Now, for the most part - parents don't want their kids to cut up because they will have to take off work to come and see what's going on. So they don't want that to happen, so they're going to talk to their children and try to get them right. And then after that, - uh - being suspended out of school - they [students] don't want to be in trouble at school with administrators, so I think that's a big thing, too. To me, it's, sort of, like, hand in hand with the parents and administrators. Oh, if I report it and they need to pull it [video monitor] they will get it. It would be helpful, but for the most part, I don't really use it. I mean it's on there and it's running, but for the most part, I don't really need it. I haven't done any rewarding because I haven't really needed to.

### **Mel**

And also, even though our children are not categorized as special needs, if they would give us bus aides especially on problem routes. If I've written a student up several times for the same thing - if I'm saying that I think bullying is going on or you know - I've had cases where I've heard kids talking about they were going to fight - if they would give us

bus aides that would help manage a little better. They give them to the special needs drivers, but some of the regular [education] drivers could use bus aides as well. I think that would be a great management method because I would be in the front of the bus and the aide could even be in the back of the bus or midway of the bus. You know – she [bus aide] could probably hear things – like, I can't hear all the way in the back. You know - If the kids are sitting mid ways and sometimes you know we may just hear a conversation. You know - they're not exactly talking to us, but we can hear what's going on – that would be – to me, that would be great because sometimes – like, I have my cameras and I'm supposed to be able to get picture and sound, but one time we were trying to get sound - it didn't give sound. It just gave the picture, so you could see the child's mouth moving, but you didn't know what they were saying. So cameras with audio and video – visual would help. (sigh) The least effective is putting it on a write-up [discipline referral] and sticking it in – in an administrator's mailbox because sometimes you see the referral again, sometimes you never, ever see it again. And if you try to hand it to them they say, oh, put it in my mailbox. Well, I put the last one in your mailbox and I didn't get any results from it. [ . . . ] never heard anything – you know – never heard anything one way or the other. You know- but at least let me tell you what's on the referral. Let me tell you know that I'm not writing a child up for chewing gum. This child is complaining to me that this student is bothering him, is teasing him, is picking on him once they get off the bus – you know. To me, that's the least effective is putting in an administrators mailbox. But that's what they ask you to do, so you have to comply- you know. I say if you can get it, but I think the most – uh – the most effective way would be a monitor. To have a person like a bus aide on the bus. And to make sure that

all cameras work – audio and visual. We just have picture, so you don't know what the child is saying. You can see his lips moving, but you don't know what he's saying, so you still can't really say if he said what you said he's saying. Um - I think – for me, I've noticed it's the afternoon. It's the afternoon because I've noticed something – kids – they'll start talking about something that happened earlier that day and, oh, wait till we get on the school bus.

### **Reese**

The discipline referral [most helpful]. Because once – the only thing reason it's helpful is because they're [bullies] gone. If they get kicked off the bus for a couple of days they're gone, so it helps. But when they come back it's the same. (sigh) Rewards would be, I guess – I have to rethink this. (pause) Rewards don't work, parents don't work - once you tell the parents what's going on, the kid go back and say that's not what happened. The bus driver lied. And the parent call the school, or the – ah - transportation department and you know will say their kid don't do this and that's not my kid and they must've been provoked. So a lot of times the parents don't believe that their child act like that. I don't know - And the rewards, third. Cameras would be last. They don't care nothing about that camera - Um-hum, they [bullies] don't care about those cameras. I will tell them [bullies] you see the camera see everything you doing - doing. They [administrators] don't care. Well, I've only been there two years. So I don't know. They've never looked at mine – never. Never. They don't – they don't ever come to me and say, I need to pull your tape because - you know – see what was going on. I've never had that happen -never heard another bus driver say that they told them they need to pull their cameras [view video]. No, so the cameras – they don't work because the kids know

that most – a lot of those cameras don't work, so the kids know that. And so they just ignore the cameras. When you have a bully it's both morning and afternoon because they just – for some reason just start out like that and it goes. And when they get off – get out of school, it's worse in the afternoon.

### **Terry**

Discipline referrals. Because you get that disciplinary action immediately rather than step by step. First time, verbal warning. Second time, hardly a slap on the wrist. Third time, you might get one or two days off the bus. With the discipline referral, right away you should be with the harsh, then go harsher. Harsh at least one week, not three days. Immediately. Then increase from that further up and up as you go. And that would deter quite a bit of actions on the bus. [Parent support] It will work, yes. It will definitely work - [if] you get that parent support, and I can give you an example. The schools want us to call the parents ourselves to let the parent know how their student is acting on the bus [. . .] You would be surprised how difficult it is to reach the parents, especially the kids that give you problems. [Video monitoring] Very helpful - the No. 1 tool there to really take care of most of these problems [. . .] The cameras will show that if they're working.

### **Cal**

I think it starts at home. I think it should be parent support [...] but again, like I said, sometimes you don't get the support from the parents. Um - It should be administration support - Administration and parent collectively - and then, if necessary, camera [...] I do believe that sometimes you do need a camera.



**Essential Training: School bus drivers felt that adequate training to combat bullying on the school bus was needed.**

Five of the participants conveyed that training was needed to recognize, respond, intervene, and prevent bullying behaviors while transporting students to and from school. The five participants responded that the training received was limited or none at all. Two of the participants communicated that they felt sufficient to handle bullying behaviors because of prior anti-violence knowledge and training. All the participants emphasized that their method of handling bullying behaviors was based on a combination of experiences and best judgments on how to de-escalate bullying.

**Taylor**

I mean, other than them saying - you know - off the [discipline] referral basically, move the child, separate the children, other than that – and I was reading in the handbook that I believe the administrators or teachers are giving some kind of stuff where they could learn how to de-escalate situations - Um that kind of thing. And all we are getting basically is I want to have the same [bullying] training that you're [school staff] having [...] Other than they've given you the training, and there's different levels of that training. I was reading like three or four different steps. We [school bus drivers] need to know those steps [...] We need to be given the scenarios or whatever, and we need to be a part of that other than saying put them in – reassign them to the seat closer to you. But what if the child gets violent with you? You understand what I'm saying? How do you de-escalate other than using your own adult - You know training from just your everyday living and growing? [...] We have got to have training. We have staff development,

Um but it's not like I think what you [school staff] all have. You know - It's more geared to transportation issues.

**Francis**

Yeah, we need more training because I mean what do we know about how to go about . . . [working with a] bullying child. (pause) So yeah, I guess, it would help. No - No we don't get any training. Not for bullying.

**Marion**

Uh - What, kind of, training do I need? I don't know because I do power thoughts on my bus anyway because I'm part of the national campaign for [. . .] anti-violence program. So I am intervening before it happens. So I'm planting seeds – in their heads – the consequences – no, not just for now, but for the future of their actions. So I don't really need any training, per se – but other people maybe – because I have a different attitude — than other people do. My attitude is kids don't know. They don't know the consequences so I have to teach them the consequences. So when I teach them the consequences then they do better. So I don't really have a major problem with bullying on my bus [. . .] They tell us - uh what to do - uh in case there is a fight or something like that. We – there's a step you have to do as far as writing them up, calling the parents – you have to call the parents two times within this step - um and - and if there's a fight on the bus you pull the bus over, try to get it under control, call for help. So that's basically what we do.

**Mel**

We don't. I think they should have – like, we have staff development eight hours a year, I think – you know – two hours every so often. I think one of those should be dedicated

to teach us how to prevent or spot bullying. You know – like - um if I didn't have that young man sitting toward the front of the bus I may not have noticed the change in him. You know - teach us how to spot when something is different – you know. And I just happened to notice that he – well, he used to be a very talkative child, but he just got quiet all of a sudden and I didn't know why. You know - teach us how to look for stuff like that. I mean - it's some stuff that we do on our own. Over the years you just, kind of, learn your students. You know - but give us some, kind of, training on – on how to spot it or – you know – and if we spot it, what do we do right away? Do we – I don't know if I'm doing the right – I talk to the person that I think is bullying first – should I be talking to the one that I think is being bullied first? I don't – I just use my own judgment because nobody's teaching us this. We – we just really are playing it by ear – you know. No training – we definitely could use more training in bullying – what to do. Give us some methods – some steps to take – you know. But they don't. They just say no bullying and we all know that it's against the law, but we still have babies killing themselves in elementary school – you know - because they're being bullied. But they – I would very much welcome – I would give up a Saturday to go to one of those places - You know - so a lot of times – especially on the bus – teachers may be able to spot it better cause you're sitting in a class with them, but it's difficult because the longest bus route is probably 20 minutes, so it's hard to spot. You got to watch the road, watch the kid, you know - listen to the radio – it's, kind of, hard to spot, so more training for bullying, definitely.

**Reese**

We were just told if we have - uh an incident on the bus call dispatch and that's all the training we've had. I know that I need training, but I don't know what kind. Only thing I go by is the fact that I raised two kids and so I try to use that - you know - treat them the way I treat my kids. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't.

**Terry**

Actually, most people really need training. But I have been through so much in management with [other careers] and whatever things of this nature. And it was - mine [training] was acquired on another job. There are so many different routes that I arrived at here to understand bullying - Yes, I do. I really do. I got a thorough understanding of bullying from - [prior jobs]. [. . .] Well, prime example like the elementary school girl that she's tall and all. She's large in frame. She's just taller than the other kids. And she used to - she'd slap kids and then [say] oh, I'm sorry. And see, most kids wouldn't recognize that. She'll apologize, yeah. But she intimidated. Now, she's - you inquiring and she trying to scare the kid again right in front of you. [bully said] She's lying. He's lying. Trying to make the driver, me, believe that the smaller kid is lying. That doesn't work. She's intimidating them not because she's slap [victim]. Then she's going to try to smooth it over by I'm sorry. I didn't mean to slap you. Then you inquire about it. Then automatically, then she's saying this small kid is lying.

**Cal**

Um - They'll tell us what bullying is. They'll tell us that we need to write it up. And to separate them and put them up in the front seat and everything, but your seat does not go this way - the long way, so you only have so much seating - near the front and that does

not stop them from – um - bullying from the front to the back or – and a lot of kids – you know – person with a strong personality – a lot of the kids – they will follow the direction of that student who is the most popular – you know. So whatever they do the other kids follow – follow through. So now you have a whole busload of kids – basically – doing the same thing Yeah - So I really don't know how to answer that other than either you need another party on the bus to kind of, settle things down – A monitor, right – while you focus on driving the bus (pause) because a lot of the times that's how you can have an accident.

**Inclusion and Input: School bus drivers were not included during school system leadership and local school meetings when discussing the business of bullying, student discipline, and school bus rules.**

Each participant responded to the final question of the individual interview for suggestions to prevent student bullying on the school bus. Three of the participants stated that administrators must follow through with firmer consequences (i.e., suspension off the school bus). While one participant suggested a school bus aide to monitor because buses are often overcrowded, another participant suggested that all video equipment work on the school bus, and another participant suggested counseling for the bully[ies]. All participants mentioned the necessity of gaining support and bridging the communication gap with parents and administrators, such as, addressing parents regarding school bus rules and expectations during Parent-Student- Open House. Participants responded that they should be included during meetings at the school system level and each local school level during the discussion and implementation of student discipline and school bus rules. Participants stressed that their input is vital during school

bus bullying intervention and prevention discussions. Most importantly, participants believed that once the support is in place, students would more likely refrain from bullying, therefore, riding the school bus will be a safe environment for all students.

**Taylor**

Um – Educating the students.

**Francis**

If they [administrators] - if the children were to know that if they are bullied on the bus, they were going to get put off the bus [. . .] Whenever they did something, they would have to suffer the consequences. I would give them like the first offense, I would give them like two days off the bus. And then the second time, I would give them like five days. And then if they kept doing the same thing, I would give them like 10 days. And if they kept doing it, I don't know what you have to go through to have – uh a child sent to the alternative school [. . .] To give our input [. . .] Because we're the ones driving the children back and forth to school. So, we need to be - we need to be able to have some rules of our own. If they do this, they cannot ride anymore. If they do that, they cannot ride anymore. They're going to get so many days off because they did this or so many days off because they did that. And that will make them think twice because I don't think they will enjoy taking that long walk to school [. . .] Just to sit in [meeting] and have an input into what - whatever they [administrators] are going to do. Run it by us and see what we think about it. Or do we have any better suggestions?

**Marion**

I would suggest to them talking to the kids practically on a daily basis – let them know the consequences of their actions. That would – that would curve a lot of it because –

and then, too, to understand where the child is coming from. Sometimes you might have to do one-on-one on the individual and find out what's going on. Kids don't always bully just to be mean. It's sometimes – its stuff going on in the homes – you know - and they don't have any other outlet, but to take it out on their classmates. So it's not always just that they're mean and they just want to do it. They don't know how to react to things that's going on. They – they might see their parents being beat up and it's really tearing them up on the inside. And they don't know how to react, so you have to talk to the kids. Do the individual thing, find out what's going on in their heads that's causing them to do that. So I think you just need to talk to them because – me, I do my power thoughts every morning. I'm talking to them. And, like, this is National Domestic Violence month [ . . . ]

### **Mel**

Make sure you don't have an overcrowded bus [ . . . ] And if we could get the administration to understand that – um this is a moving vehicle – that it's not – it's easy for us to notice things [ . . . ] because I can't watch to see what he's [bully] going to do because I got to put my eyes back on the road. And I don't think a lot of administrators get that. I don't think they get that when they start to plan for – uh transportation administrator - maybe bring the lead driver in, or a supervisor, or a backup driver – somebody that's actually driven a bus – to help – you know - because it's more than just driving [ . . . ]. And if you've never driven a school bus how do you know what actions to put in place? You know - how do you know how to say – um anything if you've never driven a bus? [ . . . ] At least bring our supervisors in, or – you know - backup drivers, or retainers – somebody that's driven a bus – you know - with some experience – five, ten years – somebody that – that can help contribute to some of the rules that they make.

And then if you had – if we had a monitor or some other adult on the bus that could be another set of eyes to help us. Also, even with – like I said, with the cameras working properly – that could be a big help as well. So that’s what I’ll say [. . .] But there should be somebody from transportation at the administrators meetings, PTA meetings, planning meetings – when you're planning and making all these rules somebody that has driven a bus should be able to give their input. Even if you don’t use it - you need to hear what’s really going on.

**Reese**

I would suggest that they [administrator] spend more time with the - uh bully and let them know what consequences could happen because they just tap them on the wrist and let them go and they're done with it. So they [administrator] let – release them [bullies] back on the bus and we have to handle it, so I suggest that they have more aggressive - uh punishments I mean because almost every bus driver – in the mornings you hear I need an administrator to meet me at my bus.

**Terry**

Severe reprisal against them. Give them a week initially off the bus. You got the message? Next time, it’s longer. You didn’t get the message, next time it’s longer. Even though it’s three, four, five months down the road. You got the initial one week. If it’s three months down the road, double that [. . .] I feel that bus drivers should have a tremendous amount of input on how to handle a lot of the situations and not be scrutinized because of what we have to do to get these students to school and home from school. We should have a great deal more input than we have rather than being addressed as your bus driver, and if they mess up, you write up a referral. If I say this



happened, it happened. I don't think there's a bus driver out there that would fabricate anything on elementary, high school, nor middle school [student] that this is transpiring on my bus. So that's – you can go back to the videos and everything, upgrade, and make sure every bus has a working video. Not just one but up to four on one bus from the rear toward the front, from the front toward the rear and both sides, front and back. So, we need cameras galore and properly fixed.

### **Cal**

I think the students should be more accountable for their actions. I – um - can't say exactly what should be done, but I think that there's – there's no accountability for these students – there's accountability to the parents and for administration – for everybody else except for the student themselves, which – they're the ones who's acting out. And if they don't have to – they don't have any consequences themselves [. . .] but they're not accountable for it. Everybody else is accountable except for them, so why should they stop? You still got the same situation. Now, the kids feel like, so what if you take me to the office? There's nothing going to be done [. . .] You have no power. And I've had them tell me you're just the bus driver.

### **Summary**

This chapter explored stories from lived experiences of observations and perceptions from the seven participants regarding student bullying behaviors within the school bus environment. Data analysis from school documents, responses from questionnaire, and open-ended interviews addressed the research questions. From the responses of the participants and school document information, it was evident that bullying on the school bus was a problem that needed in depth understanding for a safe

school climate. After a thorough examination of significant statements from individual stories, five themes were aligned to the two research questions that framed the study. The five themes that were identified were bullying behaviors, supervision challenges, distractions and safety, total support, and essential training. Chapter Five provides a summary and discussion of the findings, theoretical implications, implications for practice, and recommendations for future research.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION**

The purpose of this study was to explore and understand the school bus as a convenient environment where bullying occurs from the experiences and perceptions of the school bus drivers. In addition, the study explored school bus driver's reactions to student bullying, how administrators and parents responded when informed of students bullying and the effectiveness of management methods to stop student bullying. Two research questions guided the study. The research questions were addressed using three data collection instruments: (a) school documents, (b) questionnaire, and (c) open-ended interviews. In this chapter, the format of this section consists of (a) the summary of the findings addressing each of the research questions that guided this study, (b) a discussion of findings to expound on the importance of the study (c) theoretical implications, (d) reflection of the limitations, (e) recommendations for future research, and (f) implications for practice.

### **Summary of Findings**

#### **Research Question 1**

*How do school bus drivers describe their experience with student bullying?* From the findings of the analyzed data, school bus drivers described their experience with student bullying as a constant challenge, as noted from the five themes. Each school bus driver observed and recounted bullying behaviors that occurred several times a week, mainly consisting of verbal and physical attacks towards students. In addition, several of the school bus drivers revealed being victimized of bullying by a student bully or bullies. Bullying behaviors do lead to victims who are in constant fear, wide spread chaos on the school bus, and driving distractions. There was a concern for safety of the school bus

driver, students, and other motorists. Although the participants stated that they liked their job, each stated that monitoring bullying behaviors while driving was an enormous task for one adult to be responsible for the supervision of a large number of students.

## **Research Question 2**

*What perceptions do school bus drivers have of parents, administrators, and methods of management to prevent student bullying on the school bus?* The study revealed that the perception the school bus drivers have of parents, administrators, and methods of management to prevent student bullying depended on various factors. All of the participants felt that parents were not as supportive or not supportive at all when informed of bullying infractions. In addition, participants pointed out that relying on support from an administrator depended on each individual's acceptance of bullying as a problem as well as their disciplinarian skill level. Some administrators were supportive while some failed to support the school bus drivers leaving them open to continued bullying infractions. All participants noted that increased communication was needed from the parent and administrator to prevent further bullying. Each participant indicated the need for school administrators to dispense and follow through with firm consequences such as suspending the bully from riding the school bus to get the attention of the parent and bully. Another finding of the study reported that the majority of the participants felt that the training received to effectively identify and manage bullying behaviors was inadequate, where some participants stated they did not receive bullying training of any kind. However, the two participants who had prior training dealing with aggression and bullying behaviors and participation with an anti-violence program expressed that training was sufficient. Based on each of the participants' responses, all participants

indicated that they use a variety of management methods (i.e., video-monitoring, referrals) to intervene and prevent bullying.

### **Discussion of Findings**

The findings regarding school bus drivers' experiences and perceptions of student bullying on the school bus were consistent with previous published research studies reported in the literature review section (deLara, 2008a; Galliger et al., 2009). In accordance with the research study findings and prior findings, bullying on the school bus was not considered a school system priority according to the school bus drivers as indicated from the data derived from the research instruments. It is important to realize that the need for this study was because of a limited number of research studies to substantiate that bullying on the school bus were a problem. This exploratory research study addressed the gap in literature that exists with students bullying on the school bus.

### **Description of Experiences**

I noted within the research study findings and previous literature the inconsistency of a clear definition of bullying when describing bullying behaviors. It is important to mention that during the study, participants used numerous terms interchangeably that are associated with any type of disruptive or aggressive behavior when discussing bullying throughout the study. This was confirmed from the verbal responses of individual interviews and data obtained from the school documents that indicated that school bus bullying does not have a specific code. Therefore, bullying behavior on the school bus was coded with any discipline violation on the school bus. In reality, most of the participants were not clear of the characteristics that represent bullying behavior. Although, most of the participants were not clear of what constitutes

bullying, there was a consensus among them that the bullying behaviors were unwanted from the victims (Bradshaw et al., 2008; Hughes et al., 2009; Olweus, 1993, 2003).

In describing their experiences, the participants were unanimous that they observed student bullying regularly on the school bus. Each participant described experiences of verbal and physical bullying of students during the ride to and from school. Many of the participants recalled that a lot of bullying was also covert (i.e., intimidation). Participants described another important observation of bullying occurring mostly with middle school grade level students than any other grade level and when bullying occurred, it was often during the afternoon routes. It was also important to understand that most bullying can be unnoticed by the school bus drivers; however, all participants pointed out that the most compelling evidence that bullying occurred was the reaction of victims (i.e., crying, profanity, fighting, reporting, and/or withdrawing), which usually alerted the school bus driver of a possible school bus disciplinary violation. Even more important, five of the participants reported that they were bullied with one participant making a statement of wanting to quit.

The study also revealed the physical environment of the school bus made it easier for bullying behaviors to occur such as a confined tight space with one adult to supervise a large number of students while driving (deLara, 2008a; Krueger, 2010; Raskauskas, (2005). The school buses in the targeted school system have a seating capacity for 72 students. Mel expressed the difficulties of transporting a large number of students:

Oh, gosh. On the bus it's – it's difficult because I transport – look at this bus. I have 12 seats on each side. Some middle school children are as large as I am. I can really, honestly, safely only transport 48 students on this bus. I have

transported up to 70 students on this bus. So first of all, if they would help cut down on the over crowdedness of the buses you could see a little better, you could hear a little better, and you can always manage smaller crowds better than you can bigger ones – you know - I could manage even 55 kids better than I could 70 - you know. So that's one way to manage.

It is important to understand that the average number of students riding the school bus usually fluctuates during the school year for reasons such as an increase or decrease of ridership during the morning or afternoon routes because students may ride in the car with parents or stay after school for extracurricular activities, or leaving the school through attrition (i.e., move to another school district or drop out), and/or not ride the school bus because of early dismissal from school.

The participants believed that bus monitors would be an asset to alleviate the disruptions of bullying and aggressive behaviors that cause the school bus driver to be distracted. Each participant's initial response as to how they supervise bullying behaviors was to follow the guidelines provided from the transportation department, which in most cases was not sufficient to handle aggressive behaviors. They acknowledged that when the school bus was in motion, safety may be compromised (Putnam et al., 2003) until the school bus stopped in a safe location. During this time, participants expressed that they relied on their training, or lack thereof, to diffuse any type of bullying behaviors that at times become so severe that they had to bring the school bus to a complete stop.

Participants also noted that when they cannot manage the bullying behavior, the next level of safety was to require the assistance of a school security officer or public

police officer when away from the school grounds to diffuse or aid with aggressive behaviors towards student victims or themselves. For the most part, the participants stressed that driving the school bus was not the issue, just the chaotic behaviors that jeopardizes safety of everyone. Besides, the school bus drivers expressed enjoyment of seeing the students develop from impressionable elementary students to mature high school students, as they believe that they positively influence the lives of students. Mel stated, “Most of us, I believe would tell you that they love their job. You have to like what you’re doing in order to work with children every day.” Each participant felt that managing the ongoing negative behaviors of aggressive students while driving is a challenge.

### **Preventing Bullying**

The study disclosed findings of the perceptions of parents, administrators, and management methods to prevent student bullying on the school bus were consistent with prior research. All of the participants indicated that parental support was necessary to prevent student bullying. They felt that parents who address their child’s disruptive behaviors and communicate with the school bus driver would most likely adhere to the school bus rules (deLara, 2008a). However, when parents are not supportive and their child’s bullying behaviors continue, the participants expect full support from the administrators to alleviate the problem (deLara, 2008a; Long & Alexander, 2010). The participants suggested that support and communication from administrators and consulting with them regarding discipline referrals (Hirsch et al., 2004), following through with firm disciplinarian consequences, and providing feedback to the participants would alleviate some or most bus related incidents of bullying and aggressive behaviors.



The majority of the participants regarded video-monitoring as an effective method to report student bullying. However, it was noted that the video-monitors were more of a display because many were not working or if working there was no audio sound. It was noted that none of the participant recalled that an administrator requested to review the footage of their video-monitor when disruption occurred on the school bus. As mentioned in the previous research, video-monitors must be reviewed regularly to be effective (Kruger, 2010; Raskauskas, 2005). Another finding of the study revealed from the questionnaire and interview responses that rewards (i.e., prizes, treats) were not a favorite of the participants; however, students were rewarded with verbal praises for good behavior.

### **Theoretical Implications**

Bandura's social cognitive theory sets the foundation to understand the phenomenon of student bullying in this study. This widely used theory described reasons for aggressive behaviors of students in educational settings. Moreover, the bullying behaviors of the students in this study are uniform with the social cognitive theory concepts of modeling behavior, observing behavior, imitating behavior, and outcome from the behavior (Bandura, 1969; Bandura et al., 1961; Bandura & Walters, 1963). Students demonstrated bullying behaviors that were either learned from observing parents and/or peers who modeled bullying behaviors leading to the student eventually imitating the same bullying behaviors towards other individuals. In order for the outcome of the bullying behaviors on the school bus to be different, parents, administrators, and school system leaders must listen to the voices of the school bus drivers.

## **Limitations**

A limitation of the study was that the select urban school system does not generalize to other school systems (i.e., rural, suburban, or private). All urban school systems possess unique demographic characteristics. A second limitation was perceived interpretation of events, which depended on the tolerance levels of bullying behaviors by each participant. Each response was subjective based on factors such as experience with students, length of employment, and definition of bullying. A third limitation was the resistance of potential participants during recruitment, because many had reservations to commit to the study because they felt a lack of confidentiality might exist, or embarrassment from admitting that bullying occurred on their school bus, or from being a victim of bullying themselves. For this reason, the researcher-reassured participants of the strict guidelines adhering to confidentiality that allowed participants to tell their stories without fear of retribution from the school system or embarrassment from co-workers. A fourth limitation was that the term bullying was used interchangeable to identify any type of disruptive or aggressive act, reaffirming that a clear established definition was not known by the participants.

## **Implications for Practice**

The school bus drivers share a vital role of the success of students within the school system. It is important to understand that the school bus is an extension of the school and all school rules apply. Because bullying on the school bus is a constant challenge to the school bus drivers, their responsibilities are paramount when transporting students in a disruptive environment. Recommendations based on the findings and

literature of the study included ten suggestions to alleviate student bullying on the school bus:

- Provide a bus monitor and reduce the number of students on school buses with documented bullying and aggressive behaviors during both morning and/or afternoon routes.
- Provide small group training to recognize, intervene, and prevent bullying for each school bus driver periodically throughout the school year, which allows drivers to identify and recommend students (bully and victim) for counseling.
- Ensure that all video-monitors work, along with audio equipment. Check video-monitor at the request of the school bus driver within an hour after reporting a bullying incident.
- When a school bus driver reports that there was a threat to a student (s) or themselves, an administrator or school security personnel must remove bully(ies) from the school bus immediately.
- All bullying infractions dealt with immediately upon reaching the school with consequences. Administrator or school security personnel must meet the school bus to remove aggressive student(s) when bullying occurs away from school. Chronic violators removed from school bus for the semester or year.
- Administrators should converse with school bus drivers when reports and/or discipline referrals are generated regarding student bullying infraction with feedback of the consequence within one school day (administrator support).

- Administrators should ensure that students are constantly reminded that school bus drivers are to be respected as the supervisor of the school bus. School bus rules reviewed periodically within the school building.
- Administrators should support school bus drivers with regard to parents' unwarranted complaints, irate comments, and bullying behavior towards the driver.
- A school bus driver representative should be invited to speak at Open House/Parent Teacher Association (PTA) meetings to discuss school bus rules and safety rules. Parents of students identified as a bully or who had a school bus infraction should be required to attend.
- School bus drivers and/or representatives should be invited to local school meetings and school system meetings for their input regarding bullying behaviors, school bus rules, student discipline, bullying intervention/prevention programs, and anti-bullying policies.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This exploratory study should be followed with further research to explore and understand different aspects of student bullying on the school bus. Because of limited research on this study, future research is needed to address the literature gap of the phenomenon of bullying. The following recommendations include:

- Research using a qualitative design aligned to a quantitative design to study responses of student victims on the school bus in other school systems (i.e., urban, rural, suburban, private) with different demographics and geographic locations.

- Research using a qualitative design aligned to a quantitative design to study responses of school bus drivers within other school systems with different demographics (i.e., urban, rural, suburban, private) and geographic locations.
- Research study using a quantitative design comparing school buses without bus monitors to school buses with bus monitors.
- Research using a qualitative design aligned to a quantitative design to study school bus drivers who have completed an effective bullying prevention training program.

### **Conclusions**

Who better to describe the bullying behaviors of students on the school bus than the school bus driver? Clearly, school bus drivers serve as the first line of defense for gathering information for school leaders and the school system as they observe bullying behaviors daily within the school bus environment. The school bus drivers' input is vital to ensure that bullying does not take place on the school bus and that all students travel to and from school in a bully free safe environment. This study should present data to the school system to aid with encouraging parental support, reviewing and updating school bus bullying rules, provide training to the school bus drivers to recognize, report, intervene, manage, and prevent further student bullying.

This study will also benefit society [community stakeholders] to understand the impact that student bullying on the school bus does negatively affect the academic, social, and emotional success of victims (Bowllan, 2011). Students who are bullied on the school bus are prone to dropping out of school (Gastic, 2008; Zabloski, 2010), become bullies themselves (Gastic, 2008), and some bullies revert to bullying behaviors

as adults, which may lead to criminal behavior (Olweus, 2011). By describing, understanding, and addressing the phenomenon of bullying, eventually the cycle of bullying will stop within all areas of the school, including the often-overlooked environment of the school bus.

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## Appendices

Appendix A: Institutional Endorsement Letter



School of Education

June 6, 2013

Dr.

Department of

Dear \_\_\_\_\_ :

I would like to first introduce myself as the Dissertation Chair working with Natalie Evans as she completes her degree in Curriculum and Instruction. Natalie is a current student in the Education Department at Liberty University. She is currently working on completing her research proposal titled, "Exploring the School Bus as an Environment for Bullying: A Phenomenological Study."

Based on her research topic and numerous conversations with Natalie, she is an advocate for students learning in a bully free environment. She also stated that this research would align with the mission statement of \_\_\_\_\_ Schools and would be a contribution to the Bullying \_\_\_\_\_ to stop bullying within the school community.

This is an official letter of request for participation and support in her study. The research will follow all appropriate policies, practices and IRB qualifications prior to the execution of the study. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions regarding this request. Thank you again.

In Christ,

David S. Benders, Ph.D.  
Assistant Professor  
Graduate School of Education

[dsbenders@liberty.edu](mailto:dsbenders@liberty.edu)

address 1971 University Boulevard  
Lynchburg, VA 24502-2269

phone 434-582-2445  
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## Appendix B: School System IRB Approval Letter

School District

Superintendent

July 18, 2013

Reference: Research Proposal, *Exploring the School Bus as an Environment for Bullying: A Phenomenological Study* (File # 2013-

Ms. Natalie Evans

Dear Ms. Evans:

This letter is to advise you that your research proposal has been approved by the Department of \_\_\_\_\_ for implementation in the \_\_\_\_\_ School District. **Please remember that the \_\_\_\_\_ or his designee has the final right of approval or denial of the research proposal for the bus driver participants. In addition, note that the bus drivers may elect not to participate in your research study, even though the district has granted permission.** In seeking Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ approval you should provide the application with all required attachments and this district approval letter to him in order to inform the decision.

This approval is valid for one year from the date on this approval letter. Should there be any changes, addenda, design changes, or adverse events to the approved protocol, a request for these changes must also be submitted in writing to the \_\_\_\_\_ Department of \_\_\_\_\_ during this one year approval period. Changes should not be initiated until written approval is received. Further, should there be a need to extend the time requested for the project, the researcher must submit a written request for approval at least one month prior to the anniversary date of the most recent approval. If the time for which approval is given expires, it will be necessary to resubmit the proposal for another review by the \_\_\_\_\_ Institutional Review Board.

Completed results are required to be submitted to the Department of \_\_\_\_\_

Best wishes for a successful research project. Feel free to call me at \_\_\_\_\_ if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Cc: File

## Appendix C: Recruitment Script

### Verbal, Face-to-Face, email Recruitment Script

Hello, my name is Natalie Evans. I am a graduate student at Liberty University in the Education Department. I am presently conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctoral Degree and I am asking you to participate in my study. The title of the study is *Exploring the School Bus as an Environment for Bullying: A Phenomenological Study*. By participating in the study, your voice will be heard to help prevent bullying on the school bus as you transport students to and from school. The criteria for participating in the study consist of observing student bullying on the school bus.

The research will consist of (a) completing a written questionnaire, (b) an individual interview consisting of answering open-ended questions, which will be audio recorded for accuracy, and (c) attending a follow-up meeting to review and discuss your responses for accuracy. It should take approximately 2 hours or less for you to complete the research. Your participation will be confidential and no personal identifying information will be shared with anyone other than my research committee members. If you choose to participate in the study, you will be asked to sign an informed consent form.

**(Email)** The informed consent form will be given to you during the initial meeting if you agree to participate in the research study. The informed consent form contains additional information about the research process and confidentiality information. Please call me if you would like to participate. You may call me anytime; my telephone number is xxx-xxx-xxxx.

**(Telephone)** The informed consent form will be given to you during the initial meeting if you agree to participate in the research study. Also, the informed consent form contains additional information about the research process and confidentiality information. Please call me if you would like to participate. You may call me anytime; my telephone number is xxx-xxx-xxxx. Do you have any questions that you would like to ask me?

**(Face to face)** The informed consent form contains additional information about the research process and confidentiality information. If you would like to sign the informed consent form at this time, please take your time to read the information. You may ask questions regarding the study at any time. Please contact me at xxx-xxx-xxxx if you have additional concerns or questions.

**(All)** The research will be conducted at a designated private room within one of the school system's buildings or the public library. We can discuss a time and site which will be convenient for you. Thank you for your time and interest.

## Appendix D: Informed Consent

### **INFORMED CONSENT**

Exploring the School Bus as an Environment for Bullying:

A Phenomenological Study

Principal Investigator: Natalie Evans

Liberty University

Education Department

You are invited to participate in a research study of school bus drivers who observe students who bully on the school bus. You were selected as a possible participant because you have observed student bullying on the school bus. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by Natalie Evans, a Doctoral Candidate in the Department of Education at Liberty University.

The purpose of this research is to investigate school bus driver's experiences of student bullying activities on the school bus and to understand the school bus as an opportune environment where bullying occurs from the experiences of school bus drivers.

#### **Procedures:**

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

- Complete a written questionnaire. The questionnaire should take approximately 10 minutes.
- Participate in an audio-recorded individual interview. The interview should take approximately 45 minutes and will be audio-recorded.
- For clarification and accuracy responses, a follow up meeting will be scheduled to review and discuss responses, which will take approximately 15 minutes.

#### **Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:**

There is minimal risk, which is no more than you would encounter in everyday life. Confidentiality will be assured throughout the study. In addition, as a part of this research, I will not need to look at your personal records.

The benefits of this study will allow participants to describe their experiences, which will lead to discussions regarding the phenomenon of "bullying." Another benefit is that system leaders and school administrators may understand the phenomenon from the participant's experiences. In addition, the participants input and contribution will be heard as the school system continues to make strides to stop bullying behaviors within the school environment.

**Compensation:**

There will not be compensation for participating in this study.

**Confidentiality:**

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a participant. Your name and all other personal identifiable information will be kept confidential. Participant's identity will be masked using pseudonyms. The name of your school district will not be included in the final report. Research records will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to the records. All collected data will be stored in a locked file cabinet and electronic files will be secured on a password-protected laptop. All information will be destroyed three years after the completion of the study.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or DeKalb County School District. If you decide to participate in this study, you may refuse to answer questions or discontinue participation at any time. You have the right to inspect any instrument or materials related to the proposal. Your request will be honored within a reasonable period after the request is received. If you choose to discontinue participating in the study, all data collected from you will be destroyed. Paper files will be shredded and audio and electronic files will be erased.

**Contacts and Questions:**

The researcher conducting this study is Natalie Evans. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact me at xxx-xxx-xxxx or [nevans13@liberty.edu](mailto:nevans13@liberty.edu). You may also contact Dr. David S. Benders at Liberty University at 502-529-9166 or [dsbenders@liberty.edu](mailto:dsbenders@liberty.edu).

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 1837, Lynchburg, VA 24502 or email at [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

*You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.*

**Statement of Consent:**

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

[  ] By checking this box, I consent to have my voice recorded during the interview process.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Name (please print)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Investigator

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Appendix E: Liberty University Approval Letter



The Graduate School at Liberty University

July 30, 2013

Natalie Evans  
IRB Approval 1641.073013: Exploring the School Bus as an Environment for  
Bullying: A Phenomenological Study

Dear Natalie,

We are pleased to inform you that your above study has been approved by the Liberty IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Please retain this letter for your records. Also, if you are conducting research as part of the requirements for a master's thesis or doctoral dissertation, this approval letter should be included as an appendix to your completed thesis or dissertation.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

**Fernando Garzon, Psy.D.**  
*Professor, IRB Chair*  
**Counseling**

**(434) 592-4054**



*Liberty University | Training Champions for Christ since 1971*

## Appendix F: Questionnaire

### School Bus Driver Questionnaire

The purpose of the questionnaire is to obtain your experiences with various aspects of student bullying on the school bus. Please complete the questionnaire by placing a check next to your response(s). More than one response may be chosen. Refer to the definition of bullying as you answer each statement. Bullying is defined as harming another person intentionally and repeatedly when there is an imbalance of power.

**Types of bullying:** **verbal** (i.e., threatening comments, name-calling), **physical** (i.e., hitting, kicking, shoving), and **relational/social** (i.e., excluding, spreading rumors, humiliating).

Gender:  Female  Male

Age range:  Under 40  41 – 54  55 and over

Years of school bus driving experience: \_\_\_\_\_

1. The bully behavior(s) that I observe are

Verbal  Physical  Relational/Social

2. I observed bullying daily during the past year.

0 times  1 - 3 times  4 or more times

3. I observed bullying weekly during the past year.

0 times  1 - 3 times  4 - 6 times  7 or more times

4. I observe student bullying while transporting students during the

Morning ride  Afternoon ride  Both

5. I review school bus rules with students.

Always  Sometimes  Never

6. Students report to me when they are bullied.

Always  Sometimes  Never

7. Students report to school staff (teacher, counselor, administrator) when bullied.

Always  Sometimes  Never  Unsure

8. Students who are bullied  Do nothing  Defend themselves  Stop riding the school bus

Other (Explain) \_\_\_\_\_

9. I report bullying behaviors to  **Teacher**  **Counselor**  **Administrator**  
 **Handle myself**  **Other (Explain)** \_\_\_\_\_
10. Student(s) continues to bully although I have reprimanded and reported the student(s).  
 **Yes**  **No**
11. Student(s) continues to bully although an administrator has reprimanded the student(s).  
 **Yes**  **No**
12. I stop the school bus to handle bullying behaviors before reaching the bus stop or school.  
 **Yes**  **No**
13. I intervene when bullying occurs on the school bus.  **Yes**  **No**  **Sometimes**
14. I have been bullied by a student(s).  **Yes**  **No** **If No skip to # 17**
15. I have been bullied by a student(s).  **Verbally**  **Physically**  **Both**
16. I have been bullied by a student(s)  **1 - 3 times**  **4 - 6 times**  **7 or more times**
17. When I report students for a bullying infraction, the administrator consults with me.  
 **Always**  **Sometimes**  **Never**
18. I am included in discussions regarding school bus bullying and rules with administrators.  
 **Always**  **Sometimes**  **Never**
19. I should be included in discussions regarding school bus rules with administrators.  
 **Strongly Agree**  **Agree**  **Disagree**  **Strongly Disagree**
20. Administrators follow through with disciplinary procedures when given bullying referrals.  
 **Strongly Agree**  **Agree**  **Disagree**  **Strongly Disagree**
21. When I report bullying to parents, the bullying behaviors of the student(s) stop.  
 **Always**  **Sometimes**  **Never**
22. The training that I received is enough to recognize, intervene, and prevent bullying.  
 **Strongly Agree**  **Agree**  **Disagree**  **Strongly Disagree**
23. The management method that is **most** effective to the **least** effective (rank in numerical order)  
 **Rewards**  **Video-monitoring**  **Discipline referral**  **Parent support**
- 
- Other(s) (Explain)** \_\_\_\_\_

**You are invited to include any additional comments to the above statements or comments related to preventing bullying behaviors on the school bus.**

Questionnaire designed by author.



## Appendix G: Open - Ended Interview Questions

### Open Ended Questions

1. Describe bullying behaviors that you have observed on the school bus.
2. How do you respond to bullying behaviors on the school bus?
3. What is the reaction of a student who is bullied?
4. How do you respond when a student(s) displays aggressive behavior towards you?
5. Describe the support you receive from the parents after the student has been reported for bullying?
6. What support would be helpful from the parents of bullies?
7. What support do you receive from administrators about student bullying? Explain.
8. What support would be helpful from administrators about students who bully and when you report bully?
9. What management method(s) is/are the most and least effective to prevent student bullying? (rewarding, video-monitoring, parent support, discipline referral) Explain.
10. What type of training do you need to respond, intervene, and prevent bullying?
11. What impact do student bullying activities have on safety while driving?
12. Describe your feelings of students who bully during the ride to or from school.
13. Why do you feel that students use the school bus environment to bully?
14. What suggestions do you have to prevent bullying on the school bus?