

**The Impact of Evidence-Based Bullying Prevention Programs on School Climate  
and on Bullying of Students, Including Students with Disabilities**

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Submitted to the Graduate Department and Faculty of the School of Education of  
Baker University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

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Date Defended:  
8/2/2016

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## **Abstract**

This study investigated secondary level building principals' perceptions of school climate and of the bullying of students, including the bullying of students with disabilities, and whether those perceptions differed based on if their schools were using an evidence-based bullying prevention program.

This study involved a quantitative research design using survey methods. The survey was adapted from the Ministry of Ontario School Climate survey. The survey was sent out electronically via Survey Monkey to secondary principals in the state of Missouri, and 179 of those principals chose to respond. Two-way chi-square tests of independence were used to examine the crosstab proportional distribution between principals' perceptions of school climate and the implementation of an evidence-based bullying prevention program, as well as to examine the interaction between principals' perceptions of bullying of students with disabilities and bullying of general education students and the implementation of an evidence-based bullying prevention program.

Findings indicated that according to principals' perceptions, there was no significant difference in school climate or the bullying of students with disabilities or the bullying of general education students based on whether the school had implemented an evidence-based bullying prevention program or not. However a large percentage of those principals perceived that bullying was happening at their schools whether or not they had implemented an evidence-based bullying prevention program.

## **Dedication**

To Dr. Paul Madison Edwards for the inspiration and to my mom, dad, and Uncle Wally for instilling in me the importance of an education.

## **Acknowledgements**

The completion of this dissertation would not have been possible without the support and encouragement of my husband, David, my three sons, Joshua, Nicholas, and Brandon, and my family. Thank you to my sons for the many dinner conversations. Thank you to my dad and mom for showing me through their actions that if you work hard and believe in yourself you can achieve anything. I would especially like to thank my husband, David, for numerous hours of help throughout this whole process, editing, encouraging, and for telling me when it was okay to take a break.

I would like to thank Dr. Russ Kokoruda for all of his support, advice, and his commitment to helping me finish my dissertation. He gave up several hours to edit my work, and he was available whenever I needed him. I would also like to thank Dr. Peg Waterman who started out as my research analyst and Dr. Phil Messner who walked me through Chapters 4 and 5. Thank you to Dr. Harold Frye and Dr. Paul Edwards, my other committee members. I would like to thank Dr. Paul Edwards for helping me to push myself intellectually. Without his support I would have never begun nor finished this journey.

I would also like to thank those colleagues at Delta Woods who kept asking me about my dissertation and kept encouraging me to finish. I would like to thank Marla Hahn for reading and editing any writing I gave her without hesitation.

## Table of Contents

Abstract .....	ii
Dedication .....	iii
Acknowledgements .....	iv
Table of Contents .....	v
List of Tables .....	viii
Chapter One: Introduction .....	1
Background .....	3
Statement of the Problem .....	7
Purpose of the Study .....	8
Significance of the Study .....	9
Delimitations .....	9
Assumptions .....	10
Research Questions .....	10
Definition of Terms .....	11
Overview of the Methodology .....	12
Organization of the Study .....	13
Chapter Two: Review of the Literature .....	14
School Climate .....	15
Bullying of Students and Bullying Prevention Programs .....	21
Bullying of Students with Disabilities .....	28
Summary .....	33
Chapter Three: Methods .....	35

Research Design.....	35
Population and Sample .....	36
Sampling Procedures .....	36
Instrumentation .....	36
Measurement.....	37
Validity and reliability .....	38
Data Collection Procedures.....	38
Data Analysis and Hypothesis Testing .....	39
Limitations .....	40
Chapter Four: Results .....	41
Descriptive Statistics.....	41
Hypothesis Testing.....	52
Summary.....	59
Chapter Five: Interpretation and Recommendations .....	60
Study Summary.....	60
Overview of the problem .....	60
Purpose statement and research questions .....	61
Review of the methodology .....	62
Major Findings.....	62
Findings Related to the Literature.....	63
Conclusions.....	66
Implications for action .....	67
Recommendations for future research .....	67

Concluding remarks .....	68
References .....	70
Appendices .....	82
Appendix A. Email from Carolyn Gray-Survey Approval .....	83
Appendix B. IRB Proposal .....	84
Appendix C. IRB Approval Letter .....	87
Appendix D. E-mail to Principals .....	88
Appendix E. Survey .....	89
Appendix F. Reminder E-mail to Principals .....	93

## List of Tables

Table 1. Description of the Population .....	42
Table 2. Frequencies for Survey Question 5a.....	43
Table 3. Frequencies for Survey Question 5b.....	43
Table 4. Frequencies for Survey Question 5c.....	44
Table 5. Frequencies for Survey Question 5d .....	44
Table 6. Frequencies for Survey Question 6a .....	45
Table 7. Frequencies for Survey Question 6b .....	46
Table 8. Frequencies for Survey Question 6c .....	46
Table 9. Frequencies for Survey Question 6d .....	42
Table 10. Frequencies for Survey Question 6e.....	47
Table 11. Frequencies for Survey Question 7a.....	48
Table 12. Frequencies for Survey Question 7b .....	49
Table 13. Frequencies for Survey Question 7c .....	49
Table 14. Frequencies for Survey Question 7d .....	50
Table 14. Frequencies for Survey Question 8a .....	50
Table 16. Frequencies for Survey Question 8b .....	51
Table 17. Frequencies for Survey Question 8c .....	51
Table 18. Frequencies for Survey Question 8d .....	52
Table 19. Summary of Chi Square Analysis for Survey Question 5.....	54
Table 20. Summary of Chi Square Analysis for Survey Question 6 .....	56
Table 21. Summary of Chi Square Analysis for Survey Question 7 .....	57
Table 22. Summary of Chi Square Analysis for Survey Question 8 .....	59



## **Chapter One**

### **Introduction**

Bullying is a form of predatory and antagonistic behavior that is a major contributor to the misery of millions of students all over the world. Bullying is not only the source of immediate discomfort and long range phobias but also puts the students at increased risk of suicide (Dickinson, 2006).

Suicide is the third leading cause of death among young people, as nearly 4,400 students take their own life each year. This is an even more frightening figure when you realize an estimated one hundred attempts are made for every successful effort (Center for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2009). Other experts suggest that more than 14 percent of students have considered suicide and that nearly 7 percent have made some effort to act on their concerns. Experts further estimated that a bullied student is two to nine times more likely to consider suicide than one who has not been bullied, according to studies by Yale University professor Young-Shin Kim (2008). According to Kim (2008) bullying is on the rise because of the addition of cyberbullying, which makes it easy to bully people round-the-clock. Recent studies suggest that twenty-five percent of students are being bullied and that this figure rises to sixty percent among those students who have some form of disability (The National Bullying Prevention Center [NBPC], 2015). This includes people who have a record of such an impairment, even if they do not currently have a disability. It also includes individuals who do not have a disability but are regarded as having a disability. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) (2016) defines a person with a disability as a person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activity. The

ADA (2016) also makes it unlawful to discriminate against a person based on that person's association with a person with a disability. Administrators within the state of Missouri are in agreement with the NBPC, and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) has recognized that a variety of bullying-prevention programs are in use around the nation, but that none of these are specifically directed toward teaching regular education students how to interact with students with disabilities and the issues of bullying (Flint, 2004).

These and other problems relating to behavior are pushing American educators to move toward the reinstatement of a safe, healthy, and peaceful environment in which student can learn (National Education Association, 2015). To accomplish this, it is necessary to improve the quality of interaction between students and to provide what is necessary to develop a positive school climate. One approach to this issue is the implementation of an evidenced-based bullying prevention program (hereafter presented as EBBP). An EBBP program is a program that has demonstrated its effectiveness in rigorous scientific evaluations.

This chapter contains a description of the background for the present study, including the importance of principals' perceptions on school climate, evidence-based bullying prevention programs, and the treatment of students with disabilities. This chapter contains a statement of the problem and discusses the significance and purpose. A theoretical framework is provided listing the interrelated concepts, assumptions, and the delimitations inherent to the design of the present study. The research questions are stated, important terms are defined and an overview of the methodology used is described.

## **Background**

Experts agree that a positive school climate has a profound impact on students' mental and physical health (Thapa et al., 2013). This was also acknowledged by the National Center for School Climate Council (2009). The requirements for such a climate are the students' safety, the improvement of relationships, the presence of teaching and learning, a positive institutional environment, and a process for institutional improvement. A positive school climate is linked to students' elevated psychological well-being and results in fewer student absences. The climate of a school is linked as well to the improvement in academic achievement across the grades (Brand, Felner, Shim, Seitsinger, & Dumas, 2013). The presence of a positive school climate has been shown to reduce discipline problems and has led to improvement in student self-esteem and the mitigation of self-criticism (Mitchell, Bradshaw & Leaf, 2010).

Perhaps a more humanistic response is that climate is about the essence of a school that leads a child, a teacher, an administrator, or any staff member to love the school, and to look forward to being there each school day. Climate is about the quality of the school that helps each person feel personal worth, dignity and importance that creates a sense of belonging to something larger than themselves. Climate is about fostering resilience (Freiberg, 1998).

The development and maintenance of school climate is primarily the responsibility of, and the result of, the principal's involvement, for it is he or she who serves as the change agent. To lead in this regard, a principal must first understand the intricacies of school climate. Hanna (1998) surveyed middle level principals and teachers about their school climate and concluded that teachers tend to agree with their

principal's assessment of their schools' climate. Fink and Resnick (2001) found that administrators and teachers agreed that complex patterns of beliefs and attitudes made it harder for the principal to control the climate and that capable leaders will need to adjust their skills to meet the challenge.

Flint (2004) suggests that hostile school climates may lead some students to prey on children with disabilities. Flint also advocates that students with disabilities, at least in rural middle schools, feel less accepted by their peers and as a sub-group tended to see themselves different even without bullying. Flint (2004) acknowledged that many children who are bullied have no idea why they are being picked on. Bullies often go for the weakest child, or select their target for no reason, or for a very trivial one, and once a target is selected the bullying continues (Thompson, Whitney, & Smith, 1994).

Bullying is a major concern among educators in the United States, and since the events at Columbine in 1999, it has become a prime topic of consideration. Olweus (2004) defined bullying as occurring when a student is exposed to repeated negative actions by one or more students, over a period of time. He also suggested that it be defined as an overt action meant to belittle, harass, intimidate, or inflict harm upon a student. The American Medical Association (AMA) (2002) goes even further by identifying bullying as consisting of three types: physical bullying, social-group exclusion, and verbal bullying. Physical bullying includes hitting, biting, punching and other physical aggressive acts. Social-group exclusion occurs when students are intentionally left out of a group. Verbal bullying includes name calling and put-downs.

There is, as yet, no agreed-upon definition of bullying, but the AMA (2002) stated that over 100 behavior professionals came to an understanding that bullying consists of

three elements that are existent in the act. The first is the intent to cause mental or physical harm to the individual. The second factor is that the act is repeated more than one time. The AMA (2002) considers repetition a key element of bullying. The third element is that there is a perceived imbalance of power between the bully and their victim. This is especially true when victims feel they are being challenged by a group. Olweus (2004) developed his renowned international school wide bullying prevention program in accordance with these elements.

The problem of bullying exists throughout the nation (Underwood, 2010). Melton, et al. (1998) surveyed 1 million students ages 10-18. Melton, et al. (1998) found that four percent of one million students, who were surveyed, ages 12-18, report that they are afraid of being attacked or harmed. Twenty-three percent of the 6,500 students' ages 10-12 reported that they had been bullied several times during the period of that three month study. Nine percent of those students were students with disabilities. Such results have created a great deal of media response, and based on Melton's survey, one hundred per cent of educational administrators seem to agree that bullying was a major problem facing education (Copeland, 2009). Interestingly, the National School Climate Council (NSCC), based on the results of their annual survey, reported that school administrators believe that bullying in their school should be classified as "mild" to "moderately severe," whereas the students who were asked, reported it as being "severe" (Cohen, 2006). Cohen (2006) states that students see a one-time incidence as being bullied, where principals would see bullying as happening more than one time.

Bullying of students with disabilities is a major concern. While it is understood that the bullying of even one person is unacceptable, and that under every circumstance

bullying is detrimental to a positive school climate, it appears that it is even more detrimental to disabled students (Flint, 2004). While many programs have been designed to stop bullying, they are not as effective as expected or desired. Even among the programs reported to be effective, few have been designed to deal with the impact of bullying on disabled students, or have established means to prevent it (Ferguson, 2013). At this point, it is pertinent to critically examine current bullying prevention programs in an effort to determine if they have made the expected impact on overall school climate and on the bullying of students, including students with disabilities.

Numerous programs have been developed and implemented that are designed to improve school climate and reduce the incidences of bullying in schools. In 1983, three adolescent boys in northern Norway committed suicide. These acts were the consequence of severe bullying by peers, which prompted the country's Ministry of Education to initiate a national campaign against bullying in schools (Clemson University, 2015). As a result, the first version of the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program was developed (Clemson University, 2015). Olweus (2004), in conjunction with a team of child psychologists, created a program to deter bullies. The Olweus team first studied 2,500 students in 42 different schools across Norway. They identified the roles of students in bullying situations and strategies to deter bullying. In 2001 the program was mainstreamed to the United States. Mink (2014) researched three bullying prevention programs used in the United States and found that the Olweus evidence-based bullying prevention program had become the model for other bullying prevention programs. In this case, evidence-based refers to the fact the program has demonstrated its effectiveness in reducing bullying and victimization in Norway (Olweus, 2004).

According to the director of the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program, more than twenty evidence-based bullying prevention (EBBP) programs are being used in schools in the United States.

Missouri has implemented a policy that mandates principals and school boards responsible for the implementation of school-wide comprehensive bullying prevention programs (Center for Family Policy & Research, University of Missouri, 2011). These required programs must be school-wide, they must focus on at-risk students (students who are less likely to transition successfully into adulthood), and focus on those seen as perpetual bullies or victims. However, the programs are not required to be evidence-based. Such programs have been limited by the lack of resources, and by the fact each school must make the final program decisions.

The *Journal of Criminology* published a meta-analytic review of anti-bullying programs and has concluded that anti-bullying programs that are being used in many schools are not useful in deterring bullies (Ferguson, 2013). The Department of Education has said that the EBBP programs being used are only effective about 8 to 18 percent of the time. Those that include a zero tolerance policy have been even less effective, with the policy leading to greater student misbehavior and to higher rates of anxiety, alienation, and distrust in adults. According to Mink (2014) the decision about the effectiveness of EBBP programs must still be studied as other factors that play a role have not been thoroughly considered.

### **Statement of the Problem**

School climate is a complex, multidimensional construct that encompasses beliefs, values and attitudes of students, teachers, and administrators (Anderson, 1982).

According to Perkins and Borden (2003), positive school climate has been repeatedly identified as a key asset for bullying intervention and has a broad impact on students. Schools in America have struggled with school safety and bullying and are constantly looking for ways to address these issues. Because of this, evidence-based bullying prevention programs like the Olweus Program have been created. The state of Missouri requires each school to have a bullying prevention program in place; however, that program does not have to be evidence-based. Therefore, some schools are using evidence-based programs, while some are not. Further examination into these bullying-prevention programs could show whether they make an impact on school climate or on the bullying of students, including students with disabilities. Thapa et al. (2013) stated that because the bullying of any one person is unacceptable; we need to look at the effectiveness of bullying prevention programs and their impact on climate.

This study has the potential to add to the research on EBBP programs used in the United States, and especially in the state of Missouri, while showing whether these programs have had any positive effect on school climate and the treatment of students with disabilities. This information will provide guidance to decision makers as they evaluate such programs for implementation in their districts. Such a study can add to the research into the subject, can draw attention to the special needs of the disabled student, can provide guidance during budget considerations, and can lead to better education for a high number of Missouri students.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this study was to investigate secondary level building principals' perceptions of school climate and of the bullying of students, including the bullying of



students with disabilities, and whether those perceptions differed based on if their schools were using an evidence-based bullying prevention program.

### **Significance of the Study**

The significance of this study lies in the potential to demonstrate whether there are positive effects on school climate and the treatment of students with disabilities when a school has implemented an evidence-based bullying prevention program. This study can help provide guidance to district and building decision-makers about the effectiveness of such programs. In addition, because these programs cost money, and especially because educational funds are always tight, data can assist decision-makers in making budget decisions about such programs. This study can obviously also help students, including special education students, by addressing bullying and school climate concerns. Finally this study could improve schooling for students in Missouri, while at the same time contributing to the growing research on the problem of bullying in our schools.

### **Delimitations**

Delimitations are self-imposed boundaries set by the researcher on the purpose and scope of the study (Lunenburg & Irby, 2008, p. 134). The following delimitations were used in this study.

1. Only survey responses from the administrators of secondary schools in Missouri were included in this study.
2. The survey was administered during the winter of the 2015-2016 school years.

## **Assumptions**

“Assumptions are postulates, premises, and propositions that are accepted as operational purposes of the research” (Lunenburg & Irby, 2008, p. 135). This study included the following assumptions:

1. School principals are in the best position to know just what effect such programs are having on school climate and of the bullying of students, including students with disabilities.
2. The responses given on the surveys were honest and accurate measures of the administrators’ perceptions of evidence-based bullying prevention programs, school climate and the treatment of students with disabilities.
3. The survey instrument was appropriate to obtain participants’ ratings of bullying prevention programs, the climate of their school and the treatment of students with disabilities.
4. The administrators who completed the survey were representative of the secondary school administration in the state of Missouri.
5. The administrators who completed the survey were not disabled.

## **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided this study. The researcher acknowledges that principals’ perceptions are only one aspect of evaluating the implementation of an evidence-based bullying prevention program.

- RQ1.** To what extent is there a difference between principals’ perceptions of school climate based on whether their schools have implemented an evidence-based bullying prevention program?

**RQ2.** To what extent is there a difference between principals' perceptions of the bullying of students with disabilities based on whether their schools have implemented an evidence-based bullying prevention program?

**RQ3.** To what extent is there a difference between principals' perceptions of bullying of general education students based on whether their schools have implemented an evidence-based bullying prevention program?

### **Definition of Terms**

According to Luneburg and Irby (2008), key terms should be defined that are central to the study and used throughout the dissertation. To avoid confusion, this study provided definitions of the following terms.

**Bullying.** Bullying is defined as any situation where a student is being exposed repeatedly over time to negative actions on the part of one or more students (Olweus, 1993).

**Secondary School.** A secondary school is any school offering education to students ranging from 6th-12th grades (Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 2005)

**Evidence-Based Bullying Prevention Programs.** An EBBP program is a program that has demonstrated its effectiveness in rigorous scientific evaluations. The effectiveness of the program has been verified by professional researchers (Olweus, 1993).

**Inclusive Education.** Integrating students with disabilities into the general education program at the building level. Integration is in relation to degrees of disability, not on skill criteria (Gartner & Lipsky, 1992, p. 145).

**School Climate.** Climate is a general term that refers to the feel, atmosphere, tone, and ideology of a school (Hanna, 1998).

**Students with Disabilities:**

“The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) defines students with disabilities as those children, ages three to twenty-one, who have been properly evaluated as having intellectual disability, hearing impairments and deafness, speech or language impairments, visual impairments, including blindness, emotional disturbance, orthopedic impairments, autism, traumatic brain injury, other health impaired, a specific learning disability, deaf blindness, or multiple disabilities and, who because of that disability, require special education and related services. As allowed under 34 CFR 300.8 implementing IDEA, the State of Missouri also defines a child with a disability to include children ages three (3) through five (5) who have been properly identified as a young child with a developmental delay” (Department of Education IDEA, 2004, Sec. 300.8).

**Overview of the Methodology**

The methodology for this study is based on a non-experimental quantitative research design. This design focuses on the responses of a large subject population and is a means for testing objective theories through the examination of the relationship among variables (Creswell, 2009). Survey methods was used to examine principals’ perceptions of school climate and the bullying of students, including students with disabilities in their buildings. Secondary principals in the state of Missouri were the population of interest, with the sample including secondary principals who responded to the survey during the 2015-2016 school year.

The 21-item survey was modified from the original survey used by the Ontario Department of Education. The statistical analysis of this study was different for each group of research questions.

### **Organization of the Study**

This research study was organized into five chapters. Chapter one included the background of the study, statement of the problem, purpose statement, significance of the study, delimitations, assumptions, research questions, definition of terms, and overview of the methodology of the study. Chapter two presented a review of the literature that focuses on the topics of school climate, students with disabilities, research-based bullying-prevention programs and the role administration plays in setting a school climate. Chapter three described the methodology used for this research study. It includes research design, population and sample, sampling procedures, instrumentation, data collection procedures, data analysis procedures, hypothesis testing and limitations. Chapter four presented the study's findings, including demographic information, the testing of the research question and the results of the data analyses for the two research questions. Chapter five provided a summary of the entire study, discussion of the findings, implications of the findings for theory and practice, implications for action and recommendations for future research and conclusions.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Review of Literature**

The purpose of this study was to investigate secondary level building principals' perceptions of school climate and of the bullying of students, including the bullying of students with disabilities, and whether those perceptions differed based on if their schools were using an evidence-based bullying prevention program. In preparation for the study, a review of literature surrounding school climate, bullying of students in general, bullying of students with disabilities and evidence-based bullying prevention programs, was made. This review was a comprehensive effort to establish the significance of the general field of study, then identify a place where a new contribution could be made.

In this review of literature special attention was given to evidence-based bullying prevention programs and the influence they have on school climate, bullying in general, and the bullying of students with disabilities. This investigator found many researchers have documented the association of bullying and treatment of students in general. The pioneering research of Dan Olweus in the late 1980s and early 1990s led to the first evidence-based bullying prevention program. In this program Olweus categorized the different people that participate in any bullying situation (Olweus, 1994). Since Olweus' first research, much other research has dealt with the issue of bullying. The rapid advance in technology over the past decade has also changed the way bullying is seen at school and who is being bullied at school (Copeland, 2009). The limited research shows that students with disabilities are bullied more than general education students. A high number of these factors have led to research into the climate of a school. According to Van Houtte (2005) researchers have begun to study school climate and its importance in

bullying prevention. This study researched the distinctions made between past studies of school climate, bullying in general, the bullying of students with disabilities and evidence-based bullying prevention programs and this study.

### **School Climate**

The question of school climate has received a great deal of treatment among researchers. Over the past decade, educators have increasingly recognized the significance of school climate and how it impacts the way students feel, their willingness to get involved, and their sense of other and self-worth. By the end of the 1970s school climate research of analyzing the school's social system and cultural dimensions was just beginning (Van Houtte, 2005). Ashby and Krug (1998) determined that the biggest challenge with defining school climate was the variety of ways teachers, principals, and researchers used the terminology. In the 1990s, the word "climate" was often used, though there was only a small amount of agreement on its meaning (Hoy, Tarter & Bliss, 1990). School climate involves multipart issues that include numerous facets of the school. School climate may involve the noise level in the hallways, the physical structures of the building, the colors of paint on the walls, the type of discipline used with the students and the interactions between and among the students and teachers as well as many other related issues (Freiberg, 1998). While there is not one single factor that is exclusive to determining school climate, the National School Climate Council (NSCC) (2009) affirms that school climate affects norms, values and expectations that support people feeling social, emotionally and physically safe. According to the NSCC (2009) people who are engaged and respected members of the school community will work together to develop and contribute to a shared school vision. Educators who model and

nurture an attitude that emphasizes positive climate will benefit from the satisfaction that can be gained through learning. Thapa et al. (2013) has showed that a positive school climate is important for school reform and for improving behavioral and academic outcomes. Thapa et al. (2013) analyzes the importance of school climate by focusing on the five elements of school climate established by the NSCC. As part of his review, he searched through over 200 references relevant to school climate to confirm the importance of a positive school climate. He also found that recent research suggests that a positive school climate is associated with reduced aggression and violence. Cotton (1996) concludes that an essential part to a positive school climate is to consistently provide experiences and opportunities for students to practice respect, dignity and advocacy for all students. Advocacy needs to be practiced by all students to help those students with disabilities, engage all students, which in turn will motivate students, and promotes student learning.

According to Preble and Gordon (2011), school climate is about the social relationships of the students. Students form these relationships by participating in activities at school. Freiberg (1998) proposed that school climate was all about relationships within the school. In his study Freiberg (1998) evaluated these relationships between the administration and teachers to students, also students to their peers. He concluded it was very significant that each person treat each other respectfully. If this treatment existed, positive social and emotional developmental efforts for students created success in the school (Zullig et al. 2010).

Gruenert and Whitaker (2015) said “school climates are like unwritten mission statements of the school created for the students and staff to know the purpose of the



school” (p. 2). According to Forehand and Von Haller (1964) climates are overriding conceptual frameworks that have been used when analyzing school features. These formulas are based on the multiple measurement-organizational attribute theory. This theory involves a set of organizational features of school climate. There are multitude of potential factors that school climates studies can assess. These features help researchers have a common language for their studies. Some of these factors include parental involvement, school safety, and building facilities (Bucher & Manning, 2003). For the purpose of this paper, school safety has been examined. As bullying research has become prevalent, climate research has taken a new focus. During the late 1990s, school climate studies focused on a greater understanding of the safety of schools. The quality of students in education were also included. Throughout the late 1990s, violence and school shootings were starting to become of great concern. These violent acts produced a challenge for school administrators trying to preserve the quality and climate of their schools for both the students and the educators (Cushing, Horner, & Barrier, 2003).

More recent research suggests that positive school climate is associated with reduced aggression and violence, as well as reduced bullying behavior (Kosciw, Greytak, & Diaz 2009). In another study Wilson (2004), revealed that the association between school climate and level of aggression and victimization is dependent upon each student’s feeling of connectedness to the school. He suggested that school climate matters and that a positive school climate is companioned with positive child development, student learning, and academic achievement and decreased violence (Wilson, 2004).

Bucher and Manning (2003), state “that a safe school is one in which the total school climate allows students, teachers, administrators, staff and visitors to interact in a

positive, non-threatening manner that reflects the educational mission of the school while fostering positive relationships and personal growth” (p. 161). School safety includes physical, emotional and intellectual safety. Kohn and Merrow (2004) state that emotional safety involves freedom from teasing, bullying, intimidation, and isolation. Intellectual safety involves students feeling comfortably enough to talk out in class without others picking on them or laughing at them (Merrow, 2004). Physical safety involves freedom from violence as well as feeling safe from natural disasters. To feel safe in all these aspects, school culture must include a sense of community (Bukner & Manning, 2003).

An important part of school climate and school safety is the social environment of a school. The social climate of a safe school has the personnel and resources to support students, parents and staff (Furlong & Morrison, 1994). Through their research into the psychology of school climate, Furlong and Morrison (1994) found that administrators that had clear procedures in place to respond to any personal crisis had a school climate that students and staff could count on as being safe. They recommended that a mission statement be set up which defines what acceptable behavior at the school is in order to guide the day to day behaviors of everyone involved with the school. Furlong and Morrison (1994) further concluded that weapons at the school and school bullying are not the problems rather they are a symptom of the structural weakness of the school community.

Freiberg and Stein (1999) state that a school’s climate should be measured in a direct way which includes surveys, classroom observations, interviews, videotaping, journal narratives, student art and focus groups. In 1995 Fetro, Coyle and Pham (2001) started, “The Middle School Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS-M), which was

developed for middle school students to assess their school's climate. After its initial use, questions were added to assess high school students as well" (p. 189).

Student perceptions of school climate are related to student autonomy, relationships between students and teachers and peers, and the school's ability to provide schools rules and goals that are clear and consistent (Eccles, Midgley, Wigfield, Buchanan, Reuman, Flanagan & Mac Iver, 1993). Eccles et al. (1993) states that there are many internal and external factors that contribute to school climate. Researchers found that students who are more engaged in school academics have the tendency to be more engaged in school in general. These students also feel safer and tend to stay out of trouble (Skinner, Kindermann, Connell & Wellborn, 2009). A school's climate has proven to affect students of the school as a whole, but perception of school climate occurs at an individual level and varies from student to student (Cohen, 2009). Cohen (2009) found that students who feel less connected to their school environment report higher levels of anxiety about school safety, and tend to show depressive symptoms. Students perceptions of school climate tend to change from school year to school year. Wang (2009) studied social competence and its relationship between school climate and behavioral and psychological difficulties. Wang (2009) found that schools with a perceived negative school climate showed a significant correlation to deviant and depressive behaviors among 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders. They related this to a lack of teacher emotional support. In a follow-up study Wang et al. (2010) examined the relationship between student perceptions of school climate and behavioral difficulties from grades 6<sup>th</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> over three years. Wang et al. (2010) found that student perceptions of teacher and peer support relating to school climate decreased from 6<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> grade. He concluded

that students who feel supported by teachers in school and who feel their school has a positive climate demonstrated less depression and deviant behavior. Students who felt teachers immediately responded to their need for help also felt safer at their school (Wang et al., 2010).

Henshaw (2012) studied school climate and culture at a medium-sized high school in Missouri. She investigated the program, Positive Behavior Intervention Strategies (PBIS), to see if it could impact the climate and culture within the school. A PBIS program is a school-wide discipline program that emphasizes a school-wide system of support that includes strategies for teaching and supporting appropriate student behaviors to create positive school climates. Her research answers whether PBIS programs help change the perception of climate in the high school and whether PBIS programs help modification of the climate to be more positive in the high school. In September of the 2012-2013 school year, Henshaw surveyed a high percentage of high school students and staff in the Smithville (Mo) School District. She measured their awareness of school climate and culture and whether they thought there was a need for improvement in those areas. In December of 2012, after four months of the implementation of the PBIS, Henshaw gave the same survey again. She then compared the results to determine whether PBIS could change the observation of climate and culture in the building. She determined that PBIS did not change the climate and culture within this high school.

To create an emotionally and intellectually safe school, there needs to be a sense of community (Astor, Benbenishty, & Meyer, 2004 in Bucher & Manning, 2003),

student-teacher cooperation, and a common conflict resolution language (Selfridge, 2004 in Bucher & Manning, 2003).

### **Bullying of Students and Bullying Prevention Programs**

Bullying has long been seen as a fairly innocent form of social interaction and recognized as a normal part of growing up. There have been small studies of bullying in isolated situations, before the 1970s but bullying was not studied as a phenomenon until Olweus (1978). Bullying is a serious and complex problem. Bullying problems exist in most places, including schools. For the offenders in schools, results can be short-term or life-long, ending in criminal behavior (Olweus, 1991). For the victim, the results can include psychological trauma, withdrawal, loneliness, fear, becoming incapacitated and avoidance of school (Batsche & Knoff, 1994). Victims are often anxious, have low self-esteem and may be suicidal (Olweus, 1991). According to the Suicide Prevention Resource Center (2011) “bullying is associated with increases in suicide risk and depression and is strongly linked to victims’ problems with anger, frustration, and violent behavior” (p. 2). Bullying can also have negative effects on a student’s mental, physical and social adjustments (Graham, 2011). According to O’Brennan (2008) students who experience bullying have a tendency to have feelings of insecurity, loneliness and isolation. Students who are bullies, or who are victims of bullying have a habit of poor interactions with their peers and have a tendency to lack proper social skills (O’Brennan, 2008). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2009) came out with a literary study which showed that research indicates that “students involved in bullying are at a higher risk for drug abuse, delinquency, suicide, truancy, mental health problems, and below grade level academic achievement” (p. 5).

Bullying definitions have undergone laborious international study (Espelage & Swearer, 2003). Olweus (1993) outlines the most commonly used definition of bullying as a collection of behaviors that can be characterized as aggressive or intended to harm, and are repeatedly performed over time. These events occur in interpersonal relationships in which a power imbalance exists (Olweus, 1993). Bullying is further defined by Crick and Grotpeter (1995) who acknowledge that such bullying is either overt (direct) aggression or relational (indirect or social) aggression and that these categorizations are based on the behavior of the aggressor. Juvonen and Graham (2014) say that a single event may induce adequate trauma to be qualified as bullying. Bullying can take several forms and include a variety of behaviors. Wang, Iannotti, and Luk (2011), after studying a nationally representative sample of 6<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> graders, identified four forms of bullying: physical, verbal, relational, and cyber. They discovered that the rates of bullying nationally broke down in this fashion; 12.8 percent for physical, 36.5 percent for verbal, 41.0 percent relational, and 9.8 percent cyber (Wang et al., 2009). Juvonen and Graham, (2014) stated that bullying is related to aggression, whether it be physical, verbal, relational or cyber, though aggression is not always bullying. Bullying is a form of aggression in which the perpetrator may use threats and intimidation to degrade or dominate the victim. Felix and McMahon (2006), studied chronic bullying among urban middle school students of sixth grade through eighth grade. Felix and McMahon (2006) found that approximately 16 percent of the students were harassed, 21 percent suffered relational victimization, and 18 percent experienced direct or verbal bullying. Their data showed that most all forms of bullying are prevalent. Olweus (1997) labeled children who participate in bullying situations, but do not directly instigate

the bullying, as “passive bullies, henchman, and followers” (p. 495). Some students can be part of a bullying situation even though they are not directly involved.

Espelage and Swearer (2003) stated that exact occurrence rates of bullying are unknown and note that measures used to assess bullying in research differ greatly. Berger (2007) indicates that the differences from study to study, such as school size, student age, ethnicity, and social class make evaluating accurate prevalence rates nearly impossible. Most studies seem to reveal, however, that numerous students are involved in bullying. Eisner and Quattrone (1991) found that many teenagers are in schools that lack a sense of community, lack close interaction with helpful adults and have not nurtured the development of critical perceptive and higher order thinking. Today’s middle school system is under criticism because of this report. Researchers have complained about the middle school system for not speaking to specific age-related issues dealing with bullying (Eccles, Midgley, Wgfield, Reuman & MacIver, 1993). Part of this difference is that middle schools tend to focus on performance and class sizes tend to be large and meet for short periods of time, therefore the student-teacher relationship is hard to be foster (Feldlauger, Midgley, & Eccles, 1988).

Over the years, many intervention programs have been developed to decrease the occurrence of bullying in schools. Some intervention programs have been developed to specifically target attitude change while others have been developed to change aggressive behavior. Research proposes that school systems that base their choice of programs on research have more effective and positive interventions paralleled to schools that do not (Sugai & Horner, 2006). Schools should choose curriculums that are evidence-based and backed with wide-ranging research presenting positive conclusions. Prevention programs

that are evidenced-based are supported by widespread research on similar studies that have shown that the program is effective. The program is therefore studied, assessed and confirmed to have a positive outcome (Sugai & Horner, 2006). O'Connell, Pepler, and Craig (1999) state that positive peer interventions must consist of a number of factors including a directive to change behavior and useful strategies that enable peers to be able to intervene. Rigby (2004) asserts that interventions must consider the school as a community. He states that knowing the seriousness of bullying in schools is an important factor. Hunt (2007) reviewed the results of a researched-based intervention in Australia. Hunt (2007) hypothesized that the intervention would increase attitudes of compassion toward victims, and decrease bullying behavior one-year post-intervention. Australian students in 7th through 10th grade completed questionnaires to measure bullying experiences and problems at school. Hunt (2007) assessed differences between intervention and control schools. Hunt (2007) reported that there was no evidence of attitude change for the intervention or control groups; attitudes of bullying remained stable for both groups over time, but participation in the program was found to increase empathy for victims.

One of the most-often used evidence-based program was developed by Olweus, (1997) who believes that teaching students how to take care of a bully themselves is the key to decreasing bullying in schools. Schools and institutions around the world have successfully implemented the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (Synder, 2014). The goals of this program are to make schools safer by reducing existing bullying problems among students, preventing new bullying problems, and achieving better peer relations.

Olweus (1993) defined his program as the following:



The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program is a multi-level, multi-component program designed to reduce and prevent school bullying in elementary and middle schools. Secondary goals include increased awareness and knowledge about bullying, involvement of teachers and parents in bullying prevention, development of clear rules against bullying and providing support and protection to victims. The program includes school level, classroom level, and individual level components. The school level components consist of an assessment of the nature and prevalence of bullying in the school, the formation of a committee to coordinate the prevention program, and development of a system ensuring adult supervision of students outside of the classroom. Classroom components include defining and enforcing rules against bullying, discussions and activities to reinforce anti-bullying values and norms and active parental involvement in the program. Individual components intervene with students with a history of bullying and/or victimization. (p. 35)

Bauer, Lozano & Rivara (2007) completed a study on the effectiveness of the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program over the 2003-2004 academic school year in Seattle, Washington Public Schools. They gave students the bully/victim survey at the beginning of the school year and then again at the end of the school year. The results showed the difference in the number of bullying incidence from pre to post test was statistically significant. Outcomes measured included physical victimization, relational victimization, and attitudes regarding bullying (Bauer, Lozano & Rivara, 2007). Arneson (2014) reviewed 12 similar studies of schools in various countries that used the Olweus program and found similar results.

Another popular program is the Bullying Prevention in Positive Behavior Supports (BP-PBS). While this program uses principles that are supported by research on PBS, it is not an evidence-based program that has been evaluated by extensive research. Ross and Horner (2013) attest that this program was designed to define and teach the concept of being respectful to all students, to teach all students the three-step response method when dealing with bullying situations, and to train staff on a universal strategy for responding to bullying situations. Ross and Horner (2013) substantiate that the “BP-PBS gives students tools that they can use to remove the social rewards that may come from inappropriate behavior, thereby decreasing incidents of bullying behavior” (p. 352). They found a positive quality to this system in that it increases applicable recipient and bystander reactions to bullying behavior. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2011) “schools should use evidence-based programs that have shown promising results and are supported by extensive research if they want to improve student outcomes and improve the overall climate of their schools” (p.5). Therefore, Gutkin and Reynolds (2009) suggest that more research be conducted for this program. It must be evaluated and confirmed effective through widespread research on the applications and results of the program (Gutkin & Reynolds, 2009).

Bucher and Manning (2003) offered certain criteria for safe secondary schools, which could be useful when accessing the three forms of school safety (i.e., physical, emotional, and intellectual) as well as could be adapted to the elementary school level. The most important criteria is emphasizing a positive school climate centering on the entire school instead of specific students, rather than installing metal detectors and surveillance cameras (Bucher & Manning, 2003). Next they recommend the

implementation of preventative programs (Bucher & Manning, 2003). Some of the most successful programs used to produce incident-free schools combine intervention with constant preventative actions (Stevick & Levinson, 2003 in Bucher & Manning, 2003). An example of an intervention program that includes constant preventative actions is the Resolving Conflict Creatively Program, which utilized peer mediation and conflict resolution. This program has been successful as a preventative measure and development of a safe school climate (Selfridge, 2004 in Bucher & Manning 2003). According to Bucher and Manning (2003) the next criteria is to eliminate low level violence such as bullying, teasing, sexual harassment, verbal abuse, and psychological maltreatment, because these behaviors could lead to more violent behaviors. A preventative lesson on such types of violence would assist in the elimination process (Dake, Price, & Telljohann, 2004). Also Bucher and Manning (2003) say it is important to create a school climate that fosters learning and development for students. Freiberg and Stein (1999) state that in a school with a positive climate there are four things that happen, 1. adults act like role models, 2. staff actions are consistent and coherent, 3. positive messages go beyond statements on the bulletin boards, and 4. democracy is in action throughout the school.

Wanko (2001) stressed the significance of the entire community's effort in school safety. Neighborhood students and their families grow up developed by community influences. These influences are brought into the school environment. Wanko (2001) states that most programs put emphasis on the adults of the school (i.e., teachers, principal, and staff members), but they overlook the larger community which in Wanko's (2001) study was seen as creating an atmosphere encouraging violence rather than one that prevents violence. Connections between the school and the larger community are

important to the development of the school climate (Wanko, 2001). Hence, the school-community connection is imperative to construct a positive school climate when improving school safety.

Raskauskas and Modell (2011) noted that current anti-bullying programs do not have modification for students with disabilities. They reviewed several widely-used bullying prevention programs and found that for these programs to be effective, everyone in the school must feel included. Students with disabilities are an important part of the school population, and more often than not feel excluded from whole-school programming. Estelle, Farmer, Irvin, Crowther, Akos and Boudah (2009) surveyed upper elementary students in regards to how they were involved in bullying situations. They concluded that social dynamics played a key role in putting students with disabilities at risk for bullying. It is important to make an effort to include students with disabilities in the mainstream classes when participating in bullying prevention programs (Estelle et al., 2009).

### **Bullying of Students with Disabilities**

Bullying of children with disabilities is significant, although few studies exist to document it. According to Manning (2015) only 10 studies had been conducted in the United States that year. He states that most all of these studies concluded that students with disabilities were two to three times more likely to be bullied than their non-disabled peers. Manning (2015) discovered that students with disabilities were more worried about school safety and being injured or harassed by other peers compared to student without disabilities. He also found that when reporting bullying, students in special education classes were told by peers not to tattle more often than students in regular

education classes. Among those establishments that have addressed the bullying issue, most have been done in a manner that has addressed the problem in the context of the whole school. That is, most have not considered the significant category identified by the special student. One significant exception to this is Rose and Espelage, (2012) who reviewed the bullying rate of middle school and high school students with disabilities, enrolled in general and special education programs. The results indicated that students in special education programs reported a higher rate of bullying when compared to students in general education without disabilities. They also reported that those in self-contained classrooms suffered more bullying than students with and without disabilities in inclusive settings. This point of view is supported by empirical evidence that suggests disabled students are more readily bullied than general education students (Flynt 2004). Biggs, Simpson, and Gaus (2010) arrived at similar conclusions in their study of students with Aspergers. In 2010 the researchers used a qualitative approach to study a physical education class of general education students and students with disabilities and found that students with disabilities were the target of bullies because of their physical differences. The researchers formed a team of 12 people, including teachers and students, to address the bullying issues. They found that the students with disabilities were not prepared to handle bullying, and were therefore bullied more often than other students. The researchers concluded that forming a team of professionals to handle the bullying situations was effective when teaching the students what to do when confronted with a bully. Hoover and Stenhjem (2003) in a prior study identified similar findings. In their study they concluded that although bullying and teasing are often considered harmless, research shows that bullying may result in serious short- and long-term negative

consequences. Students with disabilities are predominantly susceptible and represent a high-risk group for becoming both potential victims and perpetrators of bullying and teasing. Looking at solutions for this issue in isolation is not the solution.

Hoover and Stenhjem's (2003) study is supported by Swearer, Wang, Maag, Siebecker, and Frerichs (2012) who studied 816 pupils in grades five through nine who were in regular and special education programs. The study associated their involvement in bullying and prosocial (any action intended to help others) behaviors. The researchers discovered that students with disabilities ages nine to sixteen were 1.43 times more likely to self-identify as bully-victims than their general education classmates. This seems to suggest that while bullying impacts students in all circumstances, those in special education programs are of higher risk. The researchers also provided evidence that rates of victimization vary by disability type and context (Rose, Swearer, & Espelage, 2012). One can only conclude that involvement in bullying affects both students in regular education and special education; however, students in special education may be at particular risk. Both these studies reaffirm that rates of victimization will vary greatly by the nature of the disability and context of the attacks. The researchers hypothesize that those children with disabilities are more likely to be victimized because, lacking some social skills, they may be inactive in connecting to their peers. Kaukiainen (2002) provided evidence that students with disabilities who have trouble interpreting verbal and nonverbal communication contribute to their victimization. Farmer and Farmer (1996) found this to be true in their study of social relations of students with disabilities in mainstreamed classes. They found that students tended to form peer clusters based on their shared social characteristics. To break out of their social cluster the students with

disabilities needed to be encouraged to participate in the anti-bullying programs. The amount of adjustment needed related to the amount of time spent in the mainstream classroom.

Part of the difficulty with the literature, and for any future research, is that it is nearly impossible to determine the degree to which the risk of bullying increases among students with disabilities because the reporting of such cases varies tremendously. Rose (2012) suggests “these variations may be attributed to ambiguity in the definition, differences in data collection procedures, the settings in which the bullying occurs, the populations of student examined, and /or demographics”(Rose et al., p. 7). Sveinsson and Morris (2007) suggest the field lacks empirical evidence to suggest if children with a particular disability have a higher likelihood of being bullied.

Few of these studies include students with disabilities as a separate category. This population of students in most studies is within the general population and not separated out as students with disabilities. Rose, Espelage, and Swearer (2012) conducted a study of middle and high school students with disabilities who were enrolled in general and special education programs. Their conclusion was that students with disabilities reported a higher rate of bullying than students in general education without disabilities. Even more informative was the fact that students in self-contained classrooms reported more bullying than students without disabilities in inclusive settings. Espelage et al. (2012) then questioned whether their conclusions had ever been adequately studied and concluded further research could be of major help.

Weiner and Mak (2009) investigated peer bullying among a sample of children diagnosed with ADHD. They used the Bully-Victim Questionnaire (BVQ), which was

adapted by Boer-Hersh (2002) from Craig (1998) and based on a survey developed by Olweus (1991, 1993). The survey consists of 14 items with Likert scales. Results indicate children with ADHD were more likely than general education children to report being victimized by peers. The problem was most pronounced among girls with ADHD. Those affected reported verbal, physical, and relational bullying. The ability to determine the degree to which disability increases bullying is still unclear because the degrees of victimization vary considerably from one study to the other. In other words, some students put up with some form of victimization more than others. Sveinsson and Morris (2007) adds to this the realization that there is little empirical evidence about whether children having a particular disability have a higher rate of being bullied. Sveinsson and Morris (2007) found that many studies do not offer an appropriate definition of attitudes toward bullying. Scales used to measure attitudes are only specific to the study undertaken and do not provide sufficient validation to go beyond the current study. Definitions and methods of assessment differ from study to study and results may not be generalized easily from one to another (Sveinsson & Morris, 2007). From the limited literature available one can only conclude that both general population and special education are bothered by bullying, but that those with disabilities are at a higher risk. Rose, Swearer and Espelage (2012) found there are varying rates of victimization depending on disability type and the context of the situation. This is, in part, because those with disabilities often have weak verbal and nonverbal communication skills and this affects their behavior with others (Kaukianen, 2002).

Finally, the relatively few studies addressing bullying across several disability categories have not provided any clear guidance. The findings have been inconsistent



regarding which of the disabilities presented the highest risk of bullying, and until that is determined, it will be difficult to address the particular needs of students with disabilities as they face issues of bullying. Glasser (1992) discovered that students receiving special education services for behavioral conditions, as well as students with more noticeable disabilities (like language or hearing impairments), are more likely than mainstream students to be victims of bullying. A study published in the *Journal of School Psychology* monitored more than 800 special and regular education students aged 9 to 16 years from nine different elementary, middle and high schools. The results showed students who were in special education were not only more likely to be bullied, they were more likely to bully others. Sixty-seven percent of these students stated they had been a victim of bullies, and over a third (38.1 percent) acknowledged they had bullied other students. The writers specify that children with noticeable disabilities may be more likely to be bullied because their appearance seems easy to victimize. They also propose that these kids may act as bullies towards others in an effort to pursue vengeance. The results of the study showed, students who have special education services are also more likely than others to be referred to the school office for punishment issues.

### **Summary**

According to Flint (2004), while there is a reasonable amount of literature concerning the development and execution of anti-bullying programs, it is worth noting that most programs do not have adjustments for dealing with students with disabilities. The fact that they do not suggests two basic conclusions. The first and most important is that the distinctive nature of the disability of a student is not understood or appreciated,

and the second is that school administrators are seeking whole-school, and thus less problematic and costly programs.

The studies above demonstrate that there are a variety of bullying prevention programs but there is no consistent data to show which is the best. The lack of research can be explained in any of several ways. The lack of research is either because the need has not been identified, it is impossible to do, or because it is not considered significant. Both of these possibilities are significant. Perhaps the problems have been too newly acknowledged for researchers to have done extended inquiry. But this needs to be changed, for bullying prevention program data is worthy of significant study, and like this study, new information can make a significant addition to the literature, as well as help determine if there is any relationship between EBBP programs and school climate and the bullying of students, including students with disabilities.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Methods**

This study was designed to take an in-depth look at the effect of evidence-based bullying prevention (EBBP) programs on the climate of the secondary school and the bullying of students, including students with disabilities, within the state of Missouri. The study is focused on secondary level building principals' perceptions of school climate and their perceptions of the bullying of students, including students with disabilities, and whether or not those perceptions differed based on whether or not their schools were using an evidence-based bullying prevention program.

Chapter three describes the methodology used in this study. It includes the research design, population and sample, sampling procedures, instrumentation, data collection procedures, data analysis procedures, and limitations.

### **Research Design**

A non-experimental quantitative research design guided this study. Jensen (2014) found that using an on-line survey in studies allowed participants the opportunity to anonymously answer questions openly and honestly, and thus with more freedom. The study was conducted within the state of Missouri. The *Ontario School Climate Survey* (OSCS), used annually in Canada, is designed to help schools assess the administrators' perceptions of school climate and the bullying of students in their schools. The philosophy behind the OSCS is consistent with the research and data this study is seeking to gather. The survey is used to make informed decisions about school bullying prevention programs, fair treatment of students within the school, and school climate. In Ontario, school boards are required to conduct these school climate surveys with

students, staff, and parents at least once every year, as all these groups are considered to play an important role in maintaining positive school climate.

The independent variable was the implementation of an evidence-based bullying prevention program. The dependent variables were the perception of school climate, and the perception of the bullying of students, including students with disabilities,

### **Population and Sample**

The population of interest for this study was composed of secondary level principals in the state of Missouri during the 2015-2016 school year. An estimated 500 secondary principals were surveyed. The sample for this study consisted of secondary level principals in the state of Missouri who voluntarily completed the survey instrument.

### **Sampling Procedures**

Principals were selected to be part of the study if their school was a public secondary school located in Missouri with a grade level of 6-12. Purposive sampling was used in this study. According to Lunenburg and Irby (2008) purposive sampling involves the researcher selecting a sample based on their knowledge of the group being sampled. The sample of administrators was selected based on the Department of Secondary Education school administrators' directory for the state of Missouri. From this directory, an e-mail address list of the principals to be surveyed was developed. The researcher developed the electronic version of the questionnaire on the website Survey Monkey. On January 31, 2016, the researcher provided each principal a link to the survey that was housed on Survey Monkey along with a cover letter.

**Instrumentation.** The instrument used in this research study was adapted from the Climate Survey created by the Ontario Ministry of Education (2009). The instrument

was adapted with the permission of Carolyn Gray, the Senior Copyright Advisor to Publications Ontario (see Appendix A). This instrument was used to measure secondary principals' perceptions of school climate. The instrument also measured the principals' perceptions of the bullying of students, including students with disabilities. The adapted Ontario School Climate Survey (see Appendix E) was accessible through the website Survey Monkey, an internet-based survey tool. The survey was a 21-item survey. Nine items were related to school climate, while eight items were related to bullying. This survey also gathered information on the size, location and level of the school and whether the school was utilizing an evidence-based bullying prevention program.

### **Measurement**

The adapted Ontario Ministry of Education School (2009) Climate Survey (see Appendix E) surveyed school administrators' views about equity and inclusive education, school climate and bullying and harassment of students, including students with disabilities. The survey was designed to be used with school administrators. It was initially designed to be completely anonymous and maintained that anonymity for all participants through the adapted version in the current study. The survey provided a detailed definition of bullying which covered verbal and physical aggression, as well as social and electronic forms of aggression such as exclusion practices and spreading of rumors. Nine items were related to school climate, while eight questions were related to bullying. All responses were based on a 4-point Likert scale: strongly disagree, disagree, agree, and strongly agree. Demographic information was also collected. The response choices for the majority of the questions are strongly disagree, disagree, agree, and strongly agree. These choices were designed to avoid the vagueness that can be

attributed to response of often or fairly often. Of the 523 surveys sent, 179 were completed. From the spreadsheet downloaded from Survey Monkey, the researcher designed a template to tally the responses for analysis.

**Validity and Reliability.** The survey was tested for reliability by the Ontario Ministry of Education. To test the reliability the survey was taken by each administrator and teacher who worked in their K-12 schools over a ten year period. The Ontario Ministry of Education (2015) found continuously strong agreement of the results year to year. Data were compiled regarding the reliability, test-retest reliability, and validity of the Ontario Ministry of Education School Climate Survey using large samples of more than 5,000 students. A team of people knowledgeable about bullying of students in schools reviewed the survey. The team checked for content validity of the survey questions. According to the Office of Ministry (2015) these reported results were commensurate with current findings and the Ministry stands by their survey.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

The researcher obtained permission on December 9, 2014 at 11:32 p.m. from Carolyn Gray, Senior Copyright Advisor, Publications Ontario (see Appendices A for copy of e-mail conversation). The researcher then received approval from her dissertation committee and submitted the IRB proposal to the IRB committee on December 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2015. Approval was then granted by the IRB committee and a date and time was set up for data collection to begin.

Administration of the surveys took place on-line through Survey Monkey. An initial email was sent by the researcher to the secondary school administrators in the state of Missouri asking them if they would be interested in participating in an online survey,

on January 31, 2016. The researcher gave instructions on how to complete the survey through e-mail. The survey information for administrators was inputted into Excel and then transferred over to SPSS for analysis.

### **Data Analysis and Hypothesis Testing**

In the data analysis the information from quantitative research items was used. The responses to the survey were used for quantitative research analysis based on the following research questions. The hypothesis will be stated and then a discussion will follow.

**RQ1.** To what extent is there a difference between principals' perceptions of school climate based on whether their schools have implemented an evidence-based bullying prevention program?

**H<sub>1</sub>.** Null: There is no difference between principals' perceptions of school climate based on whether their schools have implemented an evidence-based bullying prevention program?

**RQ2.** To what extent is there a difference between principals' perceptions of the bullying of students with disabilities based on whether their schools have implemented an evidence-based bullying prevention program?

**H<sub>2</sub>.** Null: There is no difference between principals' perceptions of the bullying of students with disabilities based on whether their schools have implemented an evidence-based bullying prevention program?

**RQ3.** To what extent is there a difference between principals' perceptions of the bullying of general education students based on whether their schools have implemented an evidence-based bullying prevention program?

**H<sub>3</sub>.** Null: There is no difference between principals' perceptions of the bullying of general education students based on whether their schools have implemented an evidence-based bullying prevention program?

For each research question a 2-way chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the interaction between principals' perceptions of school climate and the implementations of an evidence-based bullying prevention program. The level of significance was set at .05.

### **Limitations**

Limitations are factors that may have an effect on the interpretation of the findings or on the generalization of the results and are out of control of the researcher (Lunenburg & Irby, 2008, p. 133).

1. There is no set standard for assessing the accuracy of administrators' perceptions of their schools.
2. Participants who did not respond to the survey may have responded differently than those that did respond which would have changed the results.
3. Some of the administrators who respond to the survey may be disabled.



## **Chapter Four**

### **Results**

The purpose of this study was to investigate secondary level building principals' perceptions of school climate and of the bullying of students, including the bullying of students with disabilities, and whether those perceptions differed based on if their schools were using an evidence-based bullying prevention program.

This chapter presents the study's findings, including results of the quantitative analyses for three research questions. Included in the chapter are an explanation of the descriptive statistics and an analysis of the hypotheses testing.

#### **Descriptive Statistics**

This study included a sample of 179 Missouri secondary principals out of a total of 523 principals who received the survey, a return rate of 34.22 percent. The survey consisted of 21 questions, nine questions related to climate, and eight questions related to bullying. Four questions were demographic. Out of 179 principals that filled out the survey, 38 percent stated their school had an evidence-based bullying prevention program and 62 percent stated their school did not have an evidence-based bullying prevention program. Approximately 37.43 percent of the respondents were principals of a middle school, 2.33 percent were principals of a junior high, and 60.34 percent were principals of a high school. The respondents were 65.36 percent principals of a rural school, 7.82 percent were principals of an urban school, and 26.82 percent were principals of a suburban school (see Table 1).

Table 1

*Description of the Population by Demographic Characteristic*

Item #	Question	Response	Percent (n)
1	Does your school have an EBBP program	No	62% (111)
		Yes	37% (67)
2	What level is your school	High School	60% (108)
		Middle School	40% (71)
3	School Location	Rural	65% (117)
		Suburban	27% (48)
		Urban	8% (14)

**Summary Item Analysis**

Table 2, 3, 4, and 5 presents an item analysis that conducted and the percent and frequency of response for survey items 5a, 5b, 5c, and 5d that related to school climate by having the respondents look at how their students felt about their school and how principals perceived that their students felt about their schools. Not all 179 principals responded to this item on the survey. Data were divided into two groups; agree and disagree. Each table was discussed separately. A very large majority (98.9%) of principals perceived that students enjoy being at their schools (see Table 2).

Table 2

*To What Extend do You Agree or Disagree About How  
Students Feel About Their School: Frequencies for Q5.a  
Students Enjoy Being at School*

Response	Frequency	Percent
Agree	177	98.9
Disagree	2	1.1
Total	179	100

As shown in Table 3 a very large majority (98.3 percent) of principals' perceptions agreed that students felt that their school was friendly.

Table 3

*To What Extend do You Agree or Disagree About How  
Students Feel About Their School: Frequencies for Q5.b  
Students See Their School as Friendly*

Response	Frequency	Percent
Agree	175	98.3
Disagree	3	1.7
Total	178	100

It was also found that a very large majority (96.6 percent) of principals perceived that students felt that their school was an inviting place to learn (see Table 4).

Table 4

*To What Extend do You Agree or Disagree About How  
Students Feel About Their School: Frequencies for Q5.c  
Students Consider Their School as an Inviting Place to Learn*

Response	Frequency	Percent
Agree	173	96.6
Disagree	6	3.4
Total	179	100

As shown in Table 5 following the same trend, a very large majority (96.6 percent) of principals perceived that students felt accepted by others students in the school.

Table 5

*To What Extend do You Agree or Disagree About How  
Students Feel About Their School: Frequencies for Q5.d  
Students Feel Accepted by Other Students in the School*

Response	Frequency	Percent
Agree	173	96.6
Disagree	6	3.4
Total	179	100

Table 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10 presents an item analysis that conducted and the percent and frequency of response for survey items 6a, 6b, 6c, 6d, and 6e related to principals' perceptions of school climate by asking them how students felt at their school based on five categories and how principals' perceived their students' comfort level at their

schools based on the student's personal characteristics. Each table was discussed separately. Table 6 shows a small percentage (18 percent) of principals perceived that students in their school felt unwelcome or uncomfortable based on their gender.

Table 6

*To What Extent do You Agree or Disagree About If Students  
Feel Unwelcome or Uncomfortable at You School Because  
of: Frequencies for Q6.a Their Gender*

Response	Frequency	Percent
Agree	32	18.1
Disagree	145	81.9
Total	178	100

As shown in Table 7, a slightly larger percentage (28.8 percent) of principals perceived that students felt unwelcome or uncomfortable at their school based on their ethno, cultural, or racial background.

Table 7

*To What Extend do You Agree or Disagree About How Students Feel Unwelcome or Uncomfortable at You School Because of: Frequencies for Q6.b Their Ethno, Cultural, or Racial Background*

Response	Frequency	Percent
Agree	51	28.8
Disagree	126	71.2
Total	177	100

As shown in Table 8, a small percentage of principals perceived that students felt unwelcome or uncomfortable at their school based on their academic ability.

Table 8

*To What Extend do You Agree or Disagree About How Students Feel Unwelcome or Uncomfortable at You School Because of: Frequencies for Q6.c Their Academic Ability*

Response	Frequency	Percent
Agree	51	28.8
Disagree	126	71.2
Total	177	100

Table 9 shows that less than half (35.6 percent) of principals perceived that students felt uncomfortable or unwelcome at their school based on their appearance. Though this is less than half, it is the highest percent in this question.

Table 9

*To What Extent do You Agree or Disagree About How Students Feel Unwelcome or Uncomfortable at Your School Because of: Frequencies for Q6.d Their Appearance*

Response	Frequency	Percent
Agree	63	35.6
Disagree	114	64.4
Total	177	100

A small amount (29.4 percent) of principals perceived that students felt unwelcome or uncomfortable at their school based on their family's level of income (see Table 10).

Table 10

*To What Extent do You Agree or Disagree About How Students Feel Unwelcome or Uncomfortable at Your School Because of: Frequencies for Q6.e Their Family's Level of Income*

Response	Frequency	Percent
Agree	52	29.4
Disagree	125	70.6
Total	177	100

Table 11, 12, 13, and 14, presents an item analysis that was conducted and the percent and frequency of response for the survey items 7a, 7b, 7c, and 7d related to principals' perceptions regarding bullying of students with disabilities in their school based on four different types of bullying: physical, verbal, social, and electronic. Each table was discussed separately. As shown in Table 11, a small number of principals (10.2 percent) perceived that students with disabilities were physically bullied at their school.

Table 11

*Is Bullying a Problem at Your School for Students with Disabilities*  
*Frequencies for Q7.a Physical Bullying*

Response	Frequency	Percent
Agree	18	10.2
Disagree	159	89.8
Total	177	100

Almost half (48.6 percent) of the principals perceived that student with disabilities were being verbally bullied at their school (see Table 12).



Table 12

*Is Bullying a Problem at Your School for Students with Disabilities*

*Frequencies for Q7.b Verbal Bullying*

Response	Frequency	Percent
Agree	86	48.6
Disagree	91	51.4
Total	177	100

Similarly, as shown in Table 13, almost half (49.2 percent) of principals perceived that students with disabilities were being socially bullied at their school.

Table 13

*Is Bullying a Problem at Your School for Students with Disabilities*

*Frequencies for Q7.c Social Bullying*

Response	Frequency	Percent
Agree	87	49.2
Disagree	90	50.8
Total	177	100

Over half of the principals (71.2 percent) perceived that students with disabilities were being electronically bullied at their school (see Table 14.).

Table 14

*Is Bullying a Problem at Your School for Students with Disabilities*

*Frequencies for Q7.d Electronic Bullying*

Response	Frequency	Percent
Agree	126	71.2
Disagree	51	28.8
Total	177	100

Table 15, 16, 17, and 18, presents an item analysis that was conducted and the percent and frequency of responses for each of the survey items 8a, 8b, 8c, and 8d, related to principals' perceptions of bullying of general education students at their schools based on four different types of bullying: physical, verbal, social, and electronic. Each table was discussed separately. A small number (6.2 percent) of principals perceived that general education students were being physical bullied at their school (see Table 15).

Table 15

*Is Bullying a Problem at Your School for General Education Students*

*Frequencies for Q8.a Physical Bullying*

Response	Frequency	Percent
Agree	11	6.2
Disagree	166	93.8
Total	177	100

As shown in Table 16, a slightly higher number of principals (22.6 percent) perceived general education students were being verbally bullied at their school.

Table 16

*Is Bullying a Problem at Your School for General Education*

*Students*

*Frequencies for Q8.b Verbal Bullying*

Response	Frequency	Percent
Agree	40	22.6
Disagree	137	77.4
Total	177	100

Similarly (19.3 percent) of principals perceived that general education students were being social bullied at their school (see Table 17).

Table 17

*Is Bullying a Problem at Your School for General Education*

*Students*

*Frequencies for Q8.c Social Bullying*

Response	Frequency	Percent
Agree	34	19.2
Disagree	143	80.8
Total	177	100

A small number of principals (19.2 percent) perceived that general education students were being bullied electronically at their school (see Table 18).

Table 18

*Is Bullying a Problem at Your School for Students with Disabilities*

*Frequencies for Q7.d Electronic Bullying*

Response	Frequency	Percent
Agree	34	19.2
Disagree	143	80.8
Total	177	100

### **Hypothesis Testing**

This section contains the results of the 2-way chi-square tests of independence to examine the crosstab proportional distribution between principals' perceptions of school climate and the implementation of an evidence-based bullying prevention program, as well as to examine the interaction between principals' perceptions of bullying of students with disabilities and bullying of general education students and the implementation of an evidence-based bullying prevention program. All hypothesis testing was challenged at a .05 level of significance. A non-experimental survey design was used.

**H<sub>1</sub>**. Null: There is no significant difference between principals' perceptions of school climate based on whether their schools have implemented an evidence-based bullying prevention program. The observed frequencies were compared to those expected by chance. The level of significance was set at .05. A 2x2 cross tab test was performed to examine the interaction between evidence-based bullying prevention programs and principals' perception of students' enjoyment of school  $X^2(1, n=178) = 1.22, p = .269$ . A 2x2 cross tab test was performed to examine the interaction between

evidence-based bullying prevention programs and how principals perceive that students consider their school as friendly  $X^2(1, n=177) = 1.82, p = .178$ . A 2x2 cross tab test was performed to examine the interaction between evidence-based bullying prevention programs and principals' perception of whether their students consider their school as an inviting place to learn and  $X^2(1, n=178) = 1.16, p = .281$ . A 2x2 cross tab test was performed to examine the interaction between evidence-based bullying prevention programs and principals' perceptions of students being made to feel accepted by other students in school  $X^2(1, n=178) = 1.16, p = .281$ . The null hypothesis was not rejected; in all cases there were no proportional distribution differences. Responses were not dependent on the presence of an evidence-based bullying prevention program (EBBP). Regardless of status, about 100 percent of all respondents agreed that their school climate was positive.

Table 19

*Summary Chi Square Analysis Results Table for Differences in Principals' Perceptions of School Climate "# 5 To What Extent Do You Agree or Disagree About How Students Feel About Their School?"*

Item #	School Climate	Percent				<i>p</i>
		Did not have EBBP		Did have EBBP		
		% (n) Yes	% (n) No	% (n) Yes	% (n) No	
5(a)	Enjoy being at school	98 (109)	2 (2)	100 (67)	0 (0)	.269
5(b)	See their school as friendly	97 (108)	3 (3)	100 (66)	0 (0)	.178
5(c)	Consider their school as an inviting place to learn	95 (106)	5 (5)	98 (66)	2 (1)	.281
5(d)	Feel accepted by other students in the school	95 (106)	5 (5)	98 (66)	2 (1)	.281

*Note:* EBBP stands for evidence-based bullying prevention program. Significant = <.05. Not all participants answered every question.

No difference was found between the principals' perception of students being made to feel unwelcomed by other students in school and the frequency of an EBBP program  $X^2(1, n=179) = 1.57, p = 2.11$ . A 2x2 cross tab was performed to examine the interaction between the use of evidence-based bullying prevention programs and principals' perceptions of students being made to feel unwelcome or uncomfortable by other students in school based on gender  $X^2(1, n=177) = .72, p = .395$ . A 2x2 cross tab test was performed to examine the interaction between evidence-based bullying prevention programs and principals' perceptions of students being made to feel unwelcome or uncomfortable by other students in school based on ethno, culture or racial background  $X^2(1, n=176) = .68, p = .409$ . A 2x2 cross tab test was performed to

examine the interaction between evidence-based bullying prevention programs and principals' perceptions of students being made to feel unwelcome or uncomfortable by other students in school based on their academic ability  $X^2(1, n=176) = .68, p = .409$ . A 2x2 cross tab test was performed to examine the interaction between evidence-based bullying prevention programs and principals' perceptions of students being made to feel unwelcome or uncomfortable by other students in school based on their appearance  $X^2(1, n=176) = 3.05, p = .996$ . A 2x2 cross tab test was performed to examine the interaction between evidence-based bullying prevention programs and principals' perceptions of students being made to feel unwelcome or uncomfortable by other students in school based on their family's income  $X^2(1, n=179) = 1.67, p = .97$  (see Table 20). The null hypothesis was not rejected; in these cases there were no proportional distribution differences. Responses were not dependent on the presence of an EBBP.

Table 20

*Summary Chi Square Analysis Results Table for Differences in Principals' Perceptions of School Climate "# 6 To What Extent Do You Agree or Disagree About If Students Feel Unwelcome or Uncomfortable at Your School Because of Any of the Following?"*

Item #	School Climate	Percent				<i>p</i>
		Did not have EBBP		Did have EBBP		
		% (n) Yes	% (n) No	% (n) Yes	% (n) No	
6(a)	Their Gender	20 (22)	80 (88)	15 (10)	85 (57)	.40
6(b)	Their ethno, cultural, or racial background	31 (34)	69 (75)	25 (17)	75 (0)	.40
6(c)	Their academic ability	36 (34)	69 (75)	25 (17)	75 (1)	.41
6(d)	Their appearance	36 (39)	64 (70)	36 (24)	64 (1)	1
6(e)	Their families level of income	33 (36)	67 (73)	23 (16)	77 (51)	.20

*Note:* EBBP stands for evidence-based bullying prevention program. Significant = <.05. Not all participants answered every question.

**H<sub>2</sub>**. Null: There is no significant difference between principals' perceptions of the treatment of students with disabilities based on whether their schools have implemented an evidence-based bullying prevention program. The observed frequencies were compared to those expected by chance. The level of significance was set at .05. A 2x2 cross tab test showed no relationship was found between the principals' perceptions of the frequency of physically bullying of students with disabilities and the frequency of an evidence-based bullying prevention program  $X^2(1, n=176) = .01, p = .904$ . A 2x2 cross tab test showed no relationship was found between the principals' perceptions of the frequency of verbal bullying of students with disabilities and the frequency of an



evidence-based bullying prevention program  $X^2(1, n=176) = .007, p = .933$ . A cross tab showed no relationship was found between the principals' perceptions of the frequency of social bullying of students with disabilities and the frequency of an evidence-based bullying prevention program  $X^2(1, n=176) = .65, p = .419$ . A cross tab test showed no relationship was found between the principals' perceptions of the frequency of electronic bullying of students with disabilities and the frequency of an evidence-based bullying prevention program  $X^2(1, n=176) = 4.99, p = .982$  (see Table 21). The null hypothesis was not rejected; in these cases there were no proportional distribution differences. Responses were not dependent on the presence of an EBBP.

Table 21

*Summary Chi Square Analysis Results Table for Differences in Principals' Perceptions of Bullying "# 7 Is Bullying a Problem at Your School for students With Disabilities?"*

Item #	Item Statement	Percent				<i>p</i>
		Did not have EBBP		Did have EBBP		
		% (n) Yes	% (n) No	% (n) Yes	% (n) No	
7(a)	Physical bullying is a problem	7(7)	93(102)	5(4)	95(63)	.09
7(b)	Verbal bullying is a problem	22(25)	78(84)	23(15)	77(52)	.93
7(c)	Social bullying is a problem	17(19)	83(90)	23(15)	77(52)	.38
7(d)	Electronic bullying is a problem	19(21)	81(88)	81(13)	81(54)	.98

*Note:* EBBP stands for evidence-based bullying prevention program. Significant = <.05. Not all participants answered every question.

**H<sub>3</sub>.** Null: There is no significant difference between principals' perceptions of the treatment of general education students based on whether their schools have implemented

an evidence-based bullying prevention program. The observed frequencies were compared to those expected by chance. The level of significance was set at .05. A 2x2 cross tab test showed no relationship was found between the principals' perceptions of the frequency of physically bullying of general education students and the frequency of an evidence-based bullying prevention program  $X^2(1, n=176) = 1.91, p = .662$ . A 2x2 cross tab test showed no relationship was found between the principals' perceptions of the frequency of verbal bullying of general education students and the frequency of an evidence-based bullying prevention program  $X^2(1, n=176) = 1.35, p = .246$ . A 2x2 cross tab test showed no relationship was found between the principals' perceptions of the frequency of social bullying of general education students and the frequency of an evidence-based bullying prevention program  $X^2(1, n=176) = .15, p = .695$ . A 2x2 cross tab test showed a relationship was found to be significant between the principals' perceptions of the frequency of electronic bullying of general education students and the frequency of an evidence-based bullying prevention program  $X^2(1, n=176) = .29, p = .587$  (see Table 21). The null hypothesis was not rejected; in all cases there were no proportional distribution differences between principals' perceptions. Responses were not dependent on the presence of an EBBP.

Table 22

*Summary Chi Square Analysis Results Table for Differences in Principals' Perceptions of Bullying “# 8 Is Bullying a Problem at Your School for General Education Students?”*

Item #	Item Statement	Percent				<i>p</i>
		No, EBBP		Yes, EBBP		
		% (n) Yes	% (n) No	% (n) Yes	% (n) No	
7(a)	Physical bullying is a problem	12(2)	88(97)	8(6)	92(61)	.66
7(b)	Verbal bullying is a problem	52(57)	48(52)	43(29)	57(38)	.25
7(c)	Social bullying is a problem	48(52)	52(57)	50(34)	49(33)	.70
7(d)	Electronic bullying is a problem	63(79)	37(30)	52(46)	48(21)	.59

*Note:* EBBP stands for evidence-based bullying prevention program. Significant = <.05. Not all participants answered every question.

### Summary

This chapter presented the frequencies of responses for research questions one through three as well as the results of chi-square tests of independence for research questions one through three. The next chapter will present and analyze the data obtained from the survey.

## Chapter Five

### Interpretation and Recommendations

The first four chapters introduced the background, purpose, and significance of the study, presented a review of the literature including the definition of bullying, evidence-based bullying programs, and school climate, as well as current research on evidence-based bullying prevention programs and the bullying of general education students and students with disabilities. The methodology used in the study was provided and the study's findings, including descriptive statistics and results of the hypothesis testing for three research questions, were presented. Chapter five provides a summary of the entire study including an overview of the problem, purpose statement, and research questions. A review of the methodology and findings related to the literature, and major findings, implications for action and recommendations for future research and conclusions are also included in Chapter five.

#### Study Summary

The study summary provides a brief description of the problem and purpose of the study. Additionally, the research questions, methodology, and findings are reviewed in this section.

**Overview of the problem.** Bullying is a major concern among educators in the United States, and in the past two decades, it has become a prime topic of consideration. Olweus (2004) identified bullying as a major concern for students and teachers. The American Medical Association (AMA) (2002) states bullying occurs in three different forms: physical bullying, social-group exclusion, and verbal bullying.

American educators are looking to move toward the restoration of a safe, healthy, and peaceful environment in school so that student can learn (National Education Association, 2015). To accomplish this, it is necessary to improve the quality of interaction between students and to do what is necessary to develop a positive school climate. One approach to this issue is the implementation of an evidenced-based bullying prevention program (EBBP). School climate is a complex, multidimensional construct that encompasses beliefs, values and attitudes of students, teachers, and administrators (Anderson, 1982). According to Perkins and Borden (2003), positive school climate has been repeatedly identified as a key asset for bullying intervention and has a broad impact on students. Schools in the U.S. have struggled with school safety and bullying and are constantly looking for ways to address these issues. Because of this, evidence-based bullying prevention programs like the Olweus Program have been created. The state of Missouri requires each school to have a bullying prevention program in place; however, that program does not have to be evidence-based. Therefore, some schools are using evidence-based programs, while some are not. Further examination into these bullying-prevention programs could show whether they make an impact on school climate or on the bullying of students, including students with disabilities. Thapa et al. (2013) stated that because the bullying of any one person is unacceptable, we need to look at the effectiveness of bullying prevention programs and their impact on climate.

**Purpose statement and research questions.** This study was designed to compare secondary level building principals' perceptions of school climate and their perceptions of the bullying of students, including the bullying of students with disabilities, and

whether those perceptions differed based on whether or not their schools were using an evidence-based bullying prevention program.

**Review of the methodology.** This study involved a non-experimental quantitative survey design. This study involved secondary principals in the state of Missouri who responded to the survey during the 2015-2016 school year. The 21-item survey used in this study was modified from a questionnaire developed by The Ministry of Education in Ontario, Canada (2009). The survey was developed to examine principals' perceptions regarding bullying and school climate.

The dependent variable in RQ1 was school climate, specifically the extent to which school climate was felt by students in the participants' school. The dependent variables in RQ2 was the perceived problem of bullying of students with disabilities and whether or not their school had implemented an evidence-based bullying prevention program. The dependent variables in RQ3 was the perceived problem of bullying of general education students at the participants' school and whether or not their school had implemented an evidence-based bullying prevention program. For all of the research questions the chi-square test of independence was used.

**Major findings.** The researcher examined the perceptions of Missouri secondary principals regarding the impact of evidence-bullying prevention programs and non-evidenced based programs on their schools. Having such programs did not change the climate of their schools.

The perceptions of school climate did not differ based on the type of program a school had implemented. Results of the hypotheses tests indicated that there was no significant statistical difference in principals' perceptions of the school climate or the

bullying of general education students and students with disabilities based on whether a school had implemented an evidence-based bullying prevention program or not. In fact, the survey results indicated that principals, whether their schools had implemented an EBBP or not, believed their schools had a positive school climate. Principals are positive in their perception of their schools. However, principals are concerned about the electronic bullying of students with disabilities at their school. The survey results also indicated that bullying issues were still occurring, once again whether the school was using an EBBP program or not.

In summary the relationship between Missouri secondary principals' perceptions regarding the school climate and bullying of general education students and students with disabilities was examined. There were not statistically significant differences between the perceptions of principals' on the issue studied and whether or not a school had an evidence-based bullying prevention program.

### **Findings Related to the Literature**

This section connects findings from the current study to findings from previous studies related to school climate, bullying of students, including students with disabilities, and EBBP programs. Research question focused on the differences between principals' perceptions of school climate based on whether their schools have implemented an evidence-based bullying prevention program were studied. Thapa et al. (2013) analyzed 200 references relevant to school climate and found that a positive school climate is associated with reduced aggression and violence. Students in a positive school climate felt comfortable at their school. However, the current study's results showed that having an EBBP program or a non-evidence based program did not have an effect on how

principals perceived school climate. The survey responses indicated that the majority of principals perceived their schools' students felt comfortable at their school. Wilson (2004) suggested that a positive school climate is compatible with positive child development, student learning, and academic achievement and decreased violence. However, the current study results showed that principals perceived that their students felt positive about their school climate.

Research question two focused on Missouri secondary principals' perceptions regarding the bullying of students with disabilities at their schools based on whether their school had implemented an evidence-based bullying prevention program. Manning (2015) found that students with disabilities were two to three times more likely to be bullied than their non-disabled peers. Rose and Espelage, (2012) reported on the bullying rate of middle school and high school students with disabilities, enrolled in general and special education programs. The results of the study indicated that students in special education programs reported a higher rate of bullying when compared to students in general education without disabilities. Conversely, the current study findings were inconsistent with the both of Rose, Epelage (2012) and Manning (2015). Principals' surveys in this study indicated that nearly a fourth of the respondents thought bullying was an issue for students with disabilities in their schools, while nearly one half of the respondents thought bullying was an issue for their general education students, regardless of whether the school was using and EBBP or not.

Hunt (2007) reviewed the results of a researched-based intervention in Australia. Hunt (2007) thought that the intervention program would increase attitudes of compassion towards students with disabilities and therefore decrease bullying. Hunt



(2007) found that there was no evidence of attitude change for the intervention or control groups; attitudes about bullying remained stable for both groups over time. The current study was consistent with Hunt's (2007) findings. Evidence-based bullying prevention programs in the current study did not make a significance difference in the principals' perceptions of the bullying of students with disabilities. In the current study students with disabilities were perceived to be bullied at nearly the same rate whether there was an EBBP program or whether there was not an EBBP program implemented.

Research question three of the current study focused on Missouri secondary principals' perceptions regarding the bullying of general education students at their schools based on whether their school had implemented an evidence-based bullying prevention program. The results of the current study were in agreement with Felix and McMahon (2006), who studied chronic bullying among urban middle school students of sixth grade through eighth grade. Their data showed that all forms of bullying are prevalent. In the current study, the principals' perceptions indicated that bullying issues of all types continued to be a problem for general education students.

However, the current study was contrary to Olweus (1997) who developed an evidence-based bullying prevention program in order to deter bullies. Olweus (1997) found that evidence-based bullying program are proven to deter bullies. The current study found no difference in principals' perceptions of bullying whether there school had implemented an EBBP or not. The current study was also contrary to Sugai and Horner (2006) whose research showed that schools should choose curriculums that are evidence-based and backed with wide-ranging research in order to achieve positive conclusions. Data analysis indicated no difference in the perceived bullying behavior based on the

implementation of an EBBP. The current study differed in that there was no difference in the principals' perceptions of their schools and the issues of school climate and bullying based on the implementation of an EBBP program.

## **Conclusions**

The findings of this study expanded the work of previous researchers in the areas of school climate and bullying.

- This study is one of very few that have been conducted on the perceived impact of evidence-based bullying prevention programs on school climate and bullying.
- A high percentage of principals' perceptions indicated bullying of all types occurring in small amounts in their schools. The use of EBBP did not impact the perceived school climates.
- Based on principals' perceptions EBBP programs did not make a significant difference on school climate.
- Evidence-based bullying prevention programs were perceived by principals to not prevent bullying of students with disabilities or general education students any more so than non-evidence-based bullying prevention programs.
- This study contrasted with previously published work.
- Principals were positive about their school climate regardless of the presence of an evidence-based bullying prevention program or not.

Implications for future action as well as suggestions for additional research and concluding remarks are presented in this section.

**Implications for action.** School climate has a great impact on students' social interactions and overall well-being. The current study shows that the responding principals' perceptions of their school climate were positive. For the most part, principals perceived the students at their school as being well-treated and feeling good about themselves. These perceptions did not differ if the school had an EBBP program or if it did not have an EBBP program. Overall, despite principals believing their schools have a positive school climate, they still report bullying issues of all forms. Therefore, future researchers should investigate whether all other participants (teachers, support staff, students and parents) feel the same way about school climate and bullying at their schools.

This study showed that there was not a significant difference in the principals' perceptions of the treatment of any students based on the implementation of an evidence-based bullying prevention program. Current resources are being spent on bullying prevention programs in schools across Missouri. Principals should consider the findings of this study when applying resources for a program for their schools. When choosing programs principals should take into consideration the population of their school. It is important for principals to gather as much information about bullying prevention programs before finding the one that works with the climate of their school in order to deter the bullying of any student.

**Recommendations for future research.** After examining the findings of this study, recommendations for further research can be made. First, replication of the study in other states could be done to determine if the principals' perceptions are similar in other states. This could add to the national data base on bullying prevention programs. Second,

this study could be conducted in the elementary schools in the state of Missouri to compare secondary and elementary principals' responses. This analysis could lead to the implementation of district-wide bullying prevention and school climate programs that help students of all ages become aware of bullying and how to stop it. Third, this study could be modified to include teacher and student perceptions as well as principals. Student and teacher input would give a wider range of perceptions to the study. Comparing student and teacher perceptions to principals' perceptions would give the study a wider range of application. Student and teacher are closer to the issues that come up in a school. Fourth, modify this study to compare the answers of those principals of private schools vs. those principals of public schools. Many people perceive that bullying is more prevalent in public school. It would be interesting to see if private school principals' perceptions are the same. Fifth, modify this study to include the central office administration in order to compare the upper managements' perceptions to those of the building management. This research might help upper management connect to the perceptions of those at the building level when making decisions about EBBP programs. Sixth, modify this study to include assistant principals in order to gain a bigger sample size. Assistant principals might have the most accurate perceptions because they are closest to the issue. Seventh, compare the findings of this study to the one in Ontario, where the survey originated.

**Concluding remarks.** This study was designed to investigate secondary level building principals' perceptions of school climate and their perceptions of the bullying of students, including the bullying of students with disabilities. This study was based on the research that evidence-based bullying prevention programs had a positive impact on

school climate and bullying. Although this study's findings did not agree with this trend of research, this study adds to the knowledge base on bullying and school climate and what principals understand about these state of affairs in their schools. Responding principals' perceptions were that bullying was still an issue in many of their schools. Until that issue is eliminated, bullying prevention needs to be a topic of continued investigation.

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**Appendix A: E-mail from Carolyn Gray**

**From:** Gray, Carolyn (MGCS) <Carolyn.Gray@ontario.ca>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, December 9, 2014 11:32 AM  
**To:** Lisa Hecht  
**Subject:** RE: Inquiry on Survey

Dear. Ms. Hecht:

Thank you for your e-mail (our file N/N 0285/14/H).

The Sample School Climate Surveys can be found on the web site of the Ministry of Education.

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Yours truly,

Carolyn Gray  
Senior Copyright Advisor  
Publications Ontario  
Enterprise Business Services Division  
Ontario Share Services Ministry of Government and Consumer Services  
222 Jarvis Street, 9<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Toronto ON M7A 0B6

**Appendix B: IRB Request**



SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

Date: 11-30-2015  
IRB PROTOCOL NUMBER \_\_\_\_\_GRADUATE DEPARTMENT  
(USE ONLY)

(IRB

**IRB REQUEST**  
**Proposal for Research**  
**Submitted to the Baker University Institutional Review Board**

**I. Research Investigator(s)** (Students must list faculty sponsor first)Department(s) School of Education Graduate Department

Name	Signature	
1. Russ Kokoruda	_____	Major Advisor
2. Phil Messner	_____	Research Analyst
3. Harold Frye		University Committee Member
4. Paul Edwards		External Committee Member

Principal Investigator: Lisa Hecht \_\_\_\_\_  
 Phone: 816-803-8204  
 Email: LisaAHecht@stu.bakeru.edu  
 Mailing address: 1301 SW Shawnee Street Blue Springs MO, 64015

Faculty sponsor:

Phone:

Email:

Expected Category of Review:  Exempt  Expedited  Full**II: Protocol Title**

**The Impact of Evidence-Based Bullying Prevention Programs and School Climate on Bullying of Students, Including Students with Disabilities**

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**Summary**

The following summary must accompany the proposal. Be specific about exactly what participants will experience, and about the protections that have been included to safeguard participants from harm. Careful attention to the following may help facilitate the review process:

**In a sentence or two, please describe the background and purpose of the research.**

The purpose of this study is to investigate secondary level building principals' perceptions of school climate and their perceptions of the bullying of students, including the bullying of students with disabilities, and whether or not those perceptions differed based on whether or not their schools were using an evidence-based bullying prevention program. An additional purpose is to determine whether school size, school level, or school location affected those perceptions.

**Briefly describe each condition or manipulation to be included within the study.**

There are no conditions or manipulations in the study.

**What measures or observations will be taken in the study?** An online survey will be made available to all secondary-level principals in the state of Missouri. The survey instrument consists of 21 items and will take approximately 10 minutes to complete.

**If any questionnaire or other instruments are used, provide a brief description and attach a copy.** The survey questions will focus on principals' perceptions of school climate and bullying issues in their school.

**Will the subjects encounter the risk of psychological, social, physical, or legal risk?**

There will be no risk, participants may stop the survey at any time. **If so, please describe the nature of the risk and any measures designed to mitigate that risk.**

**Will any stress to subjects be involved? If so, please describe.** No, a link to the survey will be emailed to the participant they may fill it out at their convenience.

**Will the subjects be deceived or misled in any way? If so, include an outline or script of the debriefing.** No

**Will there be a request for information that subjects might consider to be personal or sensitive? If so, please include a description.** Participants will be asked to give information about the size, location and level of the school where they work.

**Will the subjects be presented with materials that might be considered to be offensive, threatening, or degrading? If so, please describe.** No

**Approximately how much time will be demanded of each subject?** 10 minutes

**Who will be the subjects in this study? Secondary-level Principals in the state of Missouri How will they be solicited or contacted?** Through their e-mail listed on the DESE website. **Provide an outline or script of the information which will be provided to subjects prior to their volunteering to participate.** All answers are voluntary and anonymous. It should take you only 10 minutes to complete. If interested in the results feel free to contact me. **Include a copy of any written solicitation as well as an outline of any oral solicitation.**

**What steps will be taken to ensure that each subject's participation is voluntary?**

They will be e-mailed a link to the survey and may click on the link only if they want to complete the survey. **What if any inducements will be offered to the subjects for their participation?** None

**How will you ensure that the subjects give their consent prior to participating? Will a written consent form be used? If so, include the form. If not, explain why not.**

By clicking on the link for the survey, the participant give their consent to completing it.

**Will any aspect of the data be made a part of any permanent record that can be identified with the subject? If so, please explain the necessity.** No

**Will the fact that a subject did or did not participate in a specific experiment or study be made part of any permanent record available to a supervisor, teacher or employer? If so, explain.** No

**What steps will be taken to ensure the confidentiality of the data?** No names will be used in the collection of the data.

**If there are any risks involved in the study, are there any offsetting benefits that might accrue to either the subjects or society?** There are no risks.

**Will any data from files or archival data be used? If so, please describe.** No

## **Appendix C: IRB Request Approval**





### *Baker University Institutional Review Board*

December 14, 2015

Dear Lisa Hecht and Dr. Kokoruda,

The Baker University IRB has reviewed your research project application and approved this project under Exempt Status Review. As described, the project complies with all the requirements and policies established by the University for protection of human subjects in research. Unless renewed, approval lapses one year after approval date.

Please be aware of the following:

1. Any significant change in the research protocol as described should be reviewed by this Committee prior to altering the project.
2. Notify the IRB about any new investigators not named in original application.
3. When signed consent documents are required, the primary investigator must retain the signed consent documents of the research activity.
4. If this is a funded project, keep a copy of this approval letter with your proposal/grant file.
5. If the results of the research are used to prepare papers for publication or oral presentation at professional conferences, manuscripts or abstracts are requested for IRB as part of the project record.

Please inform this Committee or myself when this project is terminated or completed. As noted above, you must also provide IRB with an annual status report and receive approval for maintaining your status. If you have any questions, please contact me at [CTodden@BakerU.edu](mailto:CTodden@BakerU.edu) or 785.594.8440.

Sincerely,

*Chris Todden EdD*

Chair, Baker University IRB

Baker University IRB Committee

Verneda Edwards EdD

Sara Crump PhD

Erin Morris PhD

Scott Crenshaw

**Appendix D: E-mail to Principals**

Dear Secondary Principals,

My name is Lisa Hecht and I am a doctoral student at Baker University School of Education. For my doctoral dissertation, I am completing a research study to determine principals' perceptions regarding the impact of evidence-based bullying prevention programs on school climate and on bullying of students, including students with disabilities.

To gather data for my research, I am asking each secondary principal in the state of Missouri to complete a survey via Survey Monkey titled "School Climate/Bullying Survey". **This survey will take approximately only 10 minutes to complete.** To start the survey please click on the following link:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/3CB23NW>

Your responses will be kept confidential; you will not be identifiable based on your responses. Responses will be aggregated (combined with the responses of other participants). Data from this survey will be reported in summary form; therefore, individuals or institutions will not be identifiable. The completion of this survey indicates consent to participate and permission to use responses. As a participant you may choose not to respond to any question that may make you feel uncomfortable, and discontinue participation at any time.

If you would like the opportunity to obtain a copy of the results of this survey, please send an email to [lisahecht@stu.bakeru.edu](mailto:lisahecht@stu.bakeru.edu).

Thanks for taking the time to complete this survey. Your participation is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Lisa Hecht

Doctoral Student, Baker University

## Appendix E: Survey

### Welcome

Thank you for agreeing to complete this survey. All answers are voluntary and anonymous. It should take you only 10 minutes to complete.

If you are interested in the results feel free to contact me at [lisaachecht@stu.bakeru.edu](mailto:lisaachecht@stu.bakeru.edu)

The purpose of this school climate survey is to research about two closely related issues – (1) school climate (2) bullying/harassment among students at your school. This information will be used for dissertation purposes.

**Thank you for completing this survey. Your answers will help us make schools more welcoming and safer for all students.**

For the purpose of this survey **Bullying/Harassment is defined as follows:**

- Actions meant to hurt someone's feelings or devalue them. Behaviors include saying hurtful things to someone about their appearance or ability, posting disrespectful comments about someone online, hurting someone by physical actions, or treating someone badly or making a point of excluding them because of who they are.

An **Evidence-Based Bullying Prevention Program** is a program that has demonstrate its effectiveness in improving school climate by reducing bullying and victimization. The effectiveness of the program has been verified by professional researchers.

**According to the definition above,**

**1. Is the program at your school an evidence-based bullying prevention program?**

YES    NO

**2. What level is your school?**

middle    junior high    high

**3. Which of the following best describes your school location?**

rural    urban    suburban

**4. How many students attend your school?\_\_\_\_\_**

<b>5. To what extent do you agree or disagree about how students feel about their school?</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>
a) They enjoy being at school.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	94 <input type="checkbox"/>
b) They see their school as a friendly and welcoming place.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c) They consider their school building an inviting place to learn.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d) Students tend to feel accepted by other students in the school.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

<b>6. Do students ever feel unwelcome or uncomfortable at your school because of any of the following?</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>
a) Their gender	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b) Their ethno, cultural, or racial background	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c) Their academic ability	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d) Their appearance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e) Their family's level of income	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

<b>7. Based on your personal experience and perspective, indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about bullying/harassment of students with disabilities at your school by checking ONE response for each statement.</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>
a. Physical bullying/harassment is a problem.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. Verbal bullying/harassment is a problem.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. Social bullying/harassment is a problem.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. Electronic bullying/harassment is a	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

problem.

**8. Based on your personal experience and perspective, indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about bullying/harassment of general education students at your school by checking ONE response for each statement.**

	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>
<b>a.</b> Physical bullying/harassment is a problem.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>b.</b> Verbal bullying/harassment is a problem.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>c.</b> Social bullying/harassment is a problem.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>d.</b> Electronic bullying/harassment is a problem.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Appendix F: Reminder E-Mail**



Dear Colleague,

A couple of weeks ago you received an email asking for your participation in a survey. If you filled out the survey thank you very much and don't read any further.

For my doctoral dissertation, I am completing a research study to determine principals' perceptions regarding the impact of evidence-based bullying prevention programs on school climate and on bullying of students, including students with disabilities. I realize that you are very busy; the survey **should take no more than 10 minutes** of your time to complete. Your privacy is important; your answers will be combined with other participants. Your completion and submission of the survey will indicate your consent to participate and permission to use the information that you have provided in my study.

If you have any question you may contact me at [lisahecht@stu.bakeru.edu](mailto:lisahecht@stu.bakeru.edu)  
Thank you so much for your time,  
Lisa Hecht  
Doctoral Student, Baker University

Click the button below to start the survey. Thank you for your participation!