

Running Head: School Safety Measures

School Safety: Do School Safety Measures Improve Teacher Perceptions of Safety?

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by
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School Safety: Do school safety measures improve teacher Perceptions of Safety?
Title of Item

school safety, teacher perceptions, active shooter
3 to 5 keywords or phrases to describe the item

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Abstract

In response to mass school shootings, most schools in the country have implemented and reinforced a variety of school safety measures, the most common being practice of lockdown procedures, increased security on school campuses, and active shooter training for staff members. As schools increase their efforts to prevent further tragedies, do teachers feel safer or better prepared for an active shooter situation on their campus? In this study, twelve teachers at Ridgeview High School were interviewed to find out the degree to which school safety measures have affected their perception of safety on the school campus. The purpose of this study was to examine the extent to which school safety measures implemented at Ridgeview High School affected teacher perceptions of safety, and determine which measures should be more widely implemented at other schools. This study includes suggestions for further training and additional school safety measures that may be implemented at Ridgeview High School as well as other schools.

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Chapter 1

Statement of Problem

The very real problem of violence in schools is publicized through local and national television newscasts and print media every week, with incidents ranging from small scale fights and bullying to mass shootings. School shootings have exposed the glaring vulnerabilities in school safety infrastructures as well as each school's capacity to guarantee that children will be kept safe while in their care.

In response to school shootings, most schools have implemented and reinforced a variety of school safety measures, the most common being practice of lockdown procedures, increased security on school campuses, and active shooter training for staff members. As schools increase their efforts to prevent further tragedies, do teachers feel safer or better prepared for an active shooter situation on their campus?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of several school safety measures implemented at Ridgeview High School (pseudonym), and to specifically evaluate their effects (positive or negative) on teachers' perceptions of safety at school. The following were evaluated in order to determine their effect on RHS teacher perceptions of safety on campus: the effects of active shooter trainings, lockdown drills, "Lock Blok" door devices, and attendance at a shooting range demonstration.

Significance

Many high school teachers (including this researcher) have experienced firsthand both the desperate feelings of vulnerability due to school shootings around the country, and have

witnessed the implementation of several new school safety measures. While none of these measures can guarantee that school staff or students will be entirely safe in an active shooter situation, this study aimed to find out if teacher perceptions of safety on the Ridgeview High School campus have been affected by these measures.

There have been several studies over the last ten years analyzing the effect of various school safety measures on students' perceptions of safety, as well as teachers' perceptions of safety, the latter to a lesser degree. The common themes revealed through existing research on this topic focused more on the types of measures than their effectiveness in preventing school violence. Because school shootings are so rare, it is difficult to evaluate whether school safety measures have actually served as a deterrent to further violent incidents, but research does indicate that perceptions of safety have been affected.

Most schools employ some of the same basic measures and procedures for school safety (Robers, Zhang, Truman, & Snyder, 2012). These measures include controlled access to school buildings/grounds during school hours, faculty requirements to wear identification badges or picture IDs, the use of security cameras, the provision of telephones in classrooms, and the requirement of school uniforms.

In existing research, studies have shown that teachers are generally receptive to safety drills but they criticized the fact that these drills were often conducted in predictable settings and situations (Heinen, Webb-Dempsey, Moore, McClellan, & Friebel, 2007). Teachers are also apt to both credit school administration for an increased perception of safety, and blame school administration for perceptions of decreased safety on campus (Bosworth, Ford, Hernandez, 2011).

Setting

This study was conducted at Ridgeview High School, located in an upper middle class suburban town in Southern California. Ridgeview is one of three high schools in the Rockland Unified School District. The study centered on teacher interviews. There are currently 105 teachers on the Ridgeview High School staff and approximately 2500 students. This school has had a history of false alarm bomb threats, but no major violent incidents in the last ten years.

Definitions of Terms

Active Shooter Training- An active shooter is defined by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security as "an individual actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill people in a confined and populated area; in most cases, active shooters use firearm[s] and there is no pattern or method to their selection of victims"(2008). Specific training at Ridgeview High School in 2013 outlined the steps that teachers and students should take in the case of an "active shooter" situation on campus.

Lock Blok- A safety device installed on classroom doors at Ridgeview High School in 2013. This device uses a rubber stopper to prevent the door from fully latching shut, and when disengaged allows the door to shut fully and lock. This device allows the door to be ready in a locked position in the event that a lockdown was necessary.

Lockdown (drill) - Drills practiced at Ridgeview High School at least once a year to simulate situations and procedures for locking campus doors and reducing visibility from outside intruders.

Q- Online system for student attendance, grades, and student behavior records used in Rockland Unified School District.

Research Questions

This study focused on researching the effect of Ridgeview High School's school safety measures. The following questions were explored:

1. How do school safety measures like lockdown drills, active shooter trainings, "Lock Blok" door devices, and shooting range demonstrations affect RHS (Ridgeview High School) teacher perceptions of safety on campus?
2. What can RHS school administration and the RUSD (Rockland Unified School District) do to make staff feel safer on campus (both formally and informally)?

Theoretical Framework

The issue of school safety and the importance of maintaining and nurturing teacher's perceptions of safety on a school's campus can be studied and supported through the organizational framework of Bolman and Deal (2008). As part of their analysis of the human resources frame in studying organizations, they address the importance of meeting a staff's basic needs, citing Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs, with safety being one of the most important priorities (Bolman & Deal, 2008, pp. 124-125). Bolman and Deal discuss this theory and predict that without the fulfillment of this basic need, employees will be unable to become productive members of their workplace.

Limitations/Delimitations

The study's major limitation was the small group of available participants, since only twelve teachers volunteered for this study. Also, participants were all teachers at the same school site so it is difficult to determine whether these results are representative of teacher perceptions relative to similar school sites or based on their experiences at the same site. The data presented in this study does not attempt to prove what does and does not work when implementing school

safety measures at all schools. Because it is difficult to determine whether or not school safety measures have been effective in preventing violent and rare incidents like mass shootings, the data serves to instead shed some light as to whether school safety measures have been effective in improving teacher perceptions of safety at Ridgeview High School. The decision to interview teachers at only one school site was made in order to focus the study on the teacher experiences at this school site, and make the study more practical for the researcher given time restrictions.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

In the 2009-2010 school year, 85 percent of public schools reported at least one crime taking place on school grounds, resulting in a total of 1.9 million crimes. Further, 74 percent of these same schools reported one or more incidents of *violent* crime on school campuses (Robers, Zhang, Truman, & Snyder, 2012). Issues of safety seem to be an inescapable part of life for the public at large, and evidently for schools as well. Both in the general public and within the scope of school settings, mass shootings take center stage as one of the most shocking and anxiety causing examples of violent crimes. It seems that for every shooting in a public place (shopping centers, movie theaters, etc.), there is an equally tragic school shooting. There are large volumes of research on implemented safety measures, not only as a result of high profile mass shootings at schools such as Columbine High School in 1999 and Sandy Hook Elementary in 2012, but also as a means of documenting the steps that schools have taken in order to reduce more common, lower profile, incidents of crime at schools.

For this study, school safety measures were researched and grouped into the following categories in order to better inform the study:

1. Problems of School Safety
2. School Safety Measures
3. Student Perceptions of School Safety
4. Teacher Perceptions of School Safety

Review Procedure

A preliminary literature search was performed through the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) database at California State University, Channel Islands. The following keywords were used:

1. School Safety, Measures
2. School Safety, Perceptions
3. School Safety, Procedures
4. Columbine

Problems of School Safety

After analyzing the existing quantitative and qualitative research on crimes and violent incidents at school, it is helpful to break these statistics into the major safety problems faced by schools. In a study which analyzed incidents reported to law enforcement authorities, the main categories were (in number of reported incidents from high to low): serious violence and attacks, minor violent incidents, other school-related, property theft, vandalism, illegal drugs, intimidation/bullying, weapons, and finally alcohol (Hernandez, Floden, & Bosworth, 2010). Public awareness seems to be heightened in relation to deadly violence in schools which is often the result of isolated gun-related violence, though the frequency of these incidents is much lower than other types of crimes committed on school campuses. Bullying and social intimidation have recently been publicized broadly in the media. This focus on bullying and social intimidation illustrates the exploration of the root of school problems (classism, racism, jealousy, etc.) rather than the outcome (violent incidents, acting out), as they are analyzed as part of prevention strategies. In research on safety perceptions of educators and students, Bakioglu

and Geyin (2009) found that problems that affect safety at school can further be grouped into three categories: Physical (weapons), Social (violence among students, feeling insecure at school), and Psychological (harassment of teachers).

School Safety Measures

While responses to school violence, and resulting prevention efforts, may vary due to local school district policies, financial constraints, and perceived need, most schools employ some of the same basic measures and procedures for school safety (Robers, Zhang, Truman, & Snyder, 2012). Many of these procedures were already in place before the recent increase in highly publicized deadly school shootings, but some have been implemented as an attempt to prevent subsequent attacks. As Jane Hammond, Superintendent of Jefferson County Schools during the Columbine mass shooting, stated, one of the most agreed upon lessons learned from that tragedy was that safety includes prevention, intervention and response (2009). According to Robers, et al. (2012), in the ten years following the Columbine High School tragedy, there was a marked increase in school safety measures in United States public schools. Specifically, controlled access to school *buildings* during school hours increased from 75 to 92 percent of all schools, controlled access to school *grounds* during school hours increased from 34 to 46 percent, faculty required to wear identification badges increased from 25 to 63 percent, the use of security cameras increased from 19 to 61 percent, the provision of telephones in most classrooms increased from 45 to 74 percent, and the requirement of school uniforms increased from 12 to 19 percent (Robers, Zhang, Truman & Snyder, 2012).

According to Robers, et al. (2012), in the 2009-2010 school year, schools overwhelmingly reported using sign-in procedures for visitors, with 99 percent of schools

reporting this security measure. In the same school year, several technology based measures were overwhelmingly reported by schools. These measures include the use of an electronic notification system for schoolwide emergencies (63 percent), limiting access to social networking sites from school computers (93 percent), and prohibiting use of cell phones and text messaging devices during school hours (91 percent). Of the school safety measures reported, certain measures were reported more by Middle and High Schools than by primary schools. These measures include drug testing for athletes, random dog sniffs for drug detection, and random sweeps for contraband (Robers, Zhang, Truman & Snyder, 2012). Neiman and the NCES (2011) found that schools also reported preparedness for crisis situations through the use of written and rehearsed plans. Ninety four percent of all schools reported having a written plan for bomb threats or incidents, while 58 percent of suburban schools drilled students on procedures for reacting to a school shooting. This focus on preparedness was not only for more commonplace school campus incidents, but also violent incidents which are less likely to occur statistically. This shows a commitment by school districts not only to prepare for more life threatening events but also a commitment to assuage fears and insecurity among the entire school community.

Geographic setting is a variable that accounts for differences in the types of security measures implemented in different schools. Shelton, et al. (2009) found that urban schools are more likely to use metal detectors (16 percent versus 3 percent in suburban and rural schools), have fencing around school grounds (30 percent versus 12 percent in suburban and rural schools), and the use of security guards (60 percent versus 23 percent for suburban and rural schools). Additionally, schools over 30 years old are less likely to use more technologically advanced school safety measures that require an updated infrastructure, such as security cameras

and fire sprinklers (Shelton, Owens, & Song, 2009). Not surprisingly, one of the highest reported factors affecting a school's ability to provide enhanced security measures was insufficient funds, reported by 25 percent of public schools (Neiman & NCES, 2011).

Among the schools that have implemented some safety measures, there have been mixed results. Heinen, et al. (2007) studied the effects of the "School Action for Emergencies" (SAFE) Project. Harrison County Public Schools in West Virginia installed a video surveillance system funded by federal monies through the SAFE Project. This project was a way to effectively coordinate responses from law enforcement officials, school personnel, and the County Bureau of Emergency Services by making security camera images available instantly through high speed communication. As a result of this project, cameras were viewed as an effective means of preventing misbehavior and also an aid in establishing disciplinary procedures for students after the fact. Although there were positive outcomes, the study also revealed that the cameras were being used as a replacement for "people power" and were not perceived to be as effective as simply increasing school personnel presence. Poor picture quality made it difficult to identify students and lack of consistent surveillance of the video feed caused a slow reaction to incidents (Heinen, Webb-Dempsey, Moore, McClellan, & Friebe, 2007).

A zero tolerance policy in Ontario, Canada through the "Safe Schools Act of 2001" mandated a tougher discipline approach towards behavior and safety concerns. While Daniel and Bondy (2008) found that participants responded favorably to the new policy due to its establishment of clear guidelines and education about what was acceptable and unacceptable behavior in schools, there was also some concern that this policy did not deter the actions of certain students. Specifically, this approach did not have an effect on students acting out due to external social, socio-economic, psychological, and behavior issues because they were "unable to

foresee the consequences of their actions prior to acting out” (Daniel and Bondy, 2008, pp. 9). Tanner (2009) explored some unintended consequences of school safety measures, namely mandatory uniforms. Tanner reminds us that this safety measure ostensibly seems like a sound policy as a way to easily identify unwanted intruders on school campuses, but may really just be an expression of our society’s post-Columbine “moral panic” as a response to what is truly an unlikely and rare event. He argues that measures like increasing police presence on school campuses may make students view an otherwise safe educational setting as a potential crime scene (Tanner, 2009, pp. 14).

Gun safety issues are still some of the most controversial topics of debate, both in and out of school settings. Some schools have taken steps to train teachers on how to use guns in order to receive certification to carry concealed weapons on campus (Shah, 2013), while the issue of teaching gun safety in schools has also been explored. Obeng (2010) concluded that teachers in the Midwest favored the teaching of gun safety to children (62 percent of respondents), though a majority of teachers felt it was the place of trained law enforcement or military personnel, and not school teachers, to actually teach children about gun safety.

Among college campuses the response to the threat of gun violence, namely as a result of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University mass shooting in 2007, has also brought the firearms debate onto campuses of higher education. In 2011, twenty three state legislatures considered bills to permit the carrying of firearms at their public college campuses, and at least 6 states already allowed weapons on college grounds, showing that even on campuses comprised wholly of adults, there is debate about the extent of permissible gun use and further, debate about the correct course of action in the face of unspeakable and unprecedented tragedy (Birnbaum, 2012).

Student Perceptions of School Safety

While it may be difficult to measure the effectiveness of safety measures in actually preventing school shootings and other violent incidents at schools, studies have shown that these measures can have a positive effect on students' perceptions of safety at school. A decrease from 12 to 4 percent in students reporting being afraid of attack or harm from school was reported from 1995-2009, no doubt due to an increase in school safety measures (Robers, Zhang, Truman, & Snyder, 2012). The school safety strategies that influence students' feelings of safety are not always obvious physical measures like security cameras or police presence. Mooij (2012) revealed that school leaders can also implement effective educational, instructional, and social behavior strategies. These strategies are evident through attention to student involvement in school, required teaching qualities of teachers, and monitoring of adequate student academic progress (Mooij, 2012).

Of the variables studied by Mooij (2012), a higher level of educational attainment was found to influence student feelings of safety in all settings, not just school settings. Age was also an important factor, as younger children tended to feel safer in the home than older students, and older children had higher feelings of safety at school than younger children. Another conclusion of Mooij's study was that children whose classmates were perceived to possess drugs or weapons in school tended to feel less safe at school. Also, larger school size contributed to a decrease in feelings of safety. Even strategies such as anti-truant policies were found to have a positive effect on students' feelings of safety at school (Mooij, 2012). In a study by Bosworth, Ford, and Hernandez (2011), the correlation between school size and feelings of safety was confirmed. In 9 of 11 schools surveyed in their study, neither faculty nor staff voiced any overwhelming safety concerns. The traits identified by both students and staff as the most important factors

influencing their feelings of school safety were physical characteristics and safety features of schools, organization and school discipline, and school staffing and relationships. Interestingly, safety features like security cameras and increased faculty presence were more important to students' feelings of safety than to faculty feelings of safety. Both students and faculty agreed that procedures for timely responses to threats improved their feelings of safety. Among students and faculty, agreement was highest on weapons, illegal drugs, and vandalism being a major school safety concern (Bosworth, Ford, Hernandez, 2011). In another study by Hernandez, Floden, and Bosworth (2010), researchers found that teachers' and students' perceptions of criminal activity at school do not match law enforcement reports, with students and teachers reporting more significant problems with weapons and illegal drugs than actually reported to law enforcement (pp. 367-368).

The effects of participation by children in crisis drill training are worth studying due to that fact that these have been so widely implemented at schools. Particularly, the possibility of increased anxiety due to these drills, and due to the mention of potential violent acts at school, are a risk worth noting. Zhe and Nickerson (2007) studied the effects of intruder crisis training drills on children's knowledge, anxiety and perceptions of safety. The intruder drill they used was a form of a lockdown drill, and they used a lesson plan to teach the steps and then actually performed a practice drill. As a result of this study, it was concluded that this training had a positive effect on knowledge acquisition, as children knew how to react to a crisis situation, while not increasing anxiety over that of the control group. The key in this study was the implementation of a drill that was developmentally appropriate, coupled with making it clear that it was a drill and not a true crisis event (2007).

Teacher Perceptions of School Safety

Teacher perceptions of safety are often similar to student perceptions of safety. For example, the teachers who participated in the “SAFE” project in West Virginia (where security camera images were captured instantly through high speed communication) agreed that increased surveillance was beneficial. Some teachers felt an alleviation of the burden carried by staff members to be the “eyes and ears” on campus. These teachers reported a sense of this being a more collaborative effort, and appreciated the support. On the other hand, some teachers reported surveillance images to be unreliable and difficult to interpret due to quality of images and the large crowds of students captured in these images. These teachers also felt that video surveillance should not replace human intervention. Teachers’ fears centered on the fact that many felt isolated in their classrooms, and unprotected in the case of a crisis inside the classroom. Also, teachers criticized the fact that emergency drills were often conducted in predictable settings and situations, while times and places such as lunch time, before school, after school, involving the maneuvering of large crowds, were not targeted by these drills (Heinen, Webb-Dempsey, Moore, McClellan, & Friebe, 2007).

Another way in which teacher perceptions of safety differ from students’ perceptions of safety is in their awareness of the role of school administration in affecting safety. Bosworth, et al. (2011) found that teachers are more apt to blame school administration for their lack of perceived safety (citing lack of support from administration and lack of follow-through in some instances), and also credit administration when they feel more safe and secure (citing clearer policies and increased follow-through from administration). Teachers also differ from students in their view of property theft on school grounds, with students citing concerns about stolen

electronics and teachers citing the need to lock desks and classrooms to avoid theft of purses and personal items (Bosworth, Ford, Hernandez, 2011).

Conclusions

Overwhelmingly, the existing research on school safety focuses on schools' reactions to perceived safety threats and the implementation of school safety measures. These studies have found that while teachers and students share similar perceptions of safety at school, they do not always share the same concerns. Even among teachers, there are differing viewpoints of the effectiveness of certain school safety measures like crisis drill training, video surveillance, gun safety education, and tougher discipline policies. While schools can effectively measure decreases in rates of more common crimes and less violent incidents at schools, it is much harder to gauge the impact on the tragically fatal mass shootings that make the news headlines and jolt the general public's collective consciousness. Since these events are much less frequent than more minor incidents, a better focus may be the effect that these measures have on feelings and perceptions of safety on the school community. While there has been some research on both students' and teachers' perceptions of safety, the research on teachers' perceptions is less common in databases like ERIC than research on students' perceptions. This study will add to existing research on teachers' perceptions of safety as a reaction to school safety measures. The study will address both existing safety measures, and those that seem to have been implemented in direct response to school shootings at Columbine High School in 1999, and at Sandy Hook Elementary in 2012.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Research Design

The design for this research utilized both descriptive methods and evaluation research methods. The participants for the study were current teachers, and the study yields qualitative data about their current perceptions of safety as a result of school safety measures. The study also includes an evaluative aspect in that the teacher interviews yield data about the perceived results of school safety measures that have been implemented thus far, with recommendations from teachers about possible improvements.

Setting of the Study

Participants. Twelve teachers at Ridgeview High School were interviewed over the span of three weeks in the spring of 2014. Data was collected from teachers who served in several different departments, including Social Science, Special Education, World Languages, Mathematics, Health, Science, English, and Music. These teachers represent a range of ages (forty to over sixty years old) and overall teaching experience ranging from six to over thirty years of experience. These teachers have been employed in their positions at Ridgeview High School for several years, ranging from six to twenty years.

School Description. Ridgeview High School is located in a small suburban town near Los Angeles, in Southern California. Ridgeview High School is a high school of approximately 2,550 students in the Rockland Unified School District, serving students from grades 9-12. Ridgeview High School was honored as a California Distinguished School and a 2006 “No Child Left Behind Blue Ribbon School of Excellence”. RHS is the only high school in the district to offer a

block schedule. The school is surrounded by lower, middle and upper class neighborhoods. The school boasts an International Baccalaureate program, and draws an increasing number of out-of-district students commuting from surrounding areas (currently about 400 students from outside the residence boundaries for RHS). The school serves a full range of families from differing socioeconomic backgrounds- first generation immigrant to highly educated upper class. The school proudly boasts that approximately 95% of RHS graduates enter colleges and universities. At RHS, about 19% of students are identified as Hispanic, 67% White, 8% Asian, 3% African American, and 1% American Indian. RHS has an expansive and nicely maintained campus complete with a performing arts center, computer labs, stadium, and various sports fields. The school has not experienced any major school safety incidents, but has experienced two bomb threats with resulting all-school evacuations in the last six years.

Data Collection

Interview Protocol. A series of interview questions were developed as a basis for prompting both specific and open-ended responses from interviewees. The survey was sent to participants via email two weeks prior to the interviews to ensure that interviewees were able to review the questions beforehand and determine whether they were comfortable answering the questions. The interviews took no longer than ten minutes, although an hour was allotted for each interview. Audio recording was used during all but one of the interviews, when consent was obtained, and data was retrieved from audio recordings through transcription. One interview was transcribed as the interviewee spoke, as the participant declined to provide consent for audio recording. The interviewer only asked questions from the prepared list, and all interviewees were asked the same ten questions. Only the responses to these ten questions were recorded and included in the study.

Interviews were conducted during the participant's personal time, making accommodations to what was most convenient for them. Some participants preferred that the interview take place before school, others during their lunch break, and still others wanted to participate in the interview after the school day had ended. The interviews lasted approximately 5-10 minutes.

Sample Selection. The interview opportunity was made available to all teachers at Ridgeview High School through an email invitation to participate. In addition, separate email invitations were sent to three teachers who participated in a shooting range demonstration organized by the school principal and presented by the local police department. The shooting range demonstration took place in October 2013, and was open to all Ridgeview High School staff members. The purpose of the demonstration was to expose staff members to the sound of gunshots, so that they could be more accurately and easily identified by staff members who had not heard gunshots before. Only three teachers participated in this demonstration, so these teachers received an additional invitation to participate in the study due to their experience in this unique demonstration. One teacher from the shooting range group volunteered for the study, and eleven teachers from the general population of teachers volunteered as well.

Procedures for Human Subject Protection. The researcher obtained authorization from the CSUCI Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct this study involving human subjects before data collection began, and followed IRB procedures to ensure their protection. Care was taken to ensure that the identities of all participants remained anonymous, namely through the use of pseudonyms. In addition, participants were given the prepared list of interview questions via email prior to the interview so that they could review the questions and decide whether they

were comfortable answering the interview questions. Participants were reminded that they could opt out of any questions, that participation was voluntary, and that audio recording would only take place with their consent. At the start of each interview, the researcher reviewed the nature of the study and reviewed the information contained in the consent form prior to signing.

Participants signed letters of consent which contain information regarding their voluntary participation, audio recording of the interview, their ability to discontinue participation with no bearing whatsoever on their position with the district or relationship with CSUCI, and contact information was provided for any questions regarding their rights as human subjects. Audio files and transcribed interviews were exported to a flash drive and stored in a locked cabinet.

Analysis

Once interviews were completed, data was transcribed and analyzed by the researcher to identify emerging themes. Data were examined for common themes and discrepancies among the responses of the twelve teachers. The research is intended to highlight the perceived positive effects of school safety measures as a means for identifying effective measures that should be in place at other comparable schools. Also, the research yields information about which measures are not perceived to be effective by teachers and provides suggestions for improvement at this site.

Chapter 4

Results

Responses from the teacher interviews revealed six overall themes, some of which echo existing research on teacher perceptions of school safety measures. The data collected from this study were the teacher responses to the ten question interview conducted with each teacher. Transcripts from these interviews are included in the Appendix. These results are significant because they represent teacher viewpoints from several different disciplines, and differing levels of teaching experience. Transcribed interviews were highlighted and color coded when themes appeared in more than one teacher interview, and then grouped under related themes. Common themes were: 1) importance of communication, 2) community influence on feelings of safety at school, 3) campus supervision, 4) importance of increased vigilance of mentally unstable students, 5) active shooter trainings and other drills/devices seen as beneficial, and 6) suggested improvements.

Importance of Communication

In analyzing and examining interview results, it became clear that teachers felt strongly about consistent communication from school administrators. Teachers cited that advance information and communication about safety procedures and concerns made them feel safer on campus. This practice, though not mentioned specifically in the questions posed to teachers during the interviews, was repeatedly mentioned by participants as an important element that contributed to their feelings of safety at Ridgeview High School. Of the twelve participants, five specifically mentioned communication from Ridgeview High School administrators as being one of the reasons that they felt safe at the school site, mostly in response to the question “Do you currently feel safe at Ridgeview High School? Why or Why not?”, but also in response to the

question “Which of the following has had the greatest impact on your perception of safety on campus: Active Shooter training, “Lock Blok” door device, Lockdown drills, Shooting Range demonstration, or other. Please explain why.” Mrs. Kennedy’s response to the latter question summarizes the rest of the concurring responses:

I think just the communication that we get from the administrators, them letting us know what to do or having an assembly or just through emails. For me that’s what makes me... I feel the safest when they’re aware of certain situations and they’re letting staff know what to do in case of a safety issue that happens to go on campus... basically just the communication is what makes me feel safe on campus.

The rest of the participants also mentioned the following opinions about Ridgeview High School’s administration: that it was perceived to be more active than most in trying to provide information in advance, that administration was very approachable, and that there was a deep trust in the school’s administration, which all contributed to the teachers feeling safer on campus.

Community influence on feelings of safety at school

Among several participants, there was agreement on the fact that the size and type of community surrounding Ridgeview High School was another major factor that influenced their feelings of safety on campus. There was consensus about the fact that Ridgeview High School is located in a small, relatively safe community that was mentioned as a reason for teachers feeling safe on campus. Another common sentiment that was shared by a few teachers was that they felt as safe at Ridgeview High School as they would “anywhere else (in city)”. Mrs. Lincoln expressed the following with regard to feeling safe because of Ridgeview’s small community:

I feel as safe here as I probably would you know, anyway I do feel safe here, it's a very small community... I feel safe probably because it's a small community where people really do know each other and have grown up together for a long period of time.

Despite feeling safe in the community, participants did not discount the possibility of outside intruders gaining access to the school and committing violent acts, though several did recognize that this would be a very rare, unlikely occurrence. Outside intruders were mentioned several times throughout the interviews as a response to the question "If you feel unsafe on campus, what do you feel is the biggest threat to campus safety?" In fact, five of the twelve participants mentioned outside intruders as a threat to campus safety.

Campus Supervision

Campus supervision was another commonly mentioned factor in regards to feeling safe on campus. Teachers expressed the importance of active campus supervision, both for student discipline issues and to maintain better vigilance to prevent outside intruders from gaining access to the school. Three of the twelve participants said that they would appreciate more active vigilance on the part of campus supervisors. Mrs. Taft, for example, stated: "I think they should do more active patrolling around campus, for example getting out of their carts and walking around more upstairs, out in parking lots."

The locking of the school's perimeter gates was mentioned several times as an issue that needed improvement. This is in some ways related to the role of campus supervisors, but also to the school's policy on the locking of the gates and especially consistency in locking the gates. Three of the twelve participants were concerned with the inconsistency of the locking of gates, stating that they were not all locked, or that they were not locked in a consistent manner, causing them to feel unsafe on campus. Mr. Monroe provided a response that summarized the answers of

the three participants concerned with this inconsistency: “ Side gates are not truly locked often and just appear locked. Campus is not secure if someone really wanted to get on campus.” Mrs. Coolidge, however, noted an improvement in the locking of the gates on a different side of the campus. When asked what has had the greatest impact on her perception of safety at Ridgeview High School, she responded:

When I first started at Ridgeview for the first two years, the gates were always locked, you would’ve had to call to drive around on the service road but then for a long time anybody could just drive along the service road at any point in time and now the fact that they have a campus supervisor back... that stands at the gate only allowing teachers to come in the back.

Importance of increased vigilance of mentally unstable students

Threats perceived by participants were not limited to outside intruders, since several teachers mentioned mentally unstable students as a perceived threat on campus. Seven of the twelve participants mentioned either mentally unstable students specifically, or violent students as the biggest threat to campus safety. Mrs. Lincoln gave an answer that was representative of the sentiment shared by several teachers:

I guess I don’t feel unsafe but if I were to worry about something, would be students who are maybe going through things that you don’t know they’re going through, and so like that student, if they’re not feeling emotionally safe or if they’re not mentally stable, that’s the part you don’t always get a read on. So to me, in this community, that’s the only thing that potentially could happen, because it has happened in other places. Obviously the instances are rare, that doesn’t mean that it can’t happen, so that’s the only thing I could potentially, I ever think about.

Violent students were also mentioned, both students with a history of violence and also the possibility of a student committing a seemingly random act of violence. California Education Code includes a provision, section 49079, which requires that teachers receive notification of their students' prior violent or illegal behavior resulting in disciplinary action (California Department of Education, 2014). Mrs. McKinley expressed wariness in dealing with students who have been violent in the past, a sentiment shared by one other participant. Mrs. McKinley stated:

I'm not always sure about the students that have, I call them the "gavel kids", when you look on the (electronic) roster they have the gavel (icon), that sometimes a little more background could be important. You know kids who have had physical altercations in the classroom or kids with ankle bracelets, a little more information on some of those kids, might be better.

Mrs. Washington expressed a fear of a more random type of violence from students, although she realized that this was not a more significant risk than any others that she might encounter outside of school. She cited a recent news story about a Math teacher who was attacked by a student and killed while staying after hours to provide additional tutoring. She also mentioned that this was no more of a risk than the risk she encounters every day while simply commuting to work.

A third type of risk from students on campus was identified by Mrs. McKinley, who expressed a fear of dealing with students with disabilities with a propensity to become physical: "I used to deal with a population of high school students with autism, and some of them were...very physical. To me that was my biggest threat to campus safety, were the kids in my own classroom."

Active Shooter trainings and other drills/devices seen as beneficial

The Lock blok device was seen as a generally beneficial measure. Participants appreciated the convenience provided by the Lock Blok device, which allows the classroom door's lock to engage instantly with a quick slide of the device, avoiding the issue of finding keys in order to be able to lock the door at a moment's notice. Mrs. Lincoln stated:

I do actually like the lock blok, I mean we could always unlock the door before, like you could lock or unlock from the inside, but what if I couldn't get there in time, and so now any student or substitute or anybody could easily flick it and it would like close it, and the door just closes automatically so I actually do like the Lock Blok.

The greatest consensus was found in teachers' positive reactions to Ridgeview High School's active shooter training. As part of this training, Ridgeview's school resource officer reviewed procedures to be followed in the case of a shooter on campus. Ten out of the twelve respondents mentioned the active shooter training as the measure that had the greatest impact on their perception of safety at school, or at least as a beneficial measure which improved their feelings of safety on campus. Overwhelmingly, teachers cited the feeling of preparedness that resulted from the active shooter training, and also the opportunity to think ahead and plan their response to an active shooter. Mrs. Lincoln's response was representative of several other responses in her discussion of how the active shooter training helped her to plan ahead:

Active shooter training... it's the thing that made me think about lock blok devices, like I wouldn't have thought about it if I didn't go through the active shooter training, and so I think to me that's been the biggest thing, is just looking at a situation as... okay if this happened here, what would you do? So you start mentally going through that list in your

head: where could students hide in your room, or what could you do to try to save yourself?

The involvement of law enforcement officials in the active shooter training proved to be a significant factor in the training's success with teachers, as evidenced by some of the teachers' responses. When asked which school safety measure had the greatest impact on their perception of safety on campus, Mrs. Washington stated:

I think the active shooter training, I think to have like officials who are really trained to deal with that kind of thing come in and talk to us about what we should do or how we should prepare is probably the best thing. But I think it should be reviewed more often.

Mr. Monroe stated his opinion on this same question in a much more succinct way:

“Active Shooter training. Cop explaining made it more real.”

Lockdown drills were not seen as the most effective school safety measure by all teachers, either due to a perceived infrequency in the implementation of the drills, or the lack of student buy-in. Some teachers did feel, however, that lockdown drills were a reflection of safety on campus. Mr. Carter stated: “Safety drills, fire drills, lockdown drills... seem to go very smoothly, pretty quickly. The climate on campus feels confident and calm as we're going through this, and organized.”

Other teachers, like Mrs. Coolidge, felt that an increase in drills won't necessarily help because of the unpredictable nature of school shootings: “... You can practice things but until something happens you don't know how you are going to actually react or what policies are going to be brought in to really work.”

Suggested improvements

Participants were very forthcoming with suggestions for improvements throughout the interviews, but especially in response to the final interview question, “Is there anything that school administration and/or RUSD could do to make you feel safer as teacher on campus?” As previously mentioned in other responses, some teachers suggested that the frequency of trainings like the active shooter training and the lockdown drills should be increased in order to be most effective. Also, communication about safety issues from school administration was seen as important, and something that needed to be maintained all year, as evidenced by Mrs. Kennedy’s suggestion:

I think just keep the level of communication open, and constant and I think just continual reminders because maybe if they tell us something in the Fall, and by Spring with everything going on I’ve probably forgotten it by then, even if they give it to me in email or in paper format, I’ve probably tucked it away somewhere and by Spring I’ve probably forgotten what they’ve told us, so I think just the constant communication and reminders for me would be more helpful.

The issue of adequate lighting was mentioned as an area for improvement by two teachers, both of whom teach on the outer limits of the campus. Mrs. Kennedy stated: “I think just in the Winter time it gets dark early or it’s light later and so sometimes when you walk up to the bathroom, that hallway upstairs is dark, so that’s the only part I get scared about, there’s not enough lighting during the Winter.” Also, Mrs. Washington commented on insufficient lighting during early morning hours: “Well, I get here early in the morning and sometimes it’s really dark when I get onto campus.”

Two of the participants suggested further trainings by the school and school district to respond to specific concerns they had. Mr. Lyndon expressed a concern with the lack of training on what to do with students during a lockdown situation:

...Some training on how to handle the kids would help a lot, because we'll be dealing with anywhere from 20 to 40 crazy teenagers who are worried for their lives and it's good to have all these other steps and measures in place in terms of knowing exactly what to do but once you get the door locked, then what? That will be very helpful, going to that next step.

Mrs. Lincoln suggested further training for students to help them take a more active role, and take more responsibility, in preventing the kinds of mental breakdowns that could lead their peers to become violent:

That extra component of, as students... what are those signs to look at, in terms of an extension of bullying, like those types of things could lead to somebody being so upset so these are signals you see... A presentation where somebody kind of does that in a sensitive way for this age group that makes them kind of look at the situation, because they're our eyes and ears... having extra eyes and ears never really hurts I guess.

Several teachers cautioned against taking on too many school safety measures, which could in turn change the nature of schools. These teachers expressed a reluctance to turn public schools into overly vigilant, militarized environments. Three of the four male participants expressed this concern in their interview responses. Mr. Lyndon stated: " I think the biggest threat to any campus safety is it's just so open and available, on the other hand to sort of fence everything in and shut everything down would certainly change the environment. It's hard to decide." When asked if there was anything that school administration or RUSD could do to make

him feel safer as a teacher on campus, Mr. Carter explained: “That’s probably a slippery slope and at some point I think there’s a balance between using our time efficiently so I think we’re probably doing as much as we need to be doing to be preparing people.” In his response when asked if the measures implemented by school administration and/or RUSD made him feel safer at school, Mr. Ford answered: “Those are appropriate responses and I think it’s the best we can really do under the circumstances without going to a sort of militarized environment and it’s just a kind of a calculated risk we take in this society.”

The agreement among teachers on the school safety measures that most affect their feelings of safety on campus is indicative of the effectiveness of these measures. Although it is difficult to evaluate whether these measures have actually prevented more school shootings, measures like active shooter training, frequent communication from administration, campus supervision, and increased vigilance of mentally unstable or violent students are viewed as positive measures overall.

Chapter 5

Discussion and Conclusions

The common themes revealed through the teacher interviews express some concurrence with existing data on teacher perceptions of school safety. The common themes also provide some answers to my two research questions: How do school safety measures like lockdown drills, active shooter trainings, “Lock Blok” door devices, and shooting range demonstrations affect RHS teacher perceptions of safety on campus? and What can RHS school administration and the RUSD do to make staff feel safer on campus? The common themes revealed through this study were: 1) importance of communication, 2) community influence on feelings of safety at school, 3) campus supervision, 4) importance of increased vigilance of mentally unstable students, 5) active shooter trainings and other drills/devices seen as beneficial, and 6) suggested improvements. Of these, four themes are supported in existing research on school safety: importance of communication, community influence on feelings of safety at school, active shooter trainings and other drills/devices seen as beneficial, and suggested improvements (related to settings and school climate). The responses given by Ridgeview teachers focused more on the type of campus supervision and specific practices, rather than the mere existence of campus supervisors, which is a topic that has not been explored extensively in existing research on school safety. Also, increased vigilance of mentally unstable or violent students in relation to teacher perceptions of safety may still be a newer research area that has not yet been extensively explored. The four themes supported by existing research will be discussed in greater detail in the following paragraphs.

Importance of communication

The teachers who participated in this study highlighted the importance of reliable communication with school administration as a key factor in their feelings of safety and security on campus. In the case of Ridgeview High School, teachers credit school administration with contributing to and ensuring their perceived sense of safety on campus. Bosworth, Ford and Hernandez (2011) found that while teachers, more so than students, are likely to credit administration when they feel safe, they are also apt to blame administration when they feel unsafe. Ridgeview teachers were more likely to credit administration as the reason they felt safe, due to communication, and trainings provided by administration, although they also suggested changes in procedures such as the locking of the gates. Teachers at Ridgeview seemed much more forthcoming in their praise of administration when mentioning strengths in communication and training, but did not name administration specifically when criticizing gate locking procedures. Teachers were more likely to suggest improvements in practices of school personnel, namely campus supervisors, rather than blaming administration directly for lack of consistency in gate locking procedures and campus supervisors' surveillance practices. It seems that these areas of improvement are directly related to school administration's communication, albeit communication with classified personnel (on appropriate safety procedures) and not with teachers.

Community influence on feelings of safety at school

Teachers' responses also supported existing research on school size and type of community as key factors that influence perceptions of safety. Bakioglu and Geyin (2009) and Bosworth, Ford and Hernandez (2011) found that both students and teachers felt less safe as school size increased. Teachers at Ridgeview High School credited the small size of the school

and the small size of the community as reasons for feeling safe on campus. While Ridgeview's school size of 2,500 students may be large by national standards, the small and close knit community may contribute to the feeling that Ridgeview is a "small" school. Teachers did, however, remain cognizant of the risks that are present on any campus since recent mass shootings appear to be random, and unpredictable, acts of violence in small suburban middle class towns such as Ridgeview.

Active shooter trainings and other drills/devices seen as beneficial

Bosworth, Ford, and Hernandez (2011) found that both students and staff members listed physical characteristics and safety features, organization and school discipline, and school staffing and relationships as the most important factors influencing their feelings of safety at school. Teachers at Ridgeview did not mention school staff or relationships specifically, though one teacher did mention her trust in school administration as a reason for feeling safe. Most teachers at Ridgeview did mention safety measures related to physical characteristics and organization like the Lock blok device, active shooter trainings, and lockdown procedures as beneficial school safety measures, echoing existing research.

Suggested improvements (settings and school climate)

Two Ridgeview teachers expressed viewpoints that concurred with existing research which states that many teachers are critical of the fact that emergency drills are normally conducted in predictable settings, while less predictable and less manageable settings like lunch time and after school (with larger crowds) are not addressed (Heinen, Webb-Dempsey, Moore, McClellan, & Friebe, 2007). Ridgeview teachers discussed both the next steps that are required in trainings in order to address how to handle large crowds, and also mentioned the fact that

lockdown drills are often rigid, and not close to the reality that may present itself during an unpredictable active shooter situation.

Most interesting was the view expressed by three of the teachers regarding a reluctance to place too much of an emphasis on school safety measures at the expense of the learning environment and focus on education rather than safety. Echoing the research conducted by Tanner (2009), these teachers cautioned against an overly militarized structure and presence on school campuses which could divert the focus of schools from welcoming learning centers to, as Tanner explained, viewing the school campus as a potential crime scene. Teachers mentioned phrases like “militarized”, “slippery slope” and “fenced in” as they discussed their reluctance to over prepare for potential violent incidents that are decidedly rare and unlikely. This viewpoint is indicative of the struggle to find a balance between a naïve, “can’t happen here” mentality and an overbearing focus on hyper vigilance that would, at the extreme end, cause the hiring of more security personnel than teachers on school campuses.

Campus Supervision and Importance of increased vigilance of mentally unstable students

Campus supervision, or the quality of supervision, was mentioned by a few Ridgeview teachers as an area for improvement. The area of campus supervision can be categorized under increased security as mentioned in existing research (Shelton, Owens, & Song, 2009) , but the issue of quality or the procedures followed by campus supervisors in relation to increasing perceptions of safety is not specifically mentioned in existing research. It would be helpful to further explore protocols for school surveillance, and implement standard procedures to be undertaken by campus supervisors so that teachers and students can perceive that a more active role is being taken on by campus supervisors. Of course, the opinions of a few teachers on a campus of 2500 students are by no means indicative of everything that campus supervisors do,

both visibly and behind the scenes, but a more active visible role would certainly alleviate some of the concerns expressed by Ridgeview teachers. School districts could take added measures to train campus supervisors in more effective school surveillance practices as well, specifically based on input from staff on each site so that site-specific concerns could be addressed.

The importance of increasing vigilance of mentally unstable or potentially violent students was also mentioned as an area of improvement. There are already some ways, such as behavior alerts through “Q”, the online system for student attendance, grades, and student behavior records used in Rockland Unified School District. These behavior alerts are accessible to teachers but these measures can be expanded upon in order to include students who are mentally unstable. There could be increased communication from school administration in that regard, in addition to further training on how to identify and help these students. The issue of mentally unstable students and potentially violent students has not been addressed at length in existing research on school safety perceptions related to mass school shootings, other than the brief mention of fear of violence at the hand of other students. For example, Bakioglu and Geyin (2009) mentioned social problems, such as violence among students, and feeling insecure at school, as one of the main categories of problems that affect school safety. Further exploration of prevention of violent school incidents would undoubtedly have to include studies on identifying at-risk students and proposing interventions or treatment in order to help these students before they pose a threat.

Implications for practice and/or policy

Teacher responses in this study revealed that active shooter trainings, lockdown drills, and the lock blok door device do indeed improve teacher perceptions of safety on campus. In addition to more frequent trainings, school districts should address the issue of communication

with their school administrators, since this study showed that reliable communication from school site administrators is seen as a key factor in increased perceptions of school safety by teachers. As mentioned previously, some other areas for schools and school districts to explore are additional trainings, possibly based on teacher interest, in order to address some of the lingering doubts or issues related to school safety. Educational policy, specifically related to universal school safety measures, can be informed by the results of this study and further research on this topic. Again, since it is very difficult to determine whether school safety measures actually deter mass school shootings, soliciting input from teachers and staff members on which measures increased their perceptions of school safety is an excellent place to start. Staff perceptions of safety can go a long way in improving the climate and culture of a school, directly and indirectly improving school safety.

Future Research

Further research on school safety measures that increase perceptions of safety should include various types of schools, both different grade levels (elementary, middle, high school, higher education) and different types of communities (rural, suburban, urban). These studies should reveal which school safety measures are perceived as beneficial and appropriate by most teachers so that they can then be universally implemented by school districts. It would be interesting to further poll teachers in order to get some feedback on possible topics for further trainings, in addition to periodic review of active shooter trainings and lockdown procedures. Future research on this topic should ideally also include the viewpoints of students and also school administration and classified personnel in order to get a clearer and more representative picture of which school safety measures should be emphasized and implemented district-wide.

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Appendix

Project: School Safety Measures and Their Effect on Teachers' Perceptions of Safety

Proposed Draft of Interview Questions

1. Please provide your first and last name, your school name and your role in your school.
2. Please provide your age and how many years you have worked as a teacher at Ridgeview High School vs. total years of teaching experience.
3. Do you currently feel safe at Ridgeview High School? Why or why not?
4. If you feel unsafe on campus, what do you feel is the biggest threat to campus safety?
5. Have measures implemented by school administration and/or RUSD made you feel safer at school? (ex. Active Shooter training, "Lock Blok" door device, Lockdown drills, Shooting Range Demonstration, etc.)
6. Which of the following has had the greatest impact on your perception of safety on campus: Active Shooter training, "Lock Blok" door device, Lockdown drills, Shooting Range Demonstration, or other. Please explain why.
7. Did you participate in the Shooting Range Demonstration in October 2013? Why or why not?
8. Have you ever heard a gunshot before? Do you think you would recognize a gunshot if you heard it?
9. If you participated in the Shooting Range Demonstration, do you feel safer after the demonstration?
10. Is there anything that school administration and/or RUSD could do to make you feel safer as a teacher on campus?