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The Policy and the Principal:

Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment and the Role of Effective Administrative

Leadership in Creating Safe Intermediate School Environments

in the Eastern School District of Prince Edward Island

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Abstract

In 1999, a new violence reduction policy called Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment was introduced to every school within the Eastern School District of Prince Edward Island. This study evaluated the methods by which the principals of the district's five largest intermediate schools have promoted this policy through awareness, implementation, and enforcement. Areas of review include an examination of effective policy characteristics such as communication, fairness, consistency, and meaningful consequence. This is complemented with a discussion of important principal strategies such as maintaining visibility, providing teacher support, communicating with stakeholders, and responding to students fairly and consistently. Information was collected through in-depth interviews, and the findings indicate a heightened awareness of policy objectives among administrators, an increased communication between principals, staff, students, and parents, and a practical interpretation of policy procedures in accordance with the factors surrounding each violent incident that occurs. The efficacy of the policy is questioned, the possibilities for future research are presented, and the educational implications of combining good policy and effective administrative strategies are discussed in detail.

The Policy and the Principal:

Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment and the Role of Effective Administrative

Leadership in Creating Safe Intermediate School Environments

in the Eastern School District of Prince Edward Island

Chapter 1 - Introduction

Background

In 1999, the Eastern School District of Prince Edward Island officially put into effect a new policy aimed at addressing and reducing the incidents of school violence by clearly identifying those specific acts which could be considered a violent interaction among students and staff members. For each violent act deemed applicable, there was now a step-by-step procedure that administrators, teachers, support staff, and students would be required to follow. Within this policy, the consequences for violent behavior are clearly outlined, the additional stakeholders, such as parents, counselors, and law enforcement are taken into consideration, and the need to ensure a safe and caring school environment is the primary goal. The Eastern School District was responding to the fact that school violence is an unfortunate but ever-present reality in today's educational settings. Rather than allow the situation to go unchecked, the policy, officially known as Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment (Appendix A), became the legal and binding standard to which students and staff must adhere. It represented a solid step forward in addressing the violence that is appearing in the school system on a more regular basis, and it allowed for a written and specific frame of reference which could be consulted in times of need.

However, as the research in this thesis reveals, a well-defined, relevant policy is only one necessary aspect of the overall solution to school violence. A policy is only as effective as those

who consistently and fairly apply it to each and every situation that occurs. For this to happen, there must also be strong administrative leadership as well. Research has shown that “the quality of site leadership, including the principal’s attitude, affects the campus climate perhaps more directly than any other single factor” (Stephens, 1995, p. 14). The principal, therefore, becomes the person to whom others look to set the tone for the entire school. His/her vision and leadership abilities become paramount to a school’s direction in many areas, including the implementation and enforcement of new district policies such as Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment.

It is the combination of these two related factors, policy and leadership, that form the foundation of this thesis. The research consistently demonstrates that the most successful implementation of any policy regarding school violence requires the support and consistent efforts of the principal (Hill and Hill, 1994). Because of the tremendous power of influence associated with the role, the principal is primarily responsible for establishing and enforcing the procedures outlined by the policy; for fostering an awareness of the policy among involved stakeholders (staff, students, parents, law enforcement, support staff); and for recognizing the strengths, weaknesses, and relevant, practical application of the policy for each violent incident that occurs (Wanat, 1996). Thus any policy implementation by the on-site administration which lacks these aforementioned criteria may not be very effective in reducing the incidents of school violence, and therefore may struggle to create and maintain a safe school environment for both students and staff members.

By using the Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment policy as a contextual and common reference point across a number of intermediate schools in the Eastern School District of Prince Edward Island, this researcher has examined the various methods by which selected

principals have implemented and promoted this policy since its inception in 1999. The intermediate or secondary schools had been chosen as the site of the research primarily because recent findings suggest that this is the area in which school violence is growing most rapidly among young people (Dusenbury and Falco, 1997; Rossman and Morley, 1996; MacAulay, 1995; Hill and Hill, 1994). The research was guided by a series of related questions designed to explore the role of leadership in relation to making Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment an effective school policy (Appendix F). These research questions were also structured to generate significant discussion on relevant issues such as the impact of the policy on applied school discipline, the strategies for promoting policy awareness, the potential for fair and consistent consequences, the role of the larger community, the influence and perception of a highly visible administrative presence within the school, and the recognition of particular strengths, weaknesses, and areas of improvement within the policy itself according to administrators.

Significance of Study

There is a growing body of evidence that seems to suggest that schools are no longer the safe havens they once were. The students and teachers of today live with the ever-present threat of serious violence erupting on their campuses, and this has redefined the educational setting in which people now find themselves (Noguera, 1995). Research suggests that while school violence is certainly not a new phenomenon, it has become much more intense and potentially more fatal in recent years (Rossman and Morley, 1996). Equally disturbing is the fact that school violence seems to be spreading into areas that were once considered immune or resistant to such tragic acts (Prothrow-Stith and Quaday, 1996). For decades it was believed that violence was a big city problem, confined to larger urban school environments (Hill and Hill, 1994), but this is no longer

the case. Recent history has shown that violence is not particularly selective; it does not differentiate between the urban or rural schools with any discernible pattern; and its perpetrators and victims came from all walks of life, sharing both similar and diverse backgrounds. It is a simple yet complex problem. Within any community, the school is constantly being affected by the events and evolution of the popular culture that surrounds it. As the world changes, attitudes and belief systems begin to value and/or devalue different ideals and modes of behavior (NASSP, 1995). The school is then faced with the enormous task of adjusting accordingly, while still upholding the mandate for providing a safe and caring environment in which education and social development are at the forefront. More simply stated, research studies suggest that violence is increasing in society, therefore it has the potential to increase in schools (Hill and Hill, 1994). Clearly this is detrimental to fostering a positive learning environment, and steps must be taken to ensure that this cannot and will not happen.

Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment is representative of these steps actually being put into action by the Eastern School District. The policy was formulated by the district and mandated in schools in 1999 as the new and expected response to school violence. Prior to this particular research study, however, there had not been any definitive analysis of the policy since its inception. This thesis and the findings it contains are deliberately designed to remedy this lack of information. This design included collecting data from the research literature that has ascertained the most effective, practical components of policy, and from the principals who are directly involved with the day-to-day application of the policy and its procedures at the intermediate school level. The guiding rationale centered on the recognition and analysis of successful methods of policy implementation which could be documented and which could then provide a standard of

action by which other interested principals or stakeholders may refer. This occurs in a timely fashion as more people are beginning to move into administrative positions within the Eastern School District, and they will be required to familiarize themselves with the existing policy and the most effective ways to promote and enforce it. The Eastern School District projects that within the next five years, there may be as many as fifteen new principals operating within the district. Therefore, the information gained from those principals who have practical experience with creating and maintaining safe schools according to Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment will be a valuable tool for those who are just embarking on their administrative careers (British Columbia School Trustees Association, 1999).

The significance of this knowledge in terms of potential improvements to on-site administrative practices cannot be overstated. Violence is a serious issue and must be dealt with firmly and consistently by the principals responsible for leading their schools. If given the chance to take root within a school, violence becomes even more difficult to eradicate completely (Dusenbury and Falco, 1997). Although an effective school climate may have been maintained by one administrator, this does not necessarily mean such a climate will continue upon his or her departure. It becomes necessary for the new principal to fully understand the most effective procedures for dealing with violent incidents if and when they occur. This thesis isolates, evaluates, and presents those procedures as clearly and as practically as possible. As well, it allows for some discussion regarding the existing Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment policy by those most directly responsible for its implementation. Eastern School District principals who are familiar with the procedures and applications as outlined by the policy obviously have formed some opinions as to its overall strengths and weaknesses. These opinions were collected

and analyzed in terms of relevance, practicality, potential, and perceived limitations. From this data, recommendations are made in regards to maintaining or perhaps changing areas of the policy in the future to allow it to become even more effective in dealing with school violence.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

A Violent School Reflects a Violent Society

The Society of Ills

There is little debate that violence has become an integral, if not frightening, component of society. It is present in many forms of popular culture, media, communications, and ironically even celebrations (Futrell, 1996). Research has shown that violence is becoming one of the preferred methods by which many young people attempt to resolve, and/or to exacerbate perceived problems in their interactions with others (Hill and Hill, 1994). "Youth violence is more likely "to involve weapons and gangs, to be more destructive, more virulent, and to involve more females and children of younger ages than ever before" (Day, Golench, MacDougall, Beals-Gonzalez, 1995, p. 11). There is much supposition as to the causes of this disturbing trend, but this does not seem to alleviate the concern. Some critics point the fingers of blame at the media and its persistent glorification of real or imagined violent incidents (Derksen and Strasburger, 1996). For instance, "Canadian research indicates that by the time children graduate from elementary school, each one will have witnessed in excess of 8000 murders and 100,000 miscellaneous acts of violence" (Day, Golench, and et al., 1995, p. 29) through television and movies. This concern is a valid one and may provide some foundation as to the mind-set of today's youth. Under such constant bombardment, children may naturally learn to see violence as a valuable way to solve conflict and may begin to choose the aggressive and decisive resolution of

any problem instead of employing a prosocial response that more humanly considers both sides of an issue. It would be difficult to accept the media's role as being the only influence responsible for the growth of violence and violent activity among school children, but this researcher will acknowledge that it is a symptom of a flawed society that has reshaped what we as people consider appropriate response choices.

On a larger and perhaps more telling scale, there is research that sees violence as the gradual but inevitable result of decay in the established and prominent social institutions that can no longer provide the security they once did (Coleman, 1996). The school system, as one of the most influential institutions concerning the development and socialization of young people, is certainly not immune to the deterioration that surrounds it. In fact, the school "has been increasingly losing its status as a sanctuary, a place set apart from larger societal concerns and traumas. Many now perceive the school as no longer off limits to secular conflicts" (Vestermarck Jr., 1996, p. 101). This is a disturbing perception and it has allowed violence to invade hallways and classrooms across the country. It is a rather simple relationship: "The schools are a microcosm of our society and are likely to mirror societal problems in most respects" (Huff and Trump, 1996, p. 501). Therefore, this crumbling of society at large, if you will, may be understandably connected to the increase of violence in our school system.

It is interesting to note, however, that despite what is happening in society there is also "growing sensitivity to and public abhorrence for violence" (Day, Golench, and et al., 1995, p. 21) in our schools. This has much to do with how the school and its role has been perceived for decades. It is an ironic situation. Although people may denounce the violence of their neighborhoods and their communities as merely the way things are, they are often reluctant and

shocked to accept such things in their schools because these institutions are meant to represent something better for all of us. For many parents and students there is the expectation that “schools should be absolutely safe and therefore should not be judged by the same standard” (Noguera, 1995, p. 191) that we use to gauge other social institutions. The public expects schools “to be somehow more exemplary...to not only ensure students’ academic achievement, but also to impart socially appropriate values, attitudes, and behavior” (Rossman and Morley, 1996, p. 396). Thus schools are meant to teach the best of what society has to offer, yet not perpetuate the worst of what society must endure.

The Philosophy of Force

It is this expectation, realistic or not, of the school as seemingly more isolated against society’s ills that has created divergent thinking about violent incidents. There are those who appear to actively campaign against youth violence, claiming that it is virtually rampant on our streets and in schools (Golench, Day, and et al., 1995). Those who adhere to this philosophy often promote a “desire to demonstrate toughness and reassure the public that school officials are in control, and to quell the tide of violence by converting schools into prison-like, lock down facilities” (Noguera, 1995, p. 190). In this case “get-tough” measures such as suspension and expulsion become the norm (Skiba and Peterson, 1999; Thayer, 1996). The problem inherent with this type of view is the irony of countering violence with force. Left unchecked, this may escalate into a situation whereby the act of punishment becomes less a deterrent and more an act of degradation and fear (Noguera, 1995). A cycle of violence may then emerge through which the “restrictive control of the premises and the disorder demonstrate a reciprocal destructive relationship” (Maher and Leone, 1999, p. 351). This issue and the resulting consequences are

discussed more fully later in the literature review as the researcher examines certain contemporary disciplinary practices in greater detail.

The Philosophy of Ignorance

In direct opposition to those advocates and practitioners who promote rigid discipline as the most appropriate response to school violence, there still exists those who yet maintain a “traditional, sentimentalized view of schools” (Vestermarck, Jr., 1996, p. 107) and are content to downplay the reported levels of youth violence by viewing increasing incidents as changes in the definitions used, awareness, and methods of reporting (West, 1993). This approach is analogous to burying your head in the sand and refusing to see the problems that exist. By denying the presence of school violence, the school may erroneously accept little responsibility for addressing it in a most appropriate manner (Trump, 1998). The students, meanwhile, are acutely aware of the factors that guide their behavior and respond accordingly. Once the perception that students may act with impunity is established, then “challenging the rules is part of the fun. When they succeed in littering or writing on wall, they feel encouraged to challenge other more sacred rules like the prohibition against assaulting other fellow students” (Coleman, 1996, p. 213). If unaddressed the violent acts continue to increase until students internalize the belief that they can do anything without consequence. The school then teeters on the brink of chaos and a safe school environment is practically out of the question (Toby, 1994). Ignorance of the problem is not the answer.

The Scope of School Violence: The North American Perspective

It would be naive to suggest that school violence caught us completely by surprise. As adults, each of us may remember the school bully who staked a claim through intimidation and the threat of physical force (Prothrow-Stith and Quaday, 1996), but the situation has become much

more serious. Surveys of public school teachers 40 years ago indicated the “most pressing classroom problems were tardiness, talkative students, and gum chewing” (Rossman and Morley, 1996, p. 395). Contemporary complaints depict more diverse dimensions and are considerably more sobering, revealing a wide range of concerns from “the presence of drugs, gangs and weapons to verbal assaults, physical attacks, robbery and rape” (p. 395). For a long time, however, much of this has been kept relatively quiet, so as to not shake the public confidence in the existing school system (Trump, 1998). As one critic suggests, school violence “was ignored in the 1950’s, 1970’s and again in the 1980’s. Today what is happening in schools and throughout society cannot be ignored (Futrell, 1996, p. 20).

It has been established that violence has become an issue in society and, as a result, in schools across North America. Several logical and compelling reasons have been suggested for this disturbing trend, but as yet this thesis has not really explored the degree to which the rates of school violence have increased. For this, the researcher must turn to the literature and examine the research that has previously delved into this issue. It is not difficult to look back through the history of the educational system both in Canada and the United States, and to see that violence has slowly become a part of the daily routine among students for years. There has been an increase in the amount and the intensity of violent conflicts as students became more likely to verbally or physically abuse one another. From “1950 to 1975, misbehavior in a school setting had shifted from acts of violence against property to violence against persons, and fights had shifted from words to weapons, with sometimes lethal outcomes” (Flannery, 1996, p. 4). With the introduction of weapons into the school system, the likelihood for fatalities increased sharply (Gaustad, 1991) because when “you combine impulsive adolescents with the presence of guns,

tragedy is often the result” (Bourgeois, 1996, p. 303).

It is important to note that much of what is being presented in the following discussion involves highlighting the efforts made by American researchers who describe American schools. This is understandable as we consider the fact that America far outnumbers Canada in terms of school campuses and sheer student population size. As a result, the “Canadian literature is not as prolific and the data are based on impressionistic reports and formal and informal surveys of school personnel” (Day, Golench, and et al, 1995, p. 17). But this is not to say Canada is immune from nor unaware of what is happening in some American schools. Historically, this country tends to follow the United States in many areas of popular culture, and what occurs there may eventually find its way here. In fact, there is some research that offers a dire warning to Canadians that the time to combat school violence is now, while it is still relatively manageable; if not, then this nation runs the risk of further deterioration, becoming like some of the more violent American schools (Day, Golench, and et al., 1995) where student conflict and physical confrontation has reached pandemic proportions (Futrell, 1996). It is a frightening thought, but it does provide the impetus to act expeditiously.

It has been concluded that the typical American school day is fraught with violence, and that “over two thousand students and forty teachers are attacked on school grounds every hour of every school day each year” (Hoffman, 1996, p. xii). One recently completed study determined that three of four adolescents reported having witnessed someone else being threatened, slapped, hit, or punched at school during the past year (Flannery, 1996, p. 3). These are shocking statistics from a nation which declared in 1994 that one of the National Education Goals for the year 2000 was the complete elimination of violence and drugs on all American school campuses

(National Education Goals Panel, 1994). Unfortunately the years that followed such a declaration did little to stem the tide of violence that has steadily risen in the educational settings. Within that period, the occurrence of daily school violence has continued unabated, but it has been overshadowed occasionally by larger, epic catastrophes such as the elementary shootings in Arkansas in 1996, the tragic Columbine massacre in 1997, and the Santee killings of 2001. These are a few of the more well-known, highly publicized acts of school violence that have occurred, but the calendar is equally filled with the lesser known, yet still frightening acts of young people who vent their rage, their frustrations, their loneliness, and their pain onto other fellow students.

It would be easy, perhaps even oddly comforting, to dismiss American statistics as irrelevant to the Canadian education system, but that would be a dangerous mistake. In 1993, an Environics poll revealed that violence had become the top educational concern, even surpassing educational standards in many Canadian schools (MacDougall, 1993). Since that time, children and adolescents continue to be exposed to more frequent and more intense levels of violence at school (Singer, Anglin, Song, and Lunghofer, 1997). This has created a situation where too many students are finding themselves living the role of victim or victimizer during school hours. This must stop. Efforts have to be made to change this situation so that more students and teachers will enjoy a greater sense of safety and well-being while on campus. "Aggressive behavior, intimidation, extortion, assault, sexual harassment, and other common forms of school crime cannot be tolerated, denied, or ignored" (Hill and Hill, 1994, p. 76).

In many ways, the effect of school violence carries with it a tremendous cost to the individual and society. The threat of physical or verbal abuse within an institution expected to be safe and valuable represents a breakdown in the social contract between those who attend and the

society that legally demands their attendance (Noguera, 1995). In fact, there are only three categories of people who are technically forced into mandatory attendance at a social institution. "The first is prisoners. The second is the mentally insane and the third category is school children. They are seldom afforded the same protection" (Stephens, 1995, p. 29). By allowing and maintaining an environment in which children must attend and possibly endure intimidation and violence, we are hindering their potential to learn effectively and to develop socially. "If we are going to require young people to attend school, then we must provide an environment that is safe, secure, and peaceful" (p. 29). Otherwise, the effects may be profoundly felt on both a short and long term basis. Hill and Hill (1994) suggest that when students experience violence in school, the "daily worry about getting to school, moving to and from classes, going to the rest room, having lunch, and returning home safely becomes too much a strain to bear. Fear leads to an inability to concentrate, and when lack of concentration is coupled with poor attendance, grades and achievement suffer" (44). This is an immediate concern, but it goes much deeper than this. Olweus (1994) used a longitudinal study to track the life-long effects of school violence and discovered that victims of bullies in middle and high school (age 13 -16) reported significantly higher levels of depression and poorer self-esteem at age 23 than the control subjects. One is tempted to question the value of the educational experience if this is a consequence.

The Scope of School Violence: The Prince Edward Island Perspective

To this point, the literature tells a tale of school violence in large scale perspective. It has shown how violence has grown in society, and how it has made its way into schools across North America. But to narrow the scope of this study, it is necessary to consider the context from which the research data has been collected. As stated earlier, this thesis details the findings associated

with effective administrative leadership and a newly implemented school safety policy called Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment. The data reflects the degree to which these two components have been used to address school violence in the Eastern School District of Prince Edward Island. Much of the background information now presented has been summarized from a 1995 report prepared for The Prince Edward Island Teachers' Federation by Patricia MacAulay. The guiding premise of this document, Violence in Prince Edward Island Schools: Final Report, was to first identify the feelings and opinions of Island teachers, administrators, guidance counselors, and students in regards to the prevalence of school violence, and then, if applicable, to put forth several recommendations stemming from the concerns raised and voiced by those so directly involved in the day-to-day functioning of Island schools. It should be noted that this study was based on information collected from all Island schools, and not necessarily just those from the Eastern School District. Therefore this researcher was required to make some practical generalizations and assumptions about the data that are based on MacAulay's majority findings. The researcher believes they still demonstrate a fair representation of the Eastern School District administration, staff, and students.

MacAulay (1995) defined violence as "the threat or use of force that injures or intimidates a person (makes them afraid) or damages property" (p. iii). It is a broad definition, but it captures the essence of school violence by reducing it to an easily recognizable human interaction: that of intimidation and fear. The following findings outline the Island school climate as it existed at the time of MacAulay's report:

- 50% of educators believed there was an increase in the amount of violence in their schools;

- the perception of increasing violence was most strongly expressed by junior high teachers and guidance counselors;
- non-physical abuse was the most prevalent type of violence experienced by students; most schools described this abuse as continual and incessant while others characterized it as routine and on the rise;
- non-physical abuse towards other students is more frequently witnessed than directly experienced by teachers;
- violence occurred most frequently inside the school with the exception of the junior and senior high levels where the most common form of violence, the prearranged fist fight, took place off school property;
- those who had experienced violence indicated that students were far and away the most frequent perpetrators, and “that remarks, insults or threats accounted for 32% of the incidents, contact that is harmful or intended for harm for 21%, troublesome activities for 14%, various gestures, harassment, damage, or assault for the remainder” (p. 5).

It is MacAulay’s contention that “generally speaking Prince Edward Island schools are safe places for students and staff” (p. 41). In light of the other, much more destructive examples of school violence that have been played out in the media in recent years, this is certainly true. Yet is any violence, no matter how mild or nonphysical, acceptable in schools? Of course not. Efforts must always be made to effectively address, control, and eliminate school violence in all of its forms. The respondents in MacAulay’s report put forth several relevant and concise ways to do just this. Their beliefs are summarized as follows:

(1) Respondents are enthusiastic about clear policies that are well-known, supported by the entire school community, and consistently and fairly applied” (p. 29). As well, “they believe that a province-wide effort towards developing policies, increasing respect, and providing training will help Island schools prevent a further escalation of all types of violence” (p. 41).

(2) “Educators and students stress the belief that accessible, firm and fair direction from school principals is the key factor in a positive school environment. Students want a principal who pays attention to them but is not a pushover. Teachers want a principal who consistently supports their efforts to provide quality education” (p. 31).

Clearly there are two major remedies suggested for controlling violence in Island schools: policy and leadership. It has been several years since MacAulay’s report, and the Eastern School

District has responded to the recommendations to some degree. In 1999, the Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment policy

Learn/Safe School Environment policy became a reality and allowed the schools within the district to have a specific, written procedure and stance in regards to school violence. No longer is it an issue to be dealt with by individual schools under the domain of individual administrators. Now it has become a standard operating practice, and district principals are required to follow the policy’s steps and recommendations whenever school violence occurs. The intention is that Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment, when enforced by and combined with effective on-site leadership, provides a positive step forward in combating all types of school violence.

An Effective School May Reflect an Effective Policy

The Evolution of Discipline Policies

Historically, schools were created and influenced by the prevailing concept of the asylum in the latter part of the nineteenth century. The goal then was to keep students in a controlled and

isolated environment where they would be required to conform to “an assortment of rules governing student behavior and to values promoting the virtues of hard work, punctuality and obedience” (Noguera, 1996, p. 196). Instructions and policy procedures were often given to teachers that addressed not only the elements of the curriculum and the methods of presentation, but also ways to discipline and control the minds and bodies of the students in their charge. In this time period, student discipline was rigid and harsh, often unquestioned and unreported. Teachers were powerful figures within this system and their rules and procedures could elicit obedience through the “terror of degradation” (p. 197). It was an unbalanced relationship between policy and consequence, often with restrictive and violent results that would inevitably erode with time as society and the students of a new era changed in the willingness to accept punishment with impunity. This does not imply, however, that policy does not have a practical application in today’s educational settings. In fact, perhaps it is more necessary than ever before. The goal now is not to eliminate policy as a standard of expectation, but rather to create a better balance between “what is considered inappropriate behavior and what the consequences will be for inappropriate behavior” (Wanat, 1996, p. 126). A major emphasis of today’s policy is the “understanding of discipline as a positive rather than a negative” (Futrell, 1996, p. 19) activity. Positive policies that demonstrate respect for students appear to be more effective than strictly punitive measures in achieving peaceful school environments. No longer will Draconian methods be accepted nor tolerated by the stakeholders of the contemporary school system, and the policy within modern education communities must accept and reflect this.

Student Discipline Policy Issues: A Canadian Perspective

To date, the most comprehensive research into the policies regarding student violence in

Canada was conducted in 1995 by Day, Golench, MacDougall, and Beals-Gonzalez. This was a national survey involving the collection and analysis of 116 school boards' violence prevention policies and programs across Canada. The results "indicated that there was a tremendous amount of activity within the education community to understand and come to terms with the issue of school based violence and to identify and implement effective solutions" (p. 4). At the forefront of these possible solutions was the need for effective policy which could represent a "guide for action" (Stephens, 1995, p. 57). Day, Golench and others (1995) suggested that the creation of an appropriate standard of behavior and "student discipline policy that establishes achievable goals, clear rules and procedure, fosters a positive school climate, is communicated clearly to students, and implemented in a firm, fair, and consistent manner is a major step in the prevention of school violence" (p. 110).

It seems like a rather simple relationship: An effective policy regarding school violence should reduce and eventually eliminate its occurrence. However, this has not happened despite a long history of application. "As long as there have been schools, there have been policies governing student behavior and student discipline. These policies establish and maintain the necessary rules and expectations for what constitutes acceptable student behavior" (Day, Golench, and et al., 1995, p. 110), yet this preferred behavior is not always apparent. The question must then be asked: Why have some policies failed to control or effectively deal with the incidents of student violence, even though research has proven their value and practicality? To answer this question, it is important to examine the general components necessary for a policy to work well.

The Existence of Policy

Although it may sound very obvious, the most vital part of any policy designed to reduce

school violence is the actual existence, awareness, and application of the policy itself. "School districts and organizations tend to experience problems and management difficulties in those areas that lack appropriate policies and procedures. Without planning and policy development, anything can happen" (Stephens, 1995, p. 57). No longer can educators be willing to risk what that "anything" could be. Often in school boards that "do not have clear policies on misconduct, teachers are unsure where to draw the line on unacceptable behavior" (Gabor, 1995, p. 9) and problems soon emerge. In an institution such as this, "the preservation of order demands that boundaries be set and enforced" (Hyman and Perone, 1998, p. 381). Those schools with effective control over student violence "have plans and procedures in place to deal with the disruptive behaviors that inevitably occur" (p. 381). It seems that when a policy exists, it provides a firm basis upon which to act when necessary and takes "the chance and risk out of school operations" (Stephens, 1995, p. 58).

The Awareness of Policy

This is to not suggest that the mere existence of a policy is enough to ensure its success. In many cases, awareness must be clearly communicated among the stakeholders or the policy is as ineffective as if it were nonexistent. Trump (1998) found that not making others aware of the existing policy may lead to two distinct, yet impractical policy possibilities. On one hand, there are those districts which have policies but no corresponding procedures or consequences reflected in real school environments. "The result -- a nice looking policy with no practice" (p. 46). On the other hand, there are those districts which pride themselves on their efforts to create "volumes of policies and regulations. The problem is that the volumes are stored away in administrative offices and nobody knows they exist" (p. 47). This does not work. Involved stakeholders must be made

aware of the policies that govern their actions as well as the actions of others. Otherwise, ignorance is not merely the best defense when accused of committing an inappropriate act, it is the only defense.

This begs the question then: How does a school district or board create a policy that is relevant to its stakeholders and very clearly communicated to everyone involved? The research around this question has determined there are several common methods by which a policy may be most effectively presented to those who must understand its intention, its expectation, and its consequence. The following information represents the most current suggestions for policy creation and awareness promotion to date. It is outlined according to the most frequently occurring recommendations taken from a wide selection of literature regarding school violence and the policies that seek to eliminate its existence.

The Clear and Concise Communication of Policy Expectations

Much of the research into school violence stresses the need for clear and concise communication of policy expectations (Maher and Leone, 1999; Trump, 1998; Rossman and Morley, 1996; Wanat, 1996; Futrell, 1996; Cortines, 1996; Stephens, 1995; Myles and Simpson, 1994). One of the chief complaints cited “by students who had received disciplinary action for inappropriate behavior was the fact that they failed to understand school rules” (Costenbader and Markson, 1998, p. 71). This is a common occurrence when school policy is not well-known by those who are governed by its expectations. Students reported that “they need to know what is expected of them and what consequences will result if expectations are not met” (MacAulay, 1995, p. 36). A similar opinion was voiced by teachers who also believed that an awareness of their specific roles and responsibilities as outlined by policy expectations was helpful in

determining what actions they would follow (Day and Golench, 1997).

A suggested remedy for increasing policy awareness among interested stakeholders is to present the components of the policy in a written format that may be easily understood and “leave no doubt about stated positions on issues and clarify specific actions” (British Columbia School Trustees Association, 1999, p. 11). There has been a great deal of progress in this area. Schools now realize they must get the message out to teachers and students that there are rules and policy expectations they must follow. Certain schools have shown a commitment to promoting awareness by issuing handbooks that clearly outline student rights and responsibilities as well as current policies and rules on the first day of school (Morrison, Furlong, Morrison, 1994). Others institutions have dealt with this concern through large student assemblies or smaller classroom discussions in which the students have the rules explained to them to ensure they “understand the purpose of the rules, the parameters of acceptable behavior, and consequences of infractions” (Schwartz, 1996, p. 4). And still others will convey their expectations by “posting the guidelines in prominent places” (Stephens, 1994, p. 208) where students will congregate on a daily basis. It is important to remember, however, that the written document, no matter how it may be presented, must reflect its expectations in the language of common speech (Day, Golench, and et al., 1995) so that everyone may understand its content. Policy makers must resist temptation to create a policy that shines so brightly in rhetoric that the common person is blinded to its purpose.

The Fair and Consistent Reinforcement of Policy

The literature regarding school policy as an effective method of violence prevention is almost unanimous in its findings that policy is certainly not something that flourishes with inconsistent application. A wide array of researchers (Maher and Leone, 1999; Trump, 1998;

Rossman and Morley 1996; Cooke, 1996; Day and Golench, 1997; Stephens, 1995; MacAulay, 1995; Eliot and Tolan, 1994) have stressed the absolute necessity of fairly applied and consistently reinforced policy procedures. School boards and districts must effectively communicate the intended goal of violence reduction, but equally important is the follow-through actions by administrators and staff who actually show these policy procedures are more than just words on paper and will be “implemented in a firm, fair, and consistent manner (Day, Golench, et al., 1995, p. 20). Failure to do so will send one message to stakeholders in theory, but in reality send the message to students that “they can operate with few or no consequences for their criminal or disruptive behavior in and around schools” (Trump, 1998, p. 29). This may create a tragic situation “where teachers do not feel supported when they impose discipline, students do not feel protected, and the violence-prone think they will not be punished” (Schwartz, 1996, p. 4). If this becomes the norm, then “the frequency and magnitude of the crime will continue to increase. Consistently enforcing policy is labor intensive, but it is critical that the procedures are followed” (Hill and Hill, 1994, p. 76) if desired changes in behavior are to occur.

Although it seems reasonable to suggest that consistency is the key to maintaining an effective policy, there are some dissenting opinions from contemporary critics who feel that such a blanket approach is inherently flawed. There is no disputing the facts that students must be aware of what is expected of them, and that they must be prepared to accept the consequences of their actions. However, is it really possible to judge each student by the same standard every time an inappropriate incident occurs? The aforementioned research suggests that not only is it possible, it is imperative. Yet there are several studies that have emerged to present a different perspective on what could be deemed “consistent” and what could be deemed “fair.” Gabor

(1995) recognized an apparent contradiction in his research into school violence. He found that school officials were “considerably more likely to favor administrative discretion, rather than iron clad principles, in responding to misconduct” (p. 27). A paradox became clear as his respondents called for consistent consequences tempered with good administrative judgment. But this was a double-edged sword. How could any policy be always consistent yet always flexible? This also raised a good point in terms of the power of authority. “Automatic sanctions for all infractions would be excessively rigid, failing to take the circumstances of the misconduct into account. Fixed penalties would also leave the school administrators with little authority” (p. 36).

This contradiction is further examined by Curwin and Mendler (1999) as they critically evaluate the zero-tolerance approach that has often stemmed from previous research regarding universally consistent discipline policies. Openly opposed to the restrictive nature of zero-tolerance, both researchers suggest that “any intervention that treats dissimilar problems with similar behavioral outcomes the same is not only unfair but destined to fail” (p. 120). They promote a combination of consequence and flexibility aptly titled, “‘as tough as necessary,’ an approach that finds the balance between being strong and fair” (p. 120). In this application of discipline it becomes a matter of interpreting and establishing consequences that realize a wide range of circumstances and which “cover a spectrum from the mildest to the most severe, including filing police charges” (p. 120).

It is clear that the majority of the research into school policies regarding violence favor a consistent and fair approach. And, while there is little controversy over what may be defined as “consistent,” there is obvious disagreement over what is considered “fair.” This debate continues in educational settings across North America, and it will not be solved easily by the policy makers

at the board and district levels or by the policy enforcers at the administrative and staff levels. The heart of the matter involves the circumstances leading into and the consequences coming out of each incident of school misconduct. It would be interesting to now look at what constitutes a meaningful consequence and deterrent for reducing acts of school violence.

The Meaningful Consequences for Inappropriate Behavior

The consequences of inappropriate or violent student behavior as outlined by policy must “be serious enough for the students to see them as deterrents to misbehavior” (Wanat, 1996, p. 126). Day, Golench, and others (1995) found that throughout Canada, there is an “array of suggested consequences that may be imposed” (p. 13), but these are significantly categorized into one of four philosophical and procedural approaches identified as follows:

(1) Response/Sanctions: The most widely employed type of consequence system that clearly outlines the acts of misbehavior and puts in place procedures for disciplinary action. “The results indicated that the majority of boards were identified as having a Response/Sanctions focus (48.8%) popularly characterized as a ‘zero-tolerance’ policy” (Day and Golench, 1997, p. 340). This approach assumes a reactive stance, coming into effect after the undesirable or violent behavior has already happened. The application of suspension and/or expulsion figures prominently in this response pattern and was the most frequently occurring component of the analyzed policies, “recorded an average of 93.6%” (Day, Golench, et al., 1995, p. 50).

(2) Expectations for Behavior: A slightly more proactive approach that “focuses on the idea that fair, clear, and equitable rules will prevent the further incidence of inappropriate behavior” (Day and Golench, 1997, p. 340). This approach appreciates the fact that violence is a distinct possibility and recognizes a need to outline expectations before violence occurs. “Nearly

30% of the boards were classified as having an expectations for behavior approach” (p. 340).

(3) Identification and Prevention: A more integrated response to violent or inappropriate student behavior, this approach directs its attention “towards activities designed to reduce violence such as through promoting positive interpersonal relations” (p. 340). This response procedure was found to exist in 18.3 % of the school boards surveyed, and represented a shift away from merely punishing those responsible for misbehavior towards teaching them to cope by using the more effective management strategies “necessary to resolve interpersonal conflicts” (DuRant, Trieber, et al, 1996, p. 111). Such programs are designed to counteract the development of attitudes, cognition, and behavior that lead to violence. This, in turn, allows the student the potential for assuming greater responsibility for his or her own behavior, making decisions about what is socially appropriate and acceptable, demonstrating necessary self-control skills to conduct oneself as a responsible individual, and showing empathy towards others and establishing healthy relationships with adults and peers (pp. 112 - 113).

(4) Community Focus: The least employed, but often the most highly regarded method for eliminating school violence, this approach is “characterized by the recognition that the root causes of school violence go beyond the borders of the school grounds” (Day and Golench, 1997, p. 340), and that changes within the school must be inter-related with changes in the surrounding community. Although only 3.7% of the responding Canadian school districts in Day, Golench, and others’ study (1995) use such an approach, there is a substantial amount of literature to support efforts at community building. Hill and Hill (1994), for instance, suggest that because “schools are often perceived as the natural nucleus of many communities” (p. 60), they will have the greatest success by creating a policy of discipline as a “combination unique to the individual

situation and the community” (p. 86) at large. Huff and Trump (1996) express a similar view as they contend that “schools, in concert with the communities they serve, must provide environments conducive to learning and must set a behavioral standard that will teach citizenship and responsibility” (p. 501) not only in the present setting, but beyond it as well. For this type of approach to work, it will require a strong level of co-ordination and commitment within the entire community (Gabor, 1995; Steinberg, 1996). “Students, parents, law enforcement, mental health, business and community leaders, and a wide array of youth serving professionals should be involved in the process” (Stephens, 1995, p. 15). As more and more stakeholders appreciate the vested interest they have in creating and maintaining safe school environments, the greater the chances of forming a collective vision that has everyone’s best interests at heart.

School policies are the “mechanism by which safe schools are created” (Wanat, 1996, p. 126). The rules exist to outline what is acceptable and/or unacceptable behavior, but it is the possible consequences that “send a message to perpetrators of violence, and to the community in general” (Noguera, 1995, p. 198) that certain acts will not go unaddressed. Students must be able to see an equity in the balance between the inappropriate act and the following consequence that serves some meaningful social purpose (Baker, 1998), or it will have little impact on their daily lives and modes of behavior. Students also suggest imposing consequences that have some degree of gradation “that increase with each policy violation, moving through in-class measures, detentions, office visits, suspensions, to expulsions, if necessary” (MacAulay, 1995, p. 29). Day, Golench, and others (1995) suggest that if a policy fails to provide for this logical build-up from less to more serious behaviors, then “the policy as a whole appears disjointed” (p. 63) and may not have the desired effect of reducing inappropriate behaviors as well as originally intended.

The information contained within this particular section of the literature review presents an accurate and current assessment of efforts being made in schools and districts across North America to refine and enforce those policies that show promise for effectively reducing and/or eliminating acts of school violence. Now, perhaps more than ever before, policy has become an integral part of establishing a comprehensive defense against the threats of inappropriate and unacceptable violent behavior that undermine the real and humane goals of education. Through the promotion of documented qualities such as clear communication, fairness, consistency, and meaningful consequence, “good policies prevent problems before they occur and can help mitigate problems once they emerge” (Stephens, 1995, p. 57).

As with the previous research regarding the incidents of violence in schools, the pattern of presentation was one of moving from the more general to the more specific. Analysis was shown from an international perspective, then the scope was narrowed to provide distinctly Canadian insight, and then finally narrowed again to a more localized analysis of the Eastern School District of Prince Edward Island, the sight from which the data was collected for the purposes of this thesis. This pattern of refinement emerges here once again. The literature has shown the strengths and weaknesses of policy as outlined in research conducted in schools across North America. The inclusion of the data primarily collected by Day and Golench and others in 1995 then refocuses the research with a major emphasis on Canadian school policies. A concrete foundation has been created upon which to evaluate effective policy and disciplinary procedures for school violence, and it is now possible to return to a local level and better appreciate the content and the consequences of the Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment policy as mandated by the Eastern School District of Prince Edward Island.

Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment

The Pathway to the Policy

In 1995, the year researcher Patricia MacAulay collected her data for the document, Violence in Prince Edward Island Schools: Final Report, the Island's education system was still experiencing lingering effects of a province-wide amalgamation that had occurred the year previous. Originally there had been a system of five school units, each with its own school board and own particular policies and procedures, but the new system was to be a much more streamlined, more coordinated body composed of three larger districts. Units 3 and 4 were combined to form the Eastern School District Board, a collection of 43 schools that were selected according to their geographical location. This district essentially split the province in the middle and moved in an easterly direction, incorporating the urban schools in the provincial capital of Charlottetown, and continuing to the eastern tip of the province known as East Point. The district provides education services for approximately 15,000 students, all of whom are subject to the policies and procedures put forth by the Eastern School District Board. The second largest school zone is the Western School District Board, the resulting combination of former Units 1 and 2. This district controls 21 schools and extends in a westward direction to include the urban center of Summerside, and continuing to the western tip of the province known as North Cape. The district provides education services for approximately 7,000 students. Together the Eastern and Western School District Boards set the curricula for the vast majority of the Island's student population. The final district is composed of those particular schools created to meet the educational needs of the Island's French-speaking population. It is the smallest district composed of 4 schools which that are located predominately in the areas of Evangeline and Richmond.

There is one French school located in Charlottetown as well. For a better understanding of how the Island is divided into each of its particular districts, refer to Appendix B.

It is interesting to note MacAulay's findings in relation to the school violence policies that existed at the time of her research. It appeared that "schools were alone on the policy development" (p. 40) and created their own rules and procedures to deal with school violence in a manner that was often independent of the school district. In fact, in the Eastern School District, schools were encouraged to "use their own policies while the district develops a policy on safe schools" (p. pvi). This characterized the isolation of a school system in which most teachers seemed "aware of school policies on violence and its reporting and unaware of such policies at the board level" (p. pvi). Fortunately, the majority of teachers were "satisfied with their own school efforts to prevent, reduce, or eliminate violence" (p. pvi), but these same people expressed the belief that "a province wide effort towards developing policies, increasing respect, and providing training will help Island schools prevent a further escalation of all types of violence" (p. 41).

MacAulay's report concluded with several recommendations, the first of which called for the province to create a comprehensive Island-wide policy regarding student violence that should list "the desired behaviors and the steps to be taken if those behaviors are not evident" (p. 29). This recommendation provided an impetus to coordinate policy and procedures within each of the districts, if not across the entire Island. The Eastern School District responded to the concerns of the stakeholders by having the Student Services Committee collect and evaluate all of the various policies being used in each of the district schools with "the intent of formulating an Eastern School District Policy regarding safe schools" (p. 34). In 1999, Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment became a reality and was put into operation in every school in the Eastern School

District. From that point on, the policy was mandated as the standard by which all schools would administratively handle incidents of school violence. Yet the most important question remains: How does the policy actually work in the school system?

The Objectives of the Policy

The Eastern School District supports the philosophical orientation that “student learning and staff productivity are improved by a positive learning environment” (Eastern School District Administration, 1999, p. 1). The objective of policy then is to create this particular setting and to “establish clear expectations of acceptable conduct and develop and implement supporting programs and preventative and intervention procedures” (p. 1). With guiding statements such as these, it would appear that the district formulated a policy that meets the criteria deemed necessary for effectively addressing student violence as outlined by the aforementioned research. From an initial reading, several objectives may be assumed:

- (1) there is the obvious existence and promotion of a policy regarding student violence;
- (2) this policy claims to clearly present its expectations and subsequent procedures to students and staff;
- (3) this policy wishes to impose positive discipline which is relative and important to students; and
- (4) this policy demonstrates an appreciation for and cooperation with other stakeholders and involved groups in the community.

It is important, however, that a policy be more than just paper-thin possibilities. There must be a system in place that allows the written theory to translate into a workable reality. It is now the intention to examine the policy more closely to determine if the Eastern School District

Board is able to support its rhetoric with strong follow-up procedures. This requires evaluating the policy according to the three primary criteria suggested by the cumulative research cited earlier in this thesis: (1) clear and concise communication of policy expectations; (2) fair and consistent reinforcement of policy; and (3) meaningful consequence for inappropriate behavior.

The Clear and Concise Communication of Policy Expectations

Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment is divided into several particular sections, with each one serving a different purpose. Section A states the school board's general expectations and presents what is considered appropriate behavior from both students and staff. Section B describes the board's efforts to stay involved with the policy on a staff, student, and community level. Section C offers precise and binding definitions and examples as to what the board believes is unacceptable or violent behavior, and covers a wide spectrum of possible infractions. Section D specifically outlines the procedural steps to be taken in the event of a violent incident on school property in regards to the interaction between students, between staff and students, and between staff members.

The policy initially builds its expectations upon a concept known as "Duty of Care" (p.1), a philosophical ideal that promotes the unique and inherent value of each participant in the school setting. The school board believes that Duty of Care will guide the behavior of students and staff members if they conduct themselves in accordance with the following principles:

Due Regard - Students and staff members will demonstrate regard, concern and respect for the unique differences and worth of the individual. This is the basis for all programs and procedures which the district implements, and forms the basis for trust and confidence in the commitment and competencies among the staff to improve

the quality of the students' school experience -- in this case the strengthening and maintaining of safe and caring learning environments. Student conduct will demonstrate care for themselves, for each other, and for their school and staff.

Due Diligence - Staff members and students will demonstrate diligent effort at all levels of the District in setting purposeful objectives, organizing and directing appropriate activities, monitoring performance, and taking corrective action as required to ensure safe and caring learning environments.

Due Process - The demonstration of just treatment and due process will govern the working relationships for all people involved in the strengthening and maintaining of safe and caring learning environments (p. 1).

To this point, the policy certainly sounds effective and presents a common sense, mutually humane approach to solving the problems associated with school violence by expecting students and staff to treat one another well and to recognize each person's contribution to the school setting. There are, however, no concrete examples listed as to how such things will actually be realized. The previously cited research was quite clear in its contention that the existence of a policy is not enough to ensure its success; there must also be some procedures in place which will allow the policy to be communicated to the stakeholders. In this regard Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment is quite vague. There is the condition stated that the board "will support schools in educating the public about acceptable standards of behavior in or on school property" (p. 2), but that is simply where it ends. Procedural issues concerning this public message are left unaddressed and the decisions are relegated to each individual school to determine. While one must recognize that each school responds to the specific factors that are

important to it, there could be more direction provided by the school board as to how this message should and/or must be communicated. Without such direction, then many questions continue to be unanswered. For instance: What will this school board support realistically entail for administrators, school staff, and students who find themselves involved in a violent or inappropriate incident? What standard expectations does the school board hold for each school as it tries to educate stakeholders? What procedures or methods for such education would the school board endorse or reject? The research cited earlier lists the options as many (handbooks signed by parents, class room assemblies, school assemblies, posted rules), but the school board has not suggested which of these it would prefer or promote. The consequence of this may be a lack of clear vision on the part of the schools which are relying on the school board to take an active, hands-on approach beyond the creation of a nicely-worded policy.

The Fair and Consistent Reinforcement of Policy

Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment is a policy that expects every member of the school staff to report “all incidents which adversely affect a safe and caring learning environment” (p. 2). Because teachers are usually the people closest to the students on a daily basis, they are in an excellent position to monitor behavior and to determine which acts would be considered inappropriate or violent. Teachers, therefore, are the people most responsible for the reporting of behaviors that fail to meet acceptable policy standards and wield a “tremendous influence in determining who receives discipline and why” (Noguera, 1995, p. 202). The school board recognizes this and places a great deal of faith in a teacher’s professional discretion and judgment. However, when a decision is made that an act is violent and not permissible, then a certain chain of events are set in motion. The procedures to be followed are clearly delineated in

Section D of Caring Places to Learn Policy/Safe School Environment. Using the definitions for violent acts as outlined in Section C, these procedures are categorized according to four possible interactions:

- (1) "Student To Student - where one student or group of students exhibit unacceptable behavior against another student or group of students" (Eastern School District Administration, 1999, p. 4);
- (2) "Student To Staff - where a student exhibits unacceptable behavior toward a staff member" (p. 6);
- (3) "Staff To Student - where a staff member exhibits unacceptable behavior against a student or group of students" (p. 8); and
- (4) "Staff To Staff - where a staff member exhibits unacceptable behavior against another staff member" (p. 10).

For purposes of this study, only the procedures dealing with incidents of violence between students or towards teachers will be discussed in detail. There is no denying that research exploring the other school-based interactions exists. Hyman and Snook (2000), for instance, argue that "educator violence against students, including verbal and physical assaults and the undermining of student's constitutional rights, erodes rather than enhances school safety" (p. 489). But this is not the primary focus of the study. On Prince Edward Island, "more than 90% of teachers have never witnessed or experienced physical or sexual abuse by parents, teachers, non-teaching personnel, or administrators" (MacAulay, 1995, p. 3). In fact, "the vast majority of cases involved students, as opposed to parents, teachers, non-teaching staff personnel, or administration. For example 80% or more principals never had to deal with cases of abuse by

non-teaching personnel or administration, 60% or more never had to deal with cases involving teachers, and 45% never had cases involving parents” (p. 11). This does not mean that such interactions of staff towards students and staff towards other staff members do not happen or may be ignored or overlooked. The inclusion of procedures that deal with these incidents when they occur is certainly a valuable component of any policy regarding school violence, and Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment should be recognized as being comprehensive enough to realize that such situations exist and should be handled appropriately and efficiently at all times.

Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment promotes consistency through stated expectations and procedures. Teachers are to report all allegations of those unacceptable behaviors that have been defined and explained in Section D of the policy. The initial report is made to the principal/designate for investigation, and depending upon the outcome of this discovery, the incident may be resolved at the school level or it may require contacting outside supports such as parents, social agencies, and the police. Efforts are made to then “monitor the situation until closure as warranted” (Eastern School District, 1999, p. 11). As with most school policies that regulate and record the behavior of others, Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment is very dependent upon the consistent action of the teachers who report the violence, the administrators who begin the investigation, and the other groups that may offer valuable insight. Should any of these links fail to be consistent, then the policy may suffer and its effectiveness would be questionable.

The Meaningful Consequences for Inappropriate Behavior

Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment appears to reflect many of the policy criteria outlined by Day and Golench and others (1995) in their comprehensive survey, School

Based Violence Prevention in Canada: Results of a National Survey of Policies. These criteria include Response/Sanctions, Expectations for Behavior, Intervention and Prevention, and Community Focus. For the Eastern School District, disciplinary action is an all-encompassing term used to refer to the procedures followed by the school administration. These cover a diverse range of options. There is the presence of the most common Response/Sanctions procedures in which punishment follows a violent act that has already occurred. This is characterized as on-site resolution by the administrator and may also include suspension, expulsion or alternate schooling. The policy is grounded in the domain of expectations and believes that staff and students will hold certain standards of behavior in common which will work towards the creation of a safe and caring school setting. Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment also addresses the concept of intervention and prevention by supporting “staff in their efforts to successfully implement the portions of the established curriculum which deal with self-esteem, appropriate problem-solving strategies, conflict resolutions, and respect for others” (p. 2). The goal here is to teach students how to more effectively interact with one another so violence is not the first or last resort to settle disputes.

To meet the requirements of Community Focus, often considered the most beneficial of the policy components (Hill and Hill, 1994), the Eastern School District recognizes the need to make the creation of a safe school setting a concern for the entire community. “The Board will encourage the involvement of community-based groups in school activities that promote a safe and caring learning environment” (Eastern School District Administration, 1999, p. 2). The policy statements of Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment have a number of references to other community resources which may be contacted and utilized to more effectively deal with the

incidents of school violence and the people affected by such behavior. In the event of inappropriate or violent acts, the school may contact parents, Child and Family Services, Human Resources and Administration, the police, and/or the District Response team. This team is “a group of school-based and board-based professionals called together by the school principal to assess an allegation of a criminal, sexual, or other serious nature at a school” (p. 11). At this point, it is generally a question of administrative discretion as to how each reported allegation will be handled. The policy procedures demonstrate a distinction between those acts of a less serious nature like bullying or threats which “may” go beyond the school administration and be reported to other stakeholders such as parents; and those acts of a more serious nature like weapons possession and sexual abuse which “will” be reported to the appropriate off-site resources.

Despite the noble aspirations of Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment to reach beyond the school and involve the community, the most popular disciplinary action continues to be the long-standing act of suspension and, to a lesser degree, expulsion. Of the eight specifically defined acts of unacceptable violent behavior contained in the policy, all but two reserve the right to expel or suspend students under the School Act Regulations. These exceptions are trespassing which “may result in police involvement” (p. 6) and weapons which may result in parental and police involvement, and as well, “an alternate school setting may be recommended” (p. 6).

As noted in previously cited research, the issue of suspension and expulsion has not yet been settled to every critics’ satisfaction. There are proponents of the practice, as well as detractors who believe it creates other problems in lieu of those it attempts to solve. The question in this context, however, is one of determining how students perceive this practice. Does suspension and/or expulsion provide enough incentive for students to change their inappropriate

ways, or is it simply a punishment that is accepted and endured, holding no real socially meaningful consequence for the perpetrator?

In many cases, suspension in which students are banished from the school because of unacceptable behavior has not been found to produce a great number of significant benefits for them personally (Comerford and Jacobsen, 1987). Costenbader and Markson (1998) found that when they asked 209 students to what extent suspension helped them solve their problems so that it would not happen again, "67 (32%) responded 'Not at all, I will probably be suspended again in the future'; 76 (36%) responded, 'A little bit'; 25 (12%) responded, 'A lot'; and 41 (19%) responded, 'I learned my lesson and I will never be suspended again'" (p. 70). Results such as these cast doubt on the use of a procedure that "fails to address the underlying problems that cause disruptive behavior, and removing the student from the instructional environment may actually decrease the student's opportunity to learn more appropriate behavior" (p. 75). To the more extreme downside, there is some research which has found that those students often regarded as troublesome "like to be expelled, and some who go to alternative schools think it is a status symbol, not a punishment" (Bourgeois, 1996, p. 302). This is a rare situation, however, and will affect a small minority of students, perhaps five percent or less, and usually involve students who are out of control in the community beyond the school as well (Futrell, 1996). Regardless of these findings, suspending students for inappropriate behavior remains firmly entrenched as one of the basic disciplinary actions used by the majority of schools. Suspension sends a message that authority exists (Noguera, 1995) and "serves to protect school staff and other students from further verbal or physical abuse, and by isolating the offending student, it allows the classroom to function without undue disruption" (Costenbader and Markson, 1998, p. 59).

MacAulay (1995) found that students on Prince Edward Island believed that schools and administrators must do something to control the level of violence that was present on many of the campuses. "Over and over again, students said that they need to know what is expected of them and what consequences will result if expectations are not met. They also suggested that these consequences should be more meaningful than detentions and suspension, which generally speaking are not taken seriously by the students" (p. 36). This creates an inherent problem within the Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment which strongly promotes the idea of suspension as the primary response for violent behavior. Despite calls to make a consequence more relative and valuable, the policy continues to resist contemporary research results and to rely on what has traditionally worked in the past. In fact, many of the school policies of today reveal that "in some respects surprisingly little has changed in 100 years (Day, Golench, and et al., 1995, p. 55). This finding would, of course, preclude those students of today who want to have "consequences that suit the individual and the situation" (MacAulay, 1995, p. 36).

An Effective Leader Respects An Effective Policy

A policy is only as effective as those who enforce it. This is a common refrain among much of the literature as educational researchers stress the necessity of strong, consistent guidance from a principal who "has the ability to foster information of a collective vision, and has the leadership to move the school community towards achieving that vision" (Hill and Hill, 1994, p. 72), especially with regard to violence prevention and elimination. Changing times have brought changing expectations, and the school administrator is being called upon to address many new situations that had not previously been considered part of the daily routine of managing a school. The principals of today "must be prepared for more than the academic challenges of teaching

reading and writing and arithmetic....More than ever before, administrators need to establish safe schools which support the learning and success of all children and the professionals who serve them" (Stephens, 1995, p. 9). But how exactly can the most effective principals do such a thing? How do these people create a safe and caring place where students of all ages may come to learn, be valued, and feel protected?

The Types of Administrators

The literature has determined that there are three general types of on-site school administrators. The first of these involves those school principals who appear "to be more concerned about their school image than the safety of the students entrusted to their care" (Trump, 1998, p. pvi). These are the leaders who "look the other way rather than address what is happening....who are consumed with paperwork and administrative details so they never have to see or talk with students" (Hill and Hill, 1994, p. 9). Even more troublesome are those principals who deliberately modify the handling of violent incidents because they "are more concerned that their suspensions, expulsions, and incident reports will be viewed as a negative reflection of their management abilities. So they make every effort to reduce these figures by partially dealing with the problems, underreporting the problems, or ignoring the problems altogether" (Trump, 1996, p. 53). Unfortunately the efforts or lack thereof by principals such as these only exacerbate the problem of school violence and send "a strong message to students that their criminal behaviors are immune from consequences as long as they are committed under the supervision of school officials. This, in turn, increases the likelihood of further criminal behavior" (p. 26). As Stephens (1994) so succinctly puts it, we "tend to get not only what we expect we deserve, but also what we allow" (p. 208).

The second type of administrator detailed by the research is the one who may take a more extreme approach and who believes that “you must counter violence with force; that schools can be made safer by converting them into prison-like facilities” (Noguera, 1995, p. 190). These administrators are very familiar with terms such as “zero-tolerance” and “target hardening.” They create schools that are rigidly structured and disciplined, with every offense receiving the severest possible reprimand to ensure that such behavior will not happen again. This is a completely reactive approach to behavior management that “involves a control strategy rather than a prevention strategy” (Flannery and Huff, 1999, p. 5). Principals like this, however, run the risk of creating “an unwelcoming, almost jail-like environment” (Maher and Leone, 1999, p. 348) that is too dictatorial and stifling for humane treatment to be appreciated, a school where the “discipline approaches may be perceived as arbitrary and hostile if they are devoid of any meaningful social purpose” (Baker, 1996, p. 36). Maher and Leone (1999) offer a warning to administrators who try to control school violence in this manner, and suggest they reconsider such harsh reprimands. Their structural model of school violence and disruptions indicate “that a higher level of disorder is associated with and may actually result from more efforts to control school premises in a highly restrictive manner,...where students tend to engage in more acts of self-protection and live in a heightened state of fear” (p. 351).

The third type of administrator appears to satisfy the expectations and standards of even the most critical educator. Unlike the indifferent leaders who refuse to get involved, or the autocratic leaders who attempt to control everything, these leaders are effective because they “care about students, know how to show that care to them, and inspire teachers to demonstrate that same concern for students” (Stephens, 1995, p. 14). Principals like this understand the

importance of forming a school culture of nonviolence by showing through practice and example that the school and the staff care about how students interact with one another, and that they value and promote high academic and behavior expectations for all students (Wanat, 1996). These are the most effective principals who will “foster and mentor leadership within others to create a climate in which violent behavior finds no way to germinate (Hill and Hill, 1994, p. 19). Their actions are generally guided by a sense of expectation, fairness, and consistency, and they quickly become “the primary individual responsible for overseeing the enforcement of safety policies” (Wanat, 1996, p. 125). Principals in this category are aware of the policies that exist, are committed to their success, and have a belief that the “district will assume certain responsibilities” (Hill and Hill, 1994, p. 69) towards the policies by supporting the teachers and staff as they follow the procedures outlined for them in response to student acts of violence. It is this final representation of administrative leadership that holds the most promise for effectively promoting and maintaining a positive school environment in which safety and learning are among the primary goals.

Effective Administrative Strategies

A review of the literature has revealed that strong administrators share a number of common values and methodologies which allow them to do their job efficiently and well. These are summarized as: (1) maintaining a visible school presence; (2) providing appropriate teacher support; (3) communicating with stakeholders and community; and (4) connecting with students fairly and consistently.

Maintaining a Visible School Presence

There is no doubt “that the best principals spend the majority of their time outside their

offices” (Stephens, 1994, p. 207), and are always visible to the students in the building or on the school grounds (Hill and Hill, 1994). When the principal establishes a strong school presence, he/she is demonstrating a highly effective method by which to influence student behavior and reduce the potential for violent incidents to occur. Futrell (1996) found that students are acutely aware of the presence of adult supervision and are less willing to make inappropriate decisions or engage in unacceptable behavior when the possibility of being noticed, and otherwise caught misbehaving is so great. A good leader understands this and makes the effort to be present and vigilant in the hallways when classes change, during scheduled break times, and before and after school. However, in the event that the principal is unavailable at these times, the effective administrator will compensate by making certain that adequate adult supervision is provided by other staff personnel (Stephens, 1994).

Providing Appropriate Teacher Support

It is the principal’s responsibility to hire competent staff and provide them with consistent administrative support when violence occurs. Otherwise the situation will only become worse. When teachers feel they are helpless against the threat of a student’s physical or verbal abuse, “they will be less willing to insist that all students meet new and rigorous standards. This is particularly so if teachers do not believe school administration can or will provide a safe environment in which the standards can be achieved” (Futrell, 1996, p. 13). This may foster a tragic situation in which teachers could feel that they must “think twice about how to reprimand a student, lest their attempt at chastisement be taken as a challenge for a physical confrontation, for which most are unprepared” (Noguera, 1995, p. 197). Teachers who feel this way are more likely to perceive their workplace as being overly dangerous and certainly not conducive for establishing

high academic and behavioral standards among students (Day and Golench, 1997). Effective leaders must ensure that this does not happen by consistently supporting the efforts of the staff personnel to identify and report violent acts involving students.

Communicating with Stakeholders and Community

“To reduce the potential for violence within the school and the community, the principal’s time and energy are more proactively and effectively expended by increasing communication and understanding between the school and the community” (Hill and Hill, 1994, p. 57). This is a reoccurring theme in the literature that includes reference to administrative efforts to foster community focus, community involvement, and community awareness. These are similar ideals represented by slightly different words, but the message is very easy to appreciate: It contends that “communicating with students, parents, and the community about safety issues is also the principal’s responsibility” (Wanat, 1996, p. 125). This communication may involve ensuring that “all stakeholders, including students, parents, and guardians, and others with a vested interest in the school be aware of both the content of the policy document (e.g. code of conduct, range of consequences, etc.) and the procedures, regulations, and guidelines for implementing board policy” (Day, Golench, and et al., 1995, p. 60). It may also require getting parents and certain groups within the community involved in school activities (Hill and Hill, 1994), and it may also necessitate a more dramatic commitment of “working with the police in the prevention of violence on school grounds” (British Columbia School Trustees Association, 1999, p. 19).

Responding to Students Fairly and Consistently

The students make up the majority of the people within a school setting, and therefore have a vested interest in the routines and policies that shape their behavior. As human beings in a

social institution, they have their own thoughts and form their own opinions, they make observations and pass judgments, and they are finely attuned to the events around them, especially to the controls that restrict or protect them from acts of violence. “When students perceive that school personnel, especially the principal, are fair and caring, students feel they have a stake in making the school safe” (Hyman and Perone, 1998, p. 12). This creates a situation in which students see their roles and responsibilities within the school environment and come to realize that negative events stimulate a negative overall school culture characterized by “daily disruptions such as name calling, bullying and general intimidation” (Dusenbury and Falco, 1997, p. 410). Students who wish to see this culture improve demonstrate a willingness to accept and follow an administrator who has a specific plan of action with realistic standards and expectations, who is dedicated to the ideals of fairness and consistency among staff and students, and who “creates a learning environment that supports the educational process” (Stephens, 1995, p. 9). It is a reciprocal relationship. As students begin to realize what they can do to maintain a safe school environment, they also begin to appreciate and support the principal’s efforts to accomplish goals that are similar to their own.

As the literature review concludes, a number of important characteristics have been identified in relation to school violence, to the policies which are created to address such unacceptable activity, and to the qualities of the administrators who work daily to ensure that schools become the safe havens they once were. Salient characteristics of policy and principals such as awareness, communication, and consistency have been explored at length, and have shown themselves to be integral parts of creating safe school environments. It is now time to examine the design which guided this study and provided selected principals within the Eastern School District

the opportunity to share their strategies for policy implementation, their thoughts and feelings towards school violence, and their suggestions for possible future improvements.

Chapter 3 - Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this research study is to examine and to evaluate how a relatively new violence prevention policy known as Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment has been implemented and promoted by intermediate level school principals in the Eastern School District of Prince Edward Island. This allowed the study to fully explore the relationship between policy and leadership and the contributions each of these makes to the creation of a safe and secure school community. This chapter outlines the basic research design used in the study, as well as the rationale that motivated the researcher to consider certain areas of interest. It also discusses the selection process for both the participants and the sites at which they are employed as administrative leaders; it will offer explanations regarding data collection and analysis, the researcher's role, and particular concerns such as time management, anonymity, and participant involvement.

Research Design

The qualitative research approach has gained much momentum and credibility over recent years and has steadily made inroads into the "historic domination of social science research by traditional quantitative methods" (Marshall and Rossman, 1999, p. 56). A design which had once been perceived as less serious or pseudo-research has been justified as a valuable tool that may address certain complexities, phenomena, innovations, and processes that exist across a wide spectrum of social organizations, policy procedures, and formal and informal structures

(Marshall, 1985a, 1987).

The qualitative process allows researchers to move beyond the more objective approach of quantitative research and into the real world settings where people actually live the many experiences that make up the human condition. These settings are the places where individuals' thoughts, opinions, beliefs, and basic assumptions are most vivid and most pure; they do not change to accommodate the researcher, but continue to evolve as a complex organization of personal interaction. Not only does this process provide researchers access to the social and physical settings of interest, but also it presents insight into the "norms, traditions, roles, and values" (Marshall and Rossman, 1999, p. 57) of the people involved. This is a crucial component to understanding how and why the participants involved in the research act as they do in certain situations and in certain places.

Because Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment is a policy that seeks to promote a certain standard and expectation of student behavior while at school, it is obviously most relevant to the school setting in which it exists. While on campus, students will act and/or react towards staff members and each other in ways that are either compliant with the policy or in disobedience to it. Upon leaving the school premises, however, students are not required to adhere to the rules set forth by Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment and their behavior is no longer influenced by the school administrator or the Eastern School District. Therefore, any research into this topic must concern activity that occurs at the school during regular hours of operation. The qualitative genre dealing with individual experiences appreciates the importance of this setting for evaluating the effectiveness of the selected policy and the principals who enforce it. Therefore, it would not modify the reality of the situation for risk of

adversely influencing how students, teachers, and administrators normally behave. Otherwise, an inaccurate picture of life is created which distorts a “deeper understanding of the participants’ lived experiences of the phenomenon” (Marshall and Rossman, 1999, p. 60).

The research discovery methods were directed at principals who are responsible for promoting and enforcing Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment through their administrative leadership at the intermediate school level. The data collection strategy involved conducting an elite interview with these people to “capture the deep meaning of experience in their own words” (Marshall and Rossman, 1999, p. 61). It became necessary to know how they have communicated and implemented the school safety policy for all interested stakeholders, and what they perceived the results to be. These principals were in excellent positions to further advance this study with their comments because they were the ones who “provide accurate information about violent occurrences and responses to them” (Schwartz, 1996, p. 5). The in-depth elite interview procedure was selected for its rich potential to be a rewarding and informative experience if conducted correctly. It was necessary that the researcher displayed an understanding of the topic and avoided narrow or ill-phrased questions that could restrict the interview and detract from uncovering valuable data. Efforts were made to use “intelligent, provocative, open-ended questions that allow them [the principals] the freedom to use their knowledge and imagination (Marshall and Rossman, 1999, p. 114) to detail their perceptions about Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment and effective policy implementation through leadership.

Other qualitative methods of data collection were also originally considered, but these were eventually rejected for not being comprehensive enough to fully delve into the phenomenon of Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment. Surveys and questionnaires, for instance,

may have possibly collected adequate insight to competently answer some of the guiding questions, but it would have been merely a cursory exploration of the administrative experience and would have only scratched the surface of such issues as satisfaction, expectation, and evaluation. As a result, the researcher had determined that the in-depth elite interview held the most promise for fully exploring the strategies administrators have used to make Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment an integral part of school safety.

Site and Population Selection

Prince Edward Island's school system is composed of three separate school zones known as the Eastern School District, the Western School District, and the French Board. The former two, because of their size and geographical locations are further divided into school families within the larger districts. The French Board, however, is much smaller and operates as one united group of schools despite its rather sprawling geographical settings. The provincial government maintains a school system that includes all three levels of instruction from the elementary schools, to the intermediate schools, and finally to the high schools. Together, the three districts and the people who work in them, attempt to provide educational instruction, to foster a caring, learning environment, and otherwise to meet the daily needs of the approximately 22,000 students who attend regularly.

This thesis is concerned with how school violence and student safety issues are addressed in the Eastern School District through the procedures outlined by the Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment policy that has been the standard practice in all district schools for the past three years. To further refine the scope of this study, the research was specifically directed towards examining how the policy works at intermediate schools which have student populations

in grades seven, eight, and nine only. This particular group was selected because of evidence that suggests higher rates of violence among junior high students than any other segment of the overall school population (Rossman and Morley, 1996). It seems that "violent and aggressive behavior surges to its highest point during the teenage years (Dusenbury and Falco, 1997, p. 409).

A safe school study in 1986 revealed that "junior high students were being victimized by other students at higher rates than high school students, and a third of junior high students in large cities said they avoided certain places like the rest room because they feared being victimized by a peer" (Flannery, 1996, p. 3). In the years that followed, very little has changed with regard to junior high or intermediate school violence. Friday (1996) found that "ninth graders are much more likely than twelve graders to be in a fight or to carry weapons in and around school" (p. 24). In a similar study, Vestermark Jr. (1996) produced results to suggest that the secondary school system is predominately a setting in which "adolescents can individually or collectively act out aggressive impulses" (p. 103) unless there is an established and controlling sense of school order and student security.

Although higher rates of victimization among junior high students is a serious issue in schools across North America, one is again tempted to wonder if such a thing would exist in a predominately rural environment like Prince Edward Island. Unfortunately the answer is "Yes." It appears that the perception of violence has found its way into these intermediate schools and has become a concern for all vested stakeholders. In her study on Island schools and the views regarding violence, MacAulay (1995) found that "half of the instructional respondents believe that violence is increasing in their schools. Junior high teachers and guidance counselors believe this most strongly" (pv). For this reason, as well as those outlined by previously cited research, this

study will primarily direct its efforts and data collection at the intermediate school level to determine what, if any, changes Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment can and does make in a setting that needs it the most.

In terms of population for the 2001-2002 school year, the Eastern School District is responsible for the education and safety of 3825 intermediate school level students, and this is done in a variety of places, often according to geographical location and practicality. There are five major intermediate schools in the district, and these are identified according to ascending student enrollment as Montague Intermediate School (357 students), Birchwood Intermediate (433 students), Queen Charlotte Intermediate (531 students), East Wiltshire Intermediate (620 students) and Stonepark Intermediate (835 students). Together these schools provide education for 2776 students between grades of seven and nine exclusively. This represents 72.6% of the total intermediate student population within the Eastern School District. The minority of intermediate students, the remaining 27.4%, are educated at a number of other schools which are not specifically categorized as an intermediate school, and operate according to different grade configurations. For instance, there are 10 schools with classes extending from grade one to grade eight; 5 schools extending from grade one to nine, and one school that has five to eight exclusively. These schools generally have a large student population, but only a small percentage of this is intermediate level students who would be applicable to this particular study. For this reason, the research efforts focused directly on the larger intermediate schools, and involved interviewing those particular administrators who have the responsibility of ensuring that these environment are safe, secure, and meet the educational and social needs of the students who attend. Although this may appear to have limited the number of participants to be interviewed, it

is realistic to assume that the data collected accurately represent how Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment is presented and enforced among the vast majority of students and stakeholders at the intermediate level. It is the researcher's belief that the findings are significant enough to allow transferability of effective procedures and administrative strategies for the other schools with an intermediate population who are not directly involved in the study.

Obtaining access to the particular schools in question was a two step process. The first step involved sending a letter (Appendix C) to the Eastern School District Administrative office, as represented by Ken McAleer, the Director of Instruction and Program Services. Through this correspondence, the researcher outlined the nature of the study, the procedures for data collection, the selected sites and administrators to be contacted, and the significance to educational research. This was an act of professional courtesy and was intended to establish good communication and honesty with the Eastern School District and the administrators for whom it is responsible. Once this first step proved successful, the second step of the process then required corresponding with the administrators who would be directly involved with the study and the data collection. This was again to be completed in the form of a letter (Appendix D) which explained the nature of the study, discussed certain salient issues of Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment, outlined the interview procedure, and asked for their consent to participate (Appendix E). Throughout this process, the researcher was acutely aware of how the study would be greatly enhanced if all administrators contacted agreed to participate, but he also had to admit that such unanimous agreement could not be guaranteed. It was determined that if certain principals declined to participate and the number of intermediate student representation dropped below 60%, then the researcher would broaden the data collection to include those schools that have

intermediate populations within larger grade configurations such as grades one to nine.

Fortunately this contingency plan was not necessary as all the principals contacted readily agreed to participate and offered full cooperation.

The Researcher's Role

The researcher in this study was merely one half of the elite interview method for data collection, and as such had to take steps to prove to those administrators who composed the other halves that he was committed to “building trust, maintaining good relations, respecting norms of reciprocity, and sensitively considering ethical issues” (Marshall and Rossman, 1999, p. 85). As a teacher within the system he was now exploring, the researcher was required to successfully manage a delicate balancing act. In one regard, the subject matter had both a personal and professional interest and involved researching information for practical application in the school setting as well as for gaining theoretical appreciation for the policy and the administrative strategies used by the participants. As a result, the researcher perceived himself as being “an active, patient, and thoughtful listener, and having an empathetic understanding of and a profound respect for the perspectives of others” (Marshall and Rossman, 1999, p. 85). This allowed the elite interview to progress smoothly as both participants were aware of the issues involved, shared a strong background in education, had a common understanding of many of the factors surrounding student discipline, and appreciated the importance of a safe and caring school environment.

The other aspect of the balancing act was directly connected to the researcher's career as a teacher in an intermediate school system. He had to be very careful not to allow his own personal perspectives to interfere with the interpretation of the data being collected. It would have been

very easy to accept, interpret, and perhaps modify principals' comments without exploring them in sufficient detail. The researcher faced the possible risk of making assumptions from the interviews which were grounded more in what he had come to appreciate on a daily basis through his interactions with students and disciplinary procedures, rather than in what the participants had actually suggested or alluded to in response to the interview questions. The researcher was required to conduct the interviews and analyze the data with a certain objectivity that allowed the principal's thoughts and opinions to be fully expressed, explored, and represented.

The research study was designed to collect data on the implementation and enforcement of the Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment policy by administrators at the intermediate school level. This was a distinct focus and did not entail any hidden agenda or need for covert research (Taylor and Bogdan, 1984). The researcher was comfortable revealing the true nature of the study to the participants and was prepared to answer any particular questions or address any relevant concerns expressed by the people involved.

Ethical Considerations

There were some ethical considerations that seemed unavoidable and had to be clearly stated and addressed prior to the actual interviews taking place. Based on the small number of schools and the principals responsible for each, it became difficult to guarantee confidentiality of the participants. Although the administrators were interviewed and proved vital to the data collection, they were assured that they would not be personally identified in the final thesis document. All references to these principals within the text are presented through the use of the pseudonyms Mr. Black, Mr. Blue, Mr. White, Mr. Green, and Mr. Red. This, however, did not eliminate the possibility that others may make assumptions, whether correct or incorrect as to

where the data was collected and as to whom said what. Unfortunately this cannot be completely avoided, and had to be explained to the participants in the original correspondence so that no misunderstandings developed. The researcher believed such a possibility had to be fully addressed as he worked to establish a trusting relationship with each of the participants. To further this bond, the researcher also explained to the principals that they had the right to refuse to answer any questions they felt were not applicable in their situation or which made them feel uncomfortable; that they had the right to review and edit their transcripts; and that they reserved the right to withdraw from the study at any time prior to the final thesis presentation. In fact, the researcher strongly recommended to each participant that he review the transcripts of the interview. This allowed them to feel more comfortable with what they had said, while at the same time served as an excellent way to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the interviews. Any additional information or amendment was welcomed and appreciated at this time. The focus of the study remained the advancement of the administrative strategies used to successfully implement Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment. In no way was there an effort to make participants feel uncomfortable with or restricted from expressing their personal thoughts and opinions. If such a situation had developed, both the interview and the research study itself would have suffered.

Data Collection

Data for this research document was collected and recorded primarily through the use of elite in-depth interviews with the intermediate level school principals who are responsible for following the procedures outlined by Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment and the Eastern School District. This study proposed to address certain issues such as the principals'

perception of school violence among intermediate level students, the principals' awareness and employment of the safety policy within the school setting, and the steps that each has taken to ensure that the policy is working effectively and as intended by the district. Each principal is responsible for the management of his/her individual school, and, as such, may have used different strategies to implement Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment among staff, students, and other stakeholders. Research cited in the literature review had provided a framework upon which policy often succeeds or fails under the direction of an administrator who exemplifies certain desirable traits. It was now possible to better understand why policy is most effective when it is clearly communicated among stakeholders, applied fairly and consistently, and promotes socially meaningful consequences. When this is combined with a principal who establishes a strong school presence, supports teachers and students, and has a vision for improvement, there is little question that a safe school policy will make a difference in the daily routine and culture of the school.

The in-depth interviews were designed to explore how principals have made Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment a reality in their schools. The interviewing technique was open-ended and guided by a pre-determined series of relevant questions addressing areas of policy implementation, professional efforts, personal leadership philosophies, and an evaluation of the policy's strengths and weaknesses in a real-world setting (Appendix F). Although each principal possesses a separate personality with individual ethics and administrative strategies, they were and still are all connected in their profession by the common link of policy. To allow each principal the opportunity to express his personal and unique insight, while at the same time remaining on topic, the researcher had designed each interview question to follow a similar

progression of thought, and to elicit responses that were firmly grounded in the context of Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment.

Data Analysis

“Data analysis is the process of bringing order, structure, and interpretation to the mass of collected data. It is a messy, ambiguous, time-consuming, creative, and fascinating process” (Marshall and Rossman, 1999, p. 150) that eventually allowed the researcher to see the general truth being presented by the participants in the study. The data collected during the interview process in this research study was analyzed according to the typical analytical procedures outlined by Marshall and Rossman (1999) that involved six phases: “(a) organizing the data; (b) generating categories, themes, and patterns; (c) coding the data; (d) testing the emergent understandings; (e) searching for alternative explanations; and (f) writing the report” (p. 152).

Naturally, the elite interviews were transcribed and the information contained within organized into a system that provided for easy access, manageability, and consultation. From this data, the researcher attempted to identify any “salient themes, recurring ideas or language, and the patterns of belief that link people and settings together” (p. 154) in a manner that was relevant and enlightening to the research study. By generating certain categories and trends that were evident in the setting and/or expressed by the participants, it became possible for meaning to emerge that allowed the study to accomplish its objective of determining effective administrative strategies for implementing Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment in a school setting.

Upon completion of this section of the data analysis, the data (mostly expressed through dialogue from elite interviews) was reviewed and coded to identify any new and previously unanticipated results, while at the same time documenting those findings that suggested

generalizations from previous research. Areas of interest here included statements which were coded according to references involving consistency of enforcement, promotion of policy among stakeholders, fair treatment of students within policy parameters, implementation of policy, community involvement, limitations of current policy and suggestions for policy improvement. However, data that introduced previously unexpected information and established new patterns of behavior or thought outside of coding categories was examined for its value and contribution to the study. The researcher determined just how relevant and applicable these new data were to the overall understanding of administrative implementation of policy. At times this required a return to the literature in an effort to find evidence of previously recorded data, and/or it occasionally necessitated reorganizing the coding categories to accept an unanticipated finding. In either situation, alternative explanations for these new findings were pursued and evaluated to determine the extent to which they actually applied to the on-going study.

“Writing about qualitative data cannot be separated from the analytic process. In fact, it is central to the process....[The] researcher is engaging in the interpretive act, lending shape and form --meaning-- to massive amounts of raw data” (Marshall and Rossman, 1999, p. 58) to determine how this affects real world settings. The researcher relied on his interview participants to answer his questions and to give him the evidence he needed to proceed with formulating the results. The importance of these people and their stories cannot be overstated in qualitative research, and as such, the written report attempted to reflect this as accurately as possible. The draft was written in a way that clearly illustrated “the presentation of data gathered through in-depth interviews and participant observation where the participants’ perspectives are presented and their world views form the structural framework for the report” (p.158).

Data Management

In-depth interviews yield a tremendous amount of information from which certain relevant and perhaps unanticipated themes, categories, or patterns may emerge (Marshall and Rossman, 1999). While this provides an excellent and comprehensive manner by which to further the research and elaborate upon the research questions, it does present the risk of becoming overwhelming and disorganized if not restricted by certain management strategies. To maintain a sense of control and organization over the volume of data being generated by the interviews, this researcher followed a simple, yet effective process for data management. The first step was to transfer the recorded interview into a hard-copy format. This was accomplished by transcribing the data from the cassette tapes as soon as possible following the completion of the interview, in most cases immediately afterwards. The cassettes were labeled and dated, and the paper transcriptions were photocopied once. Each version, the original and the copy were filed in separate, secure locations. The transcriptions were also saved on computer disk as well, with a separate file name for each individual interview. This system allowed the data to be kept organized and contained in several different formats, while at the same time providing ease of access at any time in the future.

Upon completion of the research study, the information in its various forms was collected, boxed, and placed in a secure location where it shall remain for a period of five years or until such time that it may serve a similar and/or related research study. The researcher also maintained a separate file containing all other relevant documents that had been necessary to the study. This has been kept with the interview data and provides a complete background of the process leading up to a successful research thesis. Examples of such documents include the

articles and books that had contributed to the literature review, a copy of Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment, completed participant consent forms, and the Research Ethics Board approval verification. When the allotted time period has passed and new and more current research has surely eclipsed that contained within the secure location, the information shall be destroyed and only the thesis will remain as a testament to what was considered effective violence prevention for intermediate students in the year 2002.

The Time Line

Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment is an ongoing school policy and as such is present in schools on a daily and yearly basis. The research that was conducted concerning this policy involved contacting and meeting with the administrative leaders who maintain and promote Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment within their individual schools. The issue of a time line became a matter of convenience for the participants who were involved in the interview process. This required scheduling appointments that were acceptable to those principals who agreed to participate and provided the researcher with time to conduct his interviews. The initial correspondence requesting their participation was mailed out on May 19, 2002 and a ten day consideration period was allowed before the follow-up phone calls were made to each principal. Agreement to participate was unanimous and the first interview was conducted on June 3. The subsequent four interviews occurred within days with the final one concluding on June 12. Transcription began immediately and written copies were then supplied to each principal on June 15. Again, time was allotted for each administrator to review his transcript and to make any desired changes such as additions or deletions. Each principal was contacted on June 28 to review these considerations and then copies were retrieved, and any revisions were made as required. As

this final date marked the last day of school for the participants in which they would no longer be at their daily place of work over the summer months, the researcher secured and provided contact numbers so that any subsequent issues could be addressed if necessary.

It was understood that data analysis was to be an on-going process and it began immediately upon the completion of the first interview. This continued as each successive interview provided more information upon which to apply the coding procedures and the categorization of themes, until all interviews were completed. In-depth analysis, further coding, and the identification of salient themes and patterns was maintained until “the critical categories [were] defined, the relationships between them [were] established, and they [were] integrated into an elegant, credible interpretation (Marshall and Rossman, 1999, p. 152). The writing process that began following the analysis involved a number of rough draft copies which were prepared and revised until a more organized and polished product emerged. As the parts of the process fell into place, the findings provided the basis for interesting discussions and implications for Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment for the administrative strategies of policy implementation.

Chapter 4 - Findings

The research and the data collection preceding this thesis were conducted to determine how a relatively new school policy known as Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment has been used by administrators to effectively address and reduce the level of student violence and/or inappropriate behavior. The following information represents a comprehensive analysis of the data collected through the in-depth interviewing process conducted with the principals who administer to the largest intermediate schools in the Eastern School District. Their responses to each of the thirteen interview questions have been reviewed and organized in relation to certain categories,

and their beliefs, opinions, and suggestions are presented accordingly.

Policy and the Resulting Changes

Question 1: Has Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment changed the way discipline is applied to those students who commit violent acts in the school setting?

The question itself allows the principals to express simple agreement or disagreement in terms of a “yes” or “no” response. However, upon further explanation there is presented a much deeper interpretation involving a rationale grounded in personal and professional experience and familiarity with the current policy, as well as with those disciplinary actions that came before its inception. This adds a depth and complexity to the responses and provides for greater insight into the translation of the policy from a board-mandated requirement to an actual in-school working practice. Of the five principals responding, two agree that it has changed the way discipline is applied, two believe that it has not dramatically changed the application of disciplinary procedures but it has expanded upon the common-sense initiatives historically employed, and one contends that the policy had more or less dovetailed into the specific procedures that were already in place at his school “so there was not a huge degree of change” (Mr. Red).

As the explanations evolved, it became apparent that despite the differences in opinions, all principals do believe that the policy has made an impact on their degree of awareness as to particular roles and responsibilities in terms of violent incidents which occur on school grounds. The following statements emphasize the fact that for these administrators, the policy does provide clear, concise, and written documentation that may be referred to when necessary:

It’s nice to have the guidelines, to see them in place. It sets out for people responsibilities, different areas of responsibilities that they may or may not have been aware of (Mr. Red).

It's given us the impression by developing this policy that there is support there, there is direction there, and hopefully as we deal with this policy throughout the next couple of years, there'll be some consistency there as well (Mr. Blue).

It certainly has given some boundaries and parameters that personally I find helpful because of the fact that there is more direction on paper that allows me to try to do things in a more consistent manner (Mr. White).

I think with the procedures that you have to follow, you're more apt to be sure that you have followed all the procedures (Mr. Green).

I would hope to think that most of us operated on the same basis in the past as we do now, except the policy is certainly more clearly defined as to what our expectations are....And even though I am familiar with it, in most cases, I'll go back and refer to that as a checklist of "Am I doing what I'm supposed to be doing?" (Mr. Black).

As the literature has revealed, the actual existence of a standard policy for dealing with violent or inappropriate student behavior is the first step towards controlling and reducing such behavior (Hyman and Perone, 1998; Trump, 1998; Day, Golench, et al., 1995; Gabor, 1995 and Stephens, 1995). By creating Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment, the Eastern School District responded to the apparent lack of policy and disjointed administrative direction that had prevailed prior to its inception in 1999. The participants in this study express obvious appreciation for these efforts and now have a document that clearly provides a comprehensive procedure. Although there are some differing perceptions in regards to the depth of change wrought by the policy, this does not detract from the fact that the policy is now in place and there are definitive steps to be taken when student violence erupts.

The Policy, Communication, and Awareness

Question 2: In what ways do you believe an administrator may effectively communicate an awareness of the policy among the teaching staff, the students, and other various stakeholders such as parents, police, etc.?

The existing literature, as well as common sense, consistently recommends policy awareness as an integral component for its successful application (Maher and Leone, 1999; Trump, 1998; Rossman and Morley, 1996; Wanat, 1996; and Myles and Simpson, 1994). As the people most responsible for administering and enforcing any policy within the school settings, the principals are expected to understand and to promote the most salient, most relevant points of the policy among those who are most affected by its practices and procedures. Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment is no exception to this. As a guideline for appropriate, non-violent student behavior, the policy succeeds or fails in accordance with how well students, staff, and other various stakeholders are made aware of their roles, responsibilities, and general expectations in relation to what the policy requires of them.

As the question suggests, policy awareness extends beyond the confines of the school itself and reaches out into the surrounding community and relevant social agencies. These have been considered by the participating principals and their thoughts are outlined in each of the appropriate categories.

Awareness Among Staff

All principals responding to the question take seriously their role in promoting an awareness of the policy among staff members. This general feeling among the five school leaders is essentially captured and reflected by the statements of Mr. Green who believes that "it is [his]

responsibility to make sure that [he] communicates the policy to the teaching staff. [He] thinks that you have to spend time with your staff on the Caring Places to Learn policy because it is that policy that everyone will hold up at the end of the day if you need to deal with a particular situation.”

Certain methods for communicating the policy among staff members have been suggested. These include an ongoing staff review of Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment at the beginning of each school year, as well as at various times throughout the year when circumstances dictate the application of policy procedures. As Mr. White states, “I talk about it in terms of my staff meetings on occasions when we are talking on policy and things of that nature. I do remind staff that there is a direction that the board wishes us to follow, that Caring Places to Learn has to be adhered to by all members within the school setting.” Such consistent reinforcement of the policy as a document to be used practically and regularly would allow staff to recognize its importance and relevance in the daily school routine, thereby reducing the potential for the policy to become neglected and eventually forgotten, a concern which shall be further addressed in subsequent discussion.

Staff are usually given a written representation of the policy highlights at the beginning of the year as part of the teacher package that is handed out to each member prior to the arrival of the students. This is designed to promote an understanding of general staff responsibilities and expectations. While not one of the principals could say that they still present the policy in its entirety to staff, most do allude to passing out a shortened, condensed version of the policy that lists “a caption of what the incidents are and the relationship between student-to-student, teacher-to-student, teacher-to-teacher in terms” (Mr. Black) of what steps should be followed and

what the consequences are to be in each case of school violence. This may seem to be an incomplete representation of the finer details contained within the policy, but this is not viewed by principals as detrimental to an overall understanding of procedure. Mr. Black responds to this concern by crediting a general awareness as being sufficient in most cases. He presents his opinion as such: "The nuts and bolts of the policy, I would say that most staff probably couldn't refer to it and say, 'This is why I'm doing this,' but I think they understand the premises of the policy and what we're doing."

As a further follow-up to the teacher package with its condensed policy expectations, there is also some suggestion made in regards to promoting policy awareness through visual prompts. Mr. Blue feels that "it's pretty essential that it's posted where people can deal with it. It should be close to the principal's phone. It should be close to the staff room, and they [staff members] should be able to look at it and see it on a regular basis, and use it as a reference tool to see what should be going on and what has been going on, and see if there is some consistency in there." The literature certainly supports this practice and suggests that generating a familiarity with policy responsibilities and consequences is successfully accomplished by posting the policy in well-traveled areas where it is easily accessible (Schwartz, 1996; Day, Golench, and et al., 1995; and Stephens, 1994). As Mr. Blue so aptly states, "It's no good just to have it [Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment] developed and have all thirteen pages of it available in the principal's desk in the binder, but to have that communicated to all those people, teachers, staff, students, and other stakeholders as well."

An interesting point was raised by several of the principals in regards to sustaining policy awareness over time as familiarity often breeds routine acceptance. These administrators feared

that now that the policy has found its niche within the school system and has become common practice, there may be less emphasis on regular review and the policy could conceivably be overshadowed by newer, more pressing board initiatives. For instance, when the policy was first implemented in 1999, there was significant expectation and support conveyed by the Eastern School District Board Office that this policy was now the standard practice and all stakeholders must be made aware of its content. Principals responded to this directive well, and often did “quite an extensive presentation” (Mr. Red) to prepare staff and make them aware that “the implications to this are more rigorous now that things are down on paper, things are more precise” (Mr. White). But time has passed, and there was some concern expressed that the policy is not subject to as much staff consideration as once was deemed necessary.

The issue was most often raised with regard to new staff members who may have been hired after the initial period of policy review and promotion. As Mr. Green says,

I’m awful afraid that we get a policy, we work hard at it at the initial stages, and then from then on we simply pass it out. And I’m thinking particularly of new teachers here. I think that it is my responsibility to make sure that the new teachers are schooled in this policy, not just at our regular staff meetings where we kind of say, “The Caring Places to Learn policy, we’re all aware of that,” but that you actually go over the Caring Places to Learn policy.

This concern was addressed again by Mr. Red as he also reflected on the fact that follow-up has diminished over time. His opinion, as expressed here denotes a similar sentiment and illustrates a natural human tendency to eventually rely on assumptions that may or may not be necessarily as true as they once were. He believed that with “follow up on the policy when you

have a change in staff, especially if they're new people, you include it in part of the package sort of things, but you don't necessarily go through all the education stuff that would have been there before.... You sort of start assuming stuff." It is always difficult to sustain vigilance over time, and often the shift in focus is imperceptible and slow, but this situation must be avoided if the policy is to remain as useful and applicable to the violent incidents that occur in a school setting.

Awareness Among Students

As the group most directly affected by the practices detailed in Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment, the intermediate level students and their awareness of and adherence to the expectations and consequences of the policy are paramount to its successful implementation. The relationship is certainly obvious, but cannot be understated: the vast majority of students will behave in accordance to the standards put forth by the policy, if and only if they recognize them as being in place and relevant. For instance, a rule cannot be broken if the student does not know of the rule in the first place, "but if we're all aware of what our expectations are, then it should reduce violent behavior" (Mr. Green). This recognition is achieved through communication and consistency. Principals understand this relationship to be of utmost importance and have put in place a number of strategies by which to make the policy familiar to the students so that they will understand the boundaries that define their behaviors. "I think it is necessary for the students to spend time...going over the policy" (Mr. Green). This tends to be a familiar refrain among the principals as they discussed promoting an awareness of Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment with the intermediate level students.

The Student Handbook

It is common practice among all the intermediate schools involved in this study to issue to

students a handbook at the beginning of every year. Standard fare within these handbooks are rules regarding issues such as “physical and verbal assault, care of the building, damage to property, alcohol, drugs, smoking, and...discipline procedures” (Mr. Red). In most cases, the presentation of school rules tend to be outlined “more globally with students in a generic kind of way by talking about respecting each other, respecting each others’ rights, treating each other as you would want to be treated yourself” (Mr. Black). Since the inception of the policy, however, each of these handbooks now contains a new addition in the form of a section devoted entirely to summarizing the Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment policy. It is approximately two pages in length and offers basic definitions and the steps to be followed. It was created and provided by the Eastern School District and inserted into the handbooks to reinforce the existence of the policy and the consequences which may or will be set in motion if and when a violent incident occurs. It is interesting to note that many of these student handbooks contain what could be considered a “Contract Page” on which the student and his or her parent or guardian must sign their names indicating that they have read the information, that they are aware of the school rules, and that they agree to accept and work within the parameters of appropriate behavior and disciplinary actions while on school grounds.

Classroom Discussion

Although the handbooks are an effective manner by which to encapsulate the policy in a relevant and manageable format for the students, there is never really a guarantee that they will read this material if left to their own devices. As a result, teachers are often directed to review with the students the information presented in the handbooks at the beginning of the school year, so that each student is aware of what expectations and consequences are applied to his or her

behavior. This review may take the form of classroom discussion in which the rules and the policy standards are “reinforced by teachers in their homerooms” (Mr. Black), or schools may “set aside time early in the school year where perhaps the whole school at a given period, or perhaps each individual vice-principal or teacher get into the class and spend a class or two talking about the importance of this policy” (Mr. Green). In either approach, there are steps taken to ensure that students receive the information necessary to be aware of the general school rules as well as the Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment policy.

Awareness Among Parents and/or Guardians

Requiring parents/guardians to sign the student handbook and indicate that they have read and understood the school rules which are in place is certainly one way to promote an awareness of Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment among vested stakeholders. There are others, however, that have also achieved a modicum of success. For example, schools also use newsletters to keep parents informed of school activities. As well they often take the initiative to welcome and encourage parents and members of the community to become active participants in the events and general welfare of the school and its clientele. Such participation is usually most apparent at various times such as Meet the Teacher night, or through school-related organizations such as Home and School or Parent Advisory Councils.

There is the suggestion made by one principal that parental awareness of Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment has achieved a comfortable place in schools because of the time which has elapsed since the inception of the policy. Mr. Red believes that when trying to promote a familiarity of the policy, one must realize “that the parents who come to the junior high would have already had that same education process through the elementary schools. It’s not like they

dropped on the face of the earth and all of a sudden, they're here and you say, "Poof, there's a Caring Places to Learn policy. It's a policy they have dealt with for the last few years." This raises a good point in terms of not overwhelming parents with repetition of all the fine details outlined in the policy, but it also presents the risk of assuming too much, a potential problem identified earlier in terms of promoting staff awareness as well.

Awareness Among Social Agencies

Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment identifies a number of social agencies as having a possible role in the procedures associated with addressing student violence and/or inappropriate behavior. When the principals were asked to comment on the involvement of different social agencies, their responses, for the most part, were often vague, blanket statements which gave credit to the organizations but which did not actually suggest any particular method by which the policy is promoted among them. For instance, Mr. Red says in reference to "social agencies like Child and Family and Justice, their case load make junior high school look like a piece of cake. I don't know how they do it; I'm glad I don't have their job." While it is admirable to recognize and acknowledge the dedication of certain groups, such a response (characteristic of four of the five respondents) failed to expand the answer to the question posed. On the other hand, Mr. Blue is very outspoken as he presents the following statement:

Some of the other agencies -- social services or justice or whatever it might be -- I think that they need to be made more aware of this policy and the initial steps that are set in place for a particular situation. And I think they'd be more comfortable with that knowing that "Okay, this has already happened because they're calling us," or "They're involving us so this is what happens at this point," or "This is what should have happened at this point."

Based on the majority of the statements provided, the researcher concluded that principals are certainly aware of the existence of other social agencies in the community which could be relied upon to lend additional resources if necessary. Yet, this awareness may not be a direct result of the policy as much as it is of personal and professional experience. If one follows Mr. Blue's line of thinking, there is the realization that this relationship is not exactly reciprocal. Certain agencies are named in the policy, but they may not actually be aware of this. It is true that they will respond when called, that they will offer their support, and that they will work with students to reach a possible remedy for inappropriate behavior. However, as the agencies are doing these things, they may not fully understand that their actions and interventions are being regarded by the Eastern School District and the administrators as an extension of the policy.

Awareness Among Police Organizations

Police organizations are identified as playing an integral part of the possible consequences associated with infractions outlined by Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment. If, however, they are designated as such major players, then it becomes of interest to learn how the Eastern School District and the individual schools have fostered an awareness of policy expectations among the various police systems such as the local detachments of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and/or the Charlottetown City Police. In responding to the question, the participants identified three different components of police involvement. Mr. Black stresses what police are expected to do as outlined by policy, and he displays a strong familiarity with the procedures. He fails to suggest any methods by which to foster policy awareness, and this is evident in the following statement:

There are requirements in the policy that we do not have any choices on. And I inform

every parent that when there is a physical altercation between any two people that there is always the option of any one of the parents going to the R.C.M.P as an outside agency, and I'm referring to any police organization, to an outside agency to basically file a complaint. And when they file that complaint, the R.C.M.P are obliged to investigate. And they will investigate, and they'll make the determination as to whether they feel that one person was the aggressor or not, and if they were, whether there's charges being laid or not. They make that decision, it's not ours.

Mr. Red, on other hand, assumes a different approach. He has nothing but praise for the efforts being made by the local officers of the responding police organization. But again, like Mr. Black, he addresses the question according to his interpretation and does not respond to the actual query regarding fostering policy awareness. Consider how the focus of the following statement is designed to convey appreciation and admiration as opposed to awareness promotion:

I've seen police officers who come in here and intervene, I've had them in to talk with kids, and try to be proactive with kids. And where I've actually had kids charged, I've run the whole gamut, and I'm impressed by their professionalism. Most of the people they dispatch to the school are younger guys,...but I'm really impressed with how they handle themselves. I've got a couple who come here that I've phoned the chief and said, "Look, these guys do a really good job handling the kids that are here at the school.

The final three principals address the question in regards to how it was phrased and focus on the perceived level of awareness of Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment among police organizations. The responses tend to be very similar, with each of the three expressing a need for better promotion of the policy among the Charlottetown City Police and the R.C.M.P.

As Mr. Green states:

I think we can do that a little bit here at the school by the police officers that we sort of meet on a regular basis....But for getting this information out to the police and other agencies, I think the board has to take a bigger role. I think they have to have Social Services involved, police, R.C.M.P, and perhaps do some workshops with police as to what this Caring Places to Learn policy is all about. Police are identified a lot of times in the Caring Places to Learn policy, and I would wonder if, in fact, every police officer has had the opportunity to be presented with this policy.

Mr. Blue echoes these sentiments as he voices his thoughts on the issue of policy awareness among police organizations:

I'm not sure that they [R.C.M.P] are as aware as they should be, or the City Police, or whatever those people may be depending upon your situation. I don't think they are as aware because of the dealings I've had with those agencies, they will say to me, "Well, what do you people do in this situation?" or "What do you want us to do?" And I think if they are going to be identified as a player in some of the consequences outlined in this policy, they need to be more aware of it as well.

Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment was formulated on the belief that many organizations must work in conjunction with the school system to create and promote a setting that is peaceful, safe, and balanced for the students who attend on a regular basis. To this point the research has examined the changes caused by the policy, and the schools' efforts to generate an awareness among interested stakeholders. In some aspects this is more evident than others, yet the policy does suggest, at least theoretically, reaching out to all of those who play some part in

the execution of the policy objectives. The reality may paint a slightly different picture, but that certainly does not negate the possibility of improvements in the future, a concern to be addressed in the following chapter.

The Policy, Consistency and Fairness

The literature is replete with books and articles stressing the absolute necessity for fairly applied and consistently reinforced policy procedures. It is the most unanimously agreed upon condition for fostering success within a school system (Maher and Leone, 1999; Trump, 1998; Day and Golench, 1997; Rossman and Morley, 1996; Cooke, 1996; Stephens, 1995; MacAulay, 1995; Eliot and Tolan, 1994), and would be very applicable to Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment. The third research question of the interview was designed to direct the discussion towards consistency and fairness and to stimulate thought for the subsequent question on administrative discretion. The responses and interpretations are presented accordingly.

Question 3: Is it possible to ensure a fair and consistent approach to student discipline within the parameters set out by the policy?

Every principal agrees that it is much easier to be consistent when there is a common frame of reference upon which to base your actions and weigh your decisions. Mr. White gives credit to the policy for being an effective reference point that was very influential in creating a sense of consistency across the schools. His appreciation of the fine details and the step-by-step sequence of events to follow a violent incident suggest the policy has approached student violence from the right direction, and has given the administrators one of the many tools they need to foster consistency and fairness. In the words of Mr. White:

It seems to be a fairly inclusive policy with all its definitions and all of this preamble.

There's not too many interactions that it doesn't refer to and for that reason it has a tendency to be fair. If it is applied reasonably and consistently by all the people across the district, it has much more of a potential across the school district in terms of what each school does compared to the other. I think it gives us a reference point for our own students within school because we have to be as consistent as possible within our own building because *we* can be the problem if we don't do things consistently. Students pick up on the fact that we are not consistent, and parents will pick it up, and our dealing with the problem becomes the problem, perhaps, sometimes rather than the problem itself.

It is interesting to note that despite the concise nature of the policy requirements and the efforts made to establish a standard operating procedure, principals understand that discipline, fairness, and consistency are not always issues that may be carved in stone and applicable in each and every situation. They do appreciate the direction given by the Eastern School District, yet they will also admit that "there are individual factors all the time, but the policy hasn't taken away the fact that you can be fair and you can be consistent" (Mr. Green).

It often becomes a matter of interpreting the policy objectives: Is the policy intended to be followed literally word-for-word without exception? Or is it meant to show that the Eastern School District and the principals it employs are working toward creating a safe school environment, and that this policy is just one of many directions to be taken? For these administrators, it is the latter. For instance, Mr. Red believes the policy "allows enough flexibility" and "if someone were to say you have to interpret it literally, then it might get a bit awkward" because there are situations where a disparity exists between how one student should be treated as opposed to another. This set the stage for what Mr. Black calls the "perceived fairness" of

discipline. He explains his belief as such:

The person at the end of the day that receives whatever the consequences are isn't necessarily going to perceive it as being fair. So at the end to the day perception is probably more important than reality. Because if it is perceived to be unfair, it doesn't make any difference how close to fair it is or not, the perception is what's going to stand. And in dealing with any incident of a discipline issue of any kind, there is always the interpretation that it is going to be perceived as unfair. If you can put in place the clear expectations ahead of time, then you're less likely to get perception problems.

In many ways, this captures the essence of the policy. It has put into place the clear expectations mentioned by Mr. Black, and it does have the potential to reduce the perception of unfair treatment imposed by administrators. Consistency in this case is important, but not to the point where it removes discretion. As Mr. Blue suggests:

I think the goal of the policy is to make sure there is a guideline to be followed. But every case is different. So in terms of a recipe to follow when you're disciplining students, I don't think that's the purpose of the policy. I think it's there to make sure that everyone is protected....I think that the rights and responsibilities are laid out and the consistency in terms of student discipline is probably something that administration has to work on on a daily basis.

Such statements moved the interview seamlessly to the next question which pursued the notion of using administrative discretion when dealing with each incident of student misbehavior.

The Policy and Administrative Discretion

The Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment policy is very specific in what it

directs administrators to do when violence occurs, but the researcher was interested to know if and how the principals could possibly retain the power to make decisions based on individual student circumstances. Would the policy still allow for this, or would the pre-determined sequence of events eliminate the administrator's professional and personal judgment? The answers are considered in the following section.

Question 4: Do you find it possible to balance administrative discretion with the very concise procedures outlined by the Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment policy?

A study by Gabor (1995) determined that principals see themselves as having a major role to play in the decision-making process that leads to disciplinary action and consequences. The crux of his argument was finding a balance between adhering strictly to the letter of the law without exception, a popular notion often characterized as "zero tolerance," and/or allowing the intervention of discretionary judgments based on extenuating circumstances. His study revealed that principals preferred using their own personal and professional judgment and were reluctant to promote rigid and automatic sanctions for each and every incident that occurred. This was perceived as removing the principal from the equation and not allowing for any flexibility in situations that may very well warrant it.

The principals who work in the Eastern School District, and who are required to follow the procedures set forth by Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment have expressed comparable opinions in regards to the parameters by which administrative discretion may be used. All respondents agreed that the policy allows for flexibility, consideration of external factors, and relevant judgment in most situations. The following statements highlight the

remarkably similar sentiments of the participants:

Good judgment still has to rule I think. And there has to be an ascending order, a first time offender and a fifth time offender is kind of different. Many people talk about zero-tolerance and I sit back and say, "I don't. It's very difficult to have zero tolerance....I can tell you that every situation that we're aware of will be dealt with, and sometimes there are degrees." I'm concerned with the people who refuse to interpret the policy, or who follow the policy right to the letter (Mr. Green).

I think the policy presumes common sense. So at the end of the day as an administrator, you are making decisions based on, "Yep, this is the expectation of the policy." That, balanced with appropriate common sense and the experience of dealing with a particular student in the past or a particular parent in the past, does leave us a certain amount of discretion. There is no doubt about that (Mr. Black).

That balance is easy because there is a lot of thought and development put into the policy. And a lot of it makes sense. A lot of it is common sense. A lot of it has taken some of the decision-making away from the principal or the administrative team. But it gives us some direction, and the balance between administrative discretion certainly isn't encroached upon (Mr. Blue).

I think so. I think it allows enough flexibility. If someone were to say you have to interpret it literally, then it might be awkward, but I don't get that sense from the [Eastern School] Board. I think that as long as they feel we're doing it fairly, and we're fairly consistent with what we're doing. My own personal philosophy is "Fair but not equal" (Mr. Red).

I think so. If I'm not quite sure of all the dynamics around why a student is in difficulty, then I can use my discretion as to how deep I want to go into the policy....And if a student may have made a mistake or something, but their pattern is not such that they have gotten into much trouble in the past, I don't have to deal with them to the full extent. I think I have that flexibility, and I would like to think that my discretion is still there in that way (Mr. White).

The responding administrators display an obvious understanding of and comfort level with the policy, and they have been able to interpret the stated procedures and objectives in such a way that they may still maintain a voice in the decision-making process. It should be noted, however, that during the interviews, the researcher did not make a definite distinction between violent or inappropriate acts of a less serious nature and those of a more serious nature. Two of the principals touch upon this issue nonetheless, and suggest that although the policy allows for flexibility in most routine cases, there are those events that cannot and will not be open for discretion, and must be handled to the full extent of policy. This is evident in the statements of Mr. White and Mr. Black who both suggest that there is a boundary or cut-off point at which their power of judgment and direct involvement may be limited due to the seriousness of the incident:

I would say that if it's what I would say is a high profile infraction, then I don't think I would have as much discretion in the particular part. If it were a sexual assault or something like that, I think my discretion would be much more limited than it would be if a student made a verbal comment to another, perhaps not understanding what they were saying and the whole thing. My judgment or discretionary powers would more in practice than they would if it were a more serious crime or a more serious infraction (Mr. White).

If there is some form of a major threat, then we don't have choices, it goes to an outside agency and is reviewed. I suppose even that is somewhat of a change. I mean, I've taken a knife off a student in the past and I dropped it in my bottom drawer and it stays there....The new policy clearly states that if there is a weapon taken off a student, then it must be turned into a police official,...and we don't have a choice in that, that's where it goes. And then the determination is made by somebody else as to what happens from there; we don't necessarily have the final say in that (Mr. Black).

The Policy and the Consequences

The literature has revealed that the majority of students value and more easily accept disciplinary consequences that have some relevance and socially meaningful benefit for them (Baker, 1996; Day and Golench, 1995; MacAulay, 1995; Stephens, 1995). They appreciate knowing the rules, being treated fairly when rules are broken, and having the opportunity to move through a sliding scale of consequence in which first offenses are not usually dealt with as severely as subsequent offenses. As well, many students have suggested that suspension and expulsion, the traditional and most common form of discipline imposed by schools, does not carry with it any value for the offender either as a deterrent or a lesson (Costenbader and Markson, 1998; Bourgeois, 1996; Comerford and Jacobsen, 1987). With this knowledge at hand, the researcher explored the issue of disciplinary consequence as outlined by Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment and enforced by the participating principals.

Question 5: How do you evaluate the consequences set out in the policy? In other words, do you believe the policy provides for socially meaningful consequences that help students realize their inappropriate actions?

In response to this question, the administrators appear divided as to how well the policy has performed in setting and enforcing consequences that have some type of meaning for the students. In many cases, the principals interpret the policy's flexibility to meet their own particular strategies when dealing with a student who had committed a violent or inappropriate act. The principals utilize the fact that the general "consequences in the policy are basically all pretty non-directing, non-determined" (Mr. Black), and this allows them to attempt a number of approaches which may or may not be clearly itemized by Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment. Often it is through these interactions and explanations that consequences seem to take on a more socially meaningful context. Consider the responses by the following principals who view the policy as a good starting point from which to try different strategies conveyed through communication and empathy. They seek to balance for the student an admission and understanding of the inappropriate act with a recognition and acceptance of the consequences:

Any time that you're able to sit down with people who have gotten into difficulties with one another, you can show them the consequences, you can help them work through the issues, and you can give them the necessary supports. I think the majority of students realize their actions, what the consequences have to be, and how it could have been very hurtful to an individual student.... Yeah, I can fully see how it [Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment] can help students realize their inappropriate behavior (Mr. Green).

To me the policy reflects just good common sense types of things. Such as there has to be a process in place: a student is not automatically suspended the first time they make a mistake. There is a duty of care there that we should sit down, talk with the students, explain what is going on, give them an opportunity to correct the behavior. We

should talk with parents so that they have an opportunity to do what they need to do to help correct the problem, and things like that. It's good practice (Mr. White).

The one thing it [Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment] does is puts an onus on the school to do more follow up; the school, teachers, and parents, and whatever else.... This is a place where kids are desperately trying to fit in and belong somewhere.

And some of them, yeah, some them do some dumb things (Mr. Red).

The participating principals are obviously leaders who care about their students and who believe that a safe and secure school environment is the general reality in which they work. They use the policy to generate the initial discussion with the student, to outline their position, and to provide a backdrop of consequence from which they have to work. They do not necessarily interpret the policy literally in every case, and are still receptive to modifying discipline when addressing the inappropriate act. As Mr. Red says with regard to interpreting the policy to meet each separate incident, it is important to keep fairness in mind:

That's what I tell them, I say, "You don't have to like what I'm doing to you, I don't expect that. I'm not mad at you, it's not about you, it's about what happened." And usually I ask them, "Is that fair?" And most often I get "yes" as a reply. I don't always get that as a reply, but I think most of the kids think you'll at least try to give them a fair shake.

Although some principals do believe that the policy provided for socially meaningful consequences, there remains some question as to whether they feel this way because of the content of the policy itself or because of the interpretation they have brought to it. Unlike the other principals who tend to base their evaluation on the efforts they have made to impart a sense of

social awareness to the student through discussion, Mr. Blue removes himself from the interaction and addresses the policy and its content as a separate entity. He is very forthcoming in his assessment of the policy as document that may be under pressure to accomplish too much in the area of beneficial consequences. In his words:

I don't think it has that much control over the consequences and student learning that comes as a result of any discipline that might have been provided. There are so many other factors that help a student determine whether they're going to make a better decision in the next situation; it certainly makes them aware of what the principal is planning to do, or what the administration is planning to do if it happens again because that would certainly be part of the discussion that that student would have with the administration. I think it is a little much to ask for that particular policy to control or to have a whole lot of influence on socially meaningful consequences.

The act of suspension factors heavily into the majority of consequences that are suggested by Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment. Suspending and contacting the parents or the guardians of a misbehaving student is the most common disciplinary action used by the school principals who follow the guidelines of the policy. But this begs the question: Does it really work?

Of the five principals interviewed, four make little or no reference to suspension in term of potential benefits. For them, it is accepted practice that can be modified accordingly in terms of in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, and/or duration of suspension. Only one principal, Mr. Blue, actually questions the efficacy of the suspension as an appropriate means to deal with students who behave inappropriately. He believes that:

Whether the lesson that could be learned from the suspension has been learned is certainly a dilemma that administration deals with all the time....Whether there's meaningful consequence, we like to hope so because we do overuse suspension, but we are also limited in the public education system in what we can do....The one thing suspension does do, and I guess we use this to justify it, is that it sends a message to the rest of the population that there are consequences if rules are broken, or difficult things are to be done if there are acts of abuse.

There is no denying the fact that Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment is a policy steeped in the tradition of suspending students who do not conform to acceptable modes of in-school behavior. Is this meaningful? Do students learn something from being suspended? Does it eliminate the possibility of future inappropriate behavior? Probably not. But the principals in this study do not merely dole out suspensions one after another until they have broken the student down and proved a point. Evident in their approaches is a sensitivity for the student who has done something unacceptable, a willingness to work with parents or guardians, and an effort to discuss the event and identify the deeper issues of how and why such an act is not permitted. This is the point at which social awareness comes into play. By communicating with students, the principals are helping them see the repercussions of their actions, and quite possibly encouraging them to make a better decision in the future. As one principal notes in our discussion, it is important to always remember that "the majority of kids in your school and my school are good people, they don't want to harm one another, they want to be friends with one another, they don't want to hurt one another, but sometimes they do hurt one another, sometimes it's intentional, but most of the time it's not" (Mr. Green).

The Policy and The Community

Noted educational researchers such as Coleman (1996), Huff and Trump (1996) and Vestermark Jr. (1996) have suggested that the school is very susceptible to the societal events and changes that surround it. They contend that the existence of a successful school community may be highly dependent and deeply influenced by the various types of support and positive interaction provided by the community at large. This study pursued this interesting line of thought and applied it to the Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment policy by looking at how the participating principals evaluate the role of society in regards to affecting and reducing violent incidents at the intermediate school level.

Question 6: What role do you perceive the larger, external community as having to promote a reduction of student violence within the school, and in accordance with the policy?

The responses to this question are fascinating because they reveal a great deal about where exactly each of the participants place the school within the community. For some, it is a distinct and separate entity that should work with the larger, external community to foster a cooperative approach to reducing student violence. For others it has become a nucleus under pressure by a surrounding society that portrays violence as an accepted practice within popular culture. And finally, for one, the school has become an overtaxed system of responsibilities which is no longer confined to the traditional objectives of long ago, but which is now expected to often fill the void left by the failings of a community at large.

The Cooperative Approach

“If we’re going to be successful we need the community to feel that they’re going to be a part of the school, and part of the school means understanding and dealing with and responding to

discipline issues or acts of violence or acts of abuse” (Mr. Blue). The words of this school leader suggest a mutual understanding between the school and the community as educating and supporting each other. He believes that the working relationship between school and community is a unique situation that carries with it tremendous expectation for both parties involved. For the school and staff, he contends that “there is the onus as a public education system to communicate policy in particular to those people [community members], and to communicate their role in it, and to identify the fact that policy is developed by us but they have a role to play in it.” In return, the community places an equal, if not greater, burden of responsibility on the school and its employees to cover a diverse spectrum of academic objectives, as well as “to teach social skills, provide sexuality information, make sure that the kids are treated fairly, and the kids understand how to treat each other fairly” (Mr. Blue). It would seem a tall order for all involved, but Mr. Blue recognizes this as one relationship that must be carefully cultivated and nurtured because, in his opinion, “the school seems to be the last bastion of that sense of community that we have.”

Mr. Green displays a similar assessment of community as a cooperative partner in the efforts to reduce student violence. However, he is careful to suggest that this cooperation exists not only within the Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment policy, but also beyond it. He believes that “even if no one has even read the policy, a lot of the policy is just good common sense. It means you don’t get in the way of someone; it’s not the way to do things. It’s just inappropriate to attack a person, to swear at a person, to be racist or whatever. We all know that just from growing up.” This provides a strong argument for appreciating the effort the community has already made to raise children who come to school understanding the basics of social interaction. As the following statement explains, Mr. Green would like to build upon this work by

continuing to involve the community as much as possible:

We need the external people like our parents, agencies like Crime Stoppers to come into our schools and talk about the fact of crime and vandalism. I think we need to invite outside agencies into our schools to talk about how important it is to be kind to one another....I think children need to be given as much information that we as a community can give them as to what they should do if something happens....and I think the policy is good solid motherhood statements that we all believe in. We all believe in the rights of others, we all believe in safe and secure buildings. I certainly see the larger community promoting it.

A Violent Community

When the dust settles and the optimism expressed by Mr. Blue and Mr. Green clears, the forum is now turned over to Mr. Red and Mr. Black, two voices with a slightly more pessimistic, if not equally important interpretation. These latter principals see the school system as a beneficial social institution surviving in a culture that may promote a less-than-beneficial belief system. For them the school will not easily bring about lasting change if it must continually compete with a larger society that does not adhere to similar standards of good manners, fair play, respect, and compassion. In the following statement, Mr. Red is very clear as to what he sees as one of the major influences on student behavior that may begin at home, but which unfortunately also finds its way onto school campuses where it plays out in a variety of ways, many of which are not exactly model behavior:

I think the toughest things that kids face today is all the violence they see on television, perhaps the violence they see in their home. The TV is a big player when you look at the

WWF (World Wrestling Federation), or you watch the hockey games, or you watch boxing on TV or all that other stuff. And these people are paid an enormous amount of money to do stupid things. And kids at this age level think they're invincible, so it's all right to do that stuff. We get five hours a day to counteract nineteen so it's a hard sell.

Mr. Black expands upon this dichotomy between what school is expected to accomplish despite what society is expected to allow. Like Mr. Red, he also grounds his explanation in the familiar:

A hockey game is a good example. We go to hockey rinks and we watch parents abuse the face off officials, coaches, opponent players; they boo as a normal part of the routine that happens. Take that back to our own communities and the same kind of thing is happening. The parent who says to her son or daughter, "Don't take that crap, smack 'em." That's just an extension of the larger community where we still are; we're probably a long piece away from having that community on side with the fact that we're not accepting violence as a means of solving issues....Until that changes, we're always going to be trying to improve the relationship that we have in school.

For these two principals, the schools at which they work are effective institutions with high expectations, reasonably consistent policy reinforcement, and a lower rate of violence than that found in the surrounding communities. The comments by each were tendered not as a complaint, but rather as a weary recognition and reluctant acceptance of a society and morality that appears far beyond the reach and control of the educational system. As principals they are prepared to meet the objectives of the policy, to create a safe and caring school environment, and to teach students how to affect positive change in the world beyond. As members of society,

however, they sometimes find it difficult to align these factors in the glare of harshness that surrounds them.

An Overworked System

The next administrative point of view to be considered is that expressed by Mr. White, a principal who perceives the school as taking on far greater and more diverse responsibilities than at any time in the past. This notion had been briefly identified by Mr. Black in his interview when he said, "I believe schools are often given too many roles, and that we're asked to take on too many things," but it was expressed within the context of another discussion question and received no further follow-up. Mr. White, however, recognizes this situation as a potential problem for the school system and suggests greater community involvement may be a possible solution. This is evident in his following statement:

I guess I'm seeing more of that now because my sense is that we as schools have taken on a lot of responsibilities that maybe we should be looking at more carefully. We tend to be very much a social agency, a policing agency, a health agency, which some days more so than we should be, a lot of days more so than we should be. And some of these problems are more difficult to solve and our resources aren't sufficient to do them well. So I think it helps to put it in context a little bit better, and it makes me think more in terms of asking or requiring outside agencies to be more involved than they might be right now.

There is no doubt that all of these principals recognize the potential role community could play in reducing school violence, but they certainly demonstrate divergent thinking on an issue that cannot be ignored. This researcher has seen these men express varying degrees of optimism, pessimism, and hope; powerful qualities which could play an integral part in making Caring Places to

Learn/Safe School Environment a useful piece in the puzzle of student violence.

The Policy and Staff Support

Teachers need to feel supported by the administration in their personal and professional efforts to report and thereby possibly reduce student violence. In the absence of this support, staff members will be more reluctant to confront students for fear of provoking a physical or verbal altercation for which they may be unprepared (Futrell, 1996; Noguera, 1995). This study realized the importance of a strong relationship between teachers and principals, and spent time exploring the issues associated with administrative efforts to make staff feel more comfortable and willing to address student violence without fear or hesitation.

Question 7: What are some particular strategies you believe could be used to make staff members feel safe and supported within the school and in relation to their reporting of student violence?

Paramount to the success of fostering a supportive environment for teachers as they deal with student violence is communication. Every principal in this study stresses the need to talk and confer with staff through both the formal and informal channels of interaction. As administrators dealing with teachers and students on a daily basis, these men are acutely aware of how any number of people involved in a situation can explain their perceptions and actions from entirely different perspectives. The result is conflicting stories that need to be investigated to everyone's satisfaction. As Mr. Red reiterates, "I think that if somebody comes to you with something or they send a student to the office, then you make sure you go down the hall and find out what the other side of the story is." By involving the teacher in the communication process, by encouraging them "to find out what the consequences were" (Mr. Red), and by considering as many aspects of

the situation as possible, the administrator is able to successfully convey his support and guidance to staff members through this particular strategy. Mr. Red believes that good communication cannot be overstated:

I think the biggest thing, though, is communication. That way people can say, "Yeah, I can live with that," or "No, I can't, I'm really miffed by that." Sometimes they are, sometimes they're not. But I think for the most part if you sit down and try to share with them all the stuff that's going on, or as much of the stuff that's going on that you feel that you can share, then I think, by and large, teachers are a pretty compassionate bunch and if they know a few of the details or some of the details, then they say, "Yeah, okay, I can live with that."

Mr. Blue expresses similar sentiments and a philosophy also grounded in the process of communication. Like his counterparts, he believes that there has to be a sustained feeling of support conveyed by administration to the teaching staff. In his strategy he assumes the responsibility of showing concern over time. For instance:

When something happens, then you don't just deal with it and move on. You deal with it and make sure that person feels that you always have that in the back of your mind, that you're concerned about their welfare and their well-being, that they were part of the situation, and whatever way it turned out, it did that because they got together with administration, had good communication, and came up with a decision.... You have to make an effort to make sure that they all feel safe, and that this policy plays a role, and that there is a comfortable working environment.

As Mr. White suggests, efforts should be made to communicate to staff that administration

is there to support the teachers as they deal with student violence. However, it is equally important that this communication be grounded within the context of Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment which recognizes limitations beyond which it is no longer primarily a teacher-student issue:

I'm thinking that by letting staff people know that we would be there behind them and letting them know what our preferences would be with regard to their handling a situation, how much independence we'd like to have them on, how much empathy we'd like to give them, or the support that they would have to solve the problem individually, how much support the district would expect, how much independence the district would expect them to give to solve their own problem. But when it becomes something which is of a more serious nature, when they have to hand it off to administration or when they have to hand it off to the school district because it's a problem which is persistent. In that respect they don't have to take ownership of more than they have to.

The idea of ownership raised by Mr. White is very interesting and is expressed in greater detail by other administrators as well. Mr. Green, for instance, believes that teachers should be involved in the daily functioning of the school beyond the classroom. He speaks primarily of the practice of "duty" in which teachers patrol hallways and make their presence known during class breaks, lunch time, and before and after school. However, as with most strategies designed to curb student violence, it is important to put the right people in the right places. There is a reciprocity inherent in this relationship, and Mr. Green works to balance the expectations of administration and the Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment policy with the particular strengths and weaknesses of his staff. In his words:

We encourage staff not to walk away from things, not to ignore things. Deal with it. If you feel that you can't deal with it, get someone who can and will. I guess on every staff you have the people who are a little more timid in groups than others, particularly on duty when you don't know everyone. The back hallway down by the gym might be more difficult to supervise than the main foyer where there are more adults coming by. Well, move the duties around, don't allow one person to be down there.

Through efforts like these, Mr. Green is conveying a sense of concern for his teachers and demonstrates an understanding of their potentials and limitations in regards to student violence. He promotes an environment in which teachers may more easily meet their responsibilities, while still feeling a sense of contribution to and ownership of a successful school setting.

The notion of ownership is again addressed by Mr. Black who believes it is necessary for the creation of a sense of community among staff members, and is instrumental to fostering support for the reporting of violent incidents. He suggests this allows teachers to feel "that everyone has an equal ownership of what happens within a school community...that if there is an incident reported, they're not going to be singled out as the person who is going to carry the responsibility of that report, that there is total staff involvement, so it is a total staff effort." In essence, this approach makes every staff member comfortable within the school, yet to some degree increases their sense of responsibility to their fellow colleagues. Once the relationship is created, it maintains itself as staff expect certain behaviors from one another. As Mr. Black says, "I think the pressure comes from, not necessarily from me as the administrator, but comes from each of the teachers on each other. Once it's in place everyone is expected to play their role, and if you don't play your role, there's going to be people on your case. And I think that's what

makes it work.”

It appears that each of the principals recognize the need to make the staff feel connected to the school, and willing to report student violence when it occurs. To varying degrees each administrator believes strongly in promoting good communication among teachers, adhering to the expectations of the Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment policy, and fostering a sense of ownership and community. Together these strategies are designed to reduce violent or inappropriate behavior on school grounds by relying on the teachers to make this a reality. As Mr. Green says, “I would hope that no one has difficulty reporting student violence. I would hope that there would not be a staff member in this province that would hesitate to inform the proper authorities about student violence.”

The Policy and the Administrative Presence

Efforts made by administrators to maintain a strong visible presence on the school grounds have been described in the literature as being among the most common, most effective methods for reducing student violence and inappropriate behavior (Futrell, 1996; Stephens, 1994; Hill and Hill, 1994). To delve into this issue further and to evaluate its applicability to the participants within this study, one of the research questions asked the principals to consider the role their presence plays in promoting a safe and secure school environment.

Question 8: In what ways do you believe the presence of the administrator can be made well-known around the school? How do you think this may affect the level of school violence that occurs?

Response is immediate and unanimous when discussing the idea that high visibility is essential to successful administrative leadership. There is little need for interpretation here as each

principal vigorously extols a proactive approach to discipline through which he puts himself or the administrative team out in the hallways, in the trouble spots, and/or in the parking lots before and after school. The following statements represent a common and consistent belief in administrative visibility among the five participants, and demonstrate how deeply committed these men are to being in the right place at the right time:

I try to be out in the halls and visible as much as possible because that's when I'm going to have the most contact with the kids. And if they see you out there then they understand that you're there. The kids who are trying to get away with stuff realize that you're there, and the kids who are concerned about their safety or whatever it might be realize that you're there as well....So for the administration to be well known they have to be exposed. And you have to get out of your office and make an effort (Mr. Blue).

I think that you have to be on the move,...but the less you're out of the building the better. If you're here to meet and greet the kids the better....I think a high visibility is the best thing that can go for all of these different things like Caring Places to Learn, of bullying programs, and things like that. These are youngsters we're dealing with, and I think they do trust adults, and they do listen to adults, and they like to see you around. They feel secure when you're around (Mr. Green).

Gotta be out and about, gotta be out and about. One of the things that we do is we're out through the school, we make regular trips through the school, one of us makes a circuit through the school at least once a period. We're out and about in the morning or down the hall when the kids come in wandering around....So people know you are around, and that's the big thing. And parents have to know that you're around too (Mr. Red).

I believe that an administrator needs to be seen around the school, and sometimes it's just a matter of a walk-about, being there, being visible, talking with students, and I think it has a lot to do with the school climate....I think there's a lot to be said for being proactive and insightful as an administrator. We could do an awful lot of book work in terms of organization and structure, but if we don't do the other things we pay a bigger price for it down the road in the fact that we have to spend an awful lot of time putting out the fire that could have been lessened by being physically present, or by being sensitive to signs that need to be addressed (Mr. White).

I'm a very big proponent of proactive administration and proactive dealing with any issues....High visibility by presence is probably one of the most important factors in terms of how things operate within the school. A preconceived kind of issue of where your trouble spots are, presence in those trouble spots make it happen or prevent it from happening, make the good happen and prevent the bad from happening (Mr. Black).

There is little doubt that these principals recognize administrative presence and high visibility as integral to their success. Being there, being active, and being seen are necessary components to promoting a safer environment, and are very effective in reducing the potential for inappropriate acts to occur. As Mr. Blue suggests, "If you're sitting in the office and a fight breaks out, maybe there's a problem with your priorities."

The Policy and a Reduction in Student Violence

Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment was created with the noble intent of reducing school violence and inappropriate acts among students. On January 14 of 2002, the policy will celebrate its fourth anniversary as the official and recognized voice of procedure when

promoting school safety. It is time now to determine if the policy has, in the opinion of the participants in this study, achieved the objectives it so clearly outlined several years earlier.

Question 9: How do you evaluate the success of Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment in terms of reducing violent incidents among students and staff members?

The principals are very united in their answers to this question. It appears that not one of them really believes that the policy has had any significant impact in reducing violent incidents among students and staff members. They express appreciation for the fact that the Eastern School District Board Office has gone to the effort to create such a detailed policy; they are pleased that there is a frame of reference now in place; and they do feel comfortable with the move towards consistency among schools across the district. However, none of the administrators could credit possible violence reduction to the policy just because it was written and put in place. Consider the perspectives presented in the following statements as each principal expresses his opinion on the policy and a related reduction in school violence:

I don't think it has had a large effect to this point. I think it is very important that it is in place and those situations can be dealt with....I would like to think it has had an effect, but I wouldn't be surprised if it didn't. I think there are so many other social factors that are controlling student behavior, and many times in a negative way, that it would be hard to evaluate the effect that this particular policy has on it (Mr. Blue).

I wouldn't necessarily attribute it directly to the policy. The policy probably puts in writing what should occur in every school anyway....People will tell me when they come in here to visit that they find the kids polite, that they find themselves being welcomed, and

that the school has a good tone to it. If that's a reflection, then it's working. Would it be the same if the policy wasn't there? I'm not sure (Mr. Black).

I honestly can't tell you whether it has reduced violent incidents. I could not sit here and tell you because we have a Caring Places to Learn Policy, that there's been a big reduction in school violence....I think it has made every one of us more aware....Perhaps five years from now we might be able to say that violent acts have decreased because of it. I don't think you can say that today (Mr. Green).

I don't know if the policy itself reduced the violent incidents just because it was written, but I do think it helped make everyone aware that there is an expectation, a process to be followed for violent types of situations. My perception is that we're more alert now because things are down on paper (Mr. White).

It's good to have the guidelines, it's good to have it there, and it's good to have the reference points, but it's only as good as the people that are doing the job. So, there's nothing fancy in that one. You get out there and you believe in what you're doing and put it in place, then it'll work. If you say it's a crock, then that's how it's treated (Mr. Red).

For these administrators, using good judgment and imposing fair and reasonably consistent discipline has always been part of their daily routine, so the policy has not greatly impacted upon that. They admit that they have been made more aware of what the Eastern School District Board Office expects them to do, but they have not recognized any incongruity with what they had done prior to the policy. This could possible account for the smooth transition from theory to reality enjoyed by Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment. Perhaps so many of the administrators felt such little pressure to dramatically alter their established philosophies and

strategies of discipline that there was no need for resistance. It stands to reason that the policy may not be as much a change put in place for these principals as it is a refinement of the good practice already in place. The policy became yet another tool to be used in the reduction of student violence, but like any tool, its success and potential depends greatly on the people who know how to exploit it to its full advantage.

The Policy, Its Strengths, Its Limitations, and Its Potential for Improvement

As the interviews moved towards conclusion, the researcher sought to gain more insight from the participants in terms of how each regarded Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment as a policy with certain strengths, limitations, and/or potential areas of improvement. These principals have had time to use the policy, to test it under both routine and extreme situations, and to form a personal and professional evaluation of the policy as an effective or ineffective tool for reducing student violence in intermediate schools. Their transcribed thoughts have been reviewed, categorized, and are now presented.

Question 10: What are some of the particular strengths of the policy which allow it to be consistent, fair, and relevant to those who are most affected by it?

The Flexibility

Despite the fact that Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment is a very concise policy with specific definitions and procedural steps to be followed in the wake of a violent incident, it has been interpreted by these principals in such a way that they have been able to add their own discretion and attain a flexible balance between what the policy states and what actually happens. Comments in this vein are recorded as follows:

It's a good policy but you still have to interpret it. We have policy, but you still have to

make your own good judgment (Mr. Green).

I think the other thing is that there's enough flexibility in it, that it's a reference point....There's a few places where it says "you must," but it gives me some flexibility (Mr. Red).

I like to use my own discretion, I like to see the guidelines which are general in nature. Also the preamble, I think, gives me some direction as to what my general responsibilities are....I have my discretionary options there whether I need to do that (Mr. White).

One of the other strengths of the policy is that there is still room for local flexibility. The administrator still has an opportunity to factor in all the other information that he or she has on a particular case and use that as a basis for their decision (Mr. Blue).

Those kinds of discretionary things are still there, still part of the policy (Mr. Black).

The Detail

It would almost seem a contradiction in terms that details should be aligned with flexibility as a positive aspect of the Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment, but this is not the case. The principals clearly appreciate the fact that the Eastern School District Board Office has gone to great lengths to cover a wide range of possible violent interactions in such details. The specific definitions provided, the sequential procedures to be followed, and the expected roles of each person involved have virtually eliminated the need to hesitate or speculate about the appropriate administrative protocol. The participants' thoughts about policy details are presented as follows:

There are a lot of details in the policy how administrators should deal with situations and it gives a lot of guidelines for people to make those decisions (Mr. Blue).

I think I could say it must be the detail. There is enough detail to know what are the things that are considered areas of concern....I think that is a strength in it (Mr. Red).

It outlines everything. It should allow you to be consistent, it should allow you to be fair, it should allow you to be relevant. And I'm sure it does (Mr. Green).

Sometimes, there's areas such as sexual misconduct which you may not feel comfortable dealing with, and you may want to overlook it, or just to minimize it. But in this case, it's there, it's outlined, and it also gives some direction (Mr. White).

I think all the issues around school violence are very clear; it gives us a very step-by-step procedure as to what must happen (Mr. Black).

The Communication

The majority of the principals identify the general area of communication as being improved by a heightened awareness of the Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment policy. They refer to the most typical interactions between the school and the community, between the administrators and the parents, between the school and the Eastern School District Board, and between staff and the students involved in the violent or inappropriate behavior. The excerpts are as follows:

That is a very important part, communication with the community. It [Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment] provides some information to the community where they realize that it does have some teeth to it and it's not just a couple of fluffy paragraphs (Mr. Blue).

I think the business of contacting each of the parents, the victim's parents as well as those of the person committing whatever the offense happens to be is also very clear, and therefore it should be consistent from place to place (Mr. Black).

We're expected to communicate with all the parties that are in that, we can't just overlook that aspect again....It says parents will be contacted, and I guess I find that's consistent to what they say in the preamble about communication, and it's generally a good practice (Mr. White).

Information to the board office is also very clearly spelled out as to who and when they need to be informed. So again, that's pretty precise, and there should be no second guessing who gets informed on a particular issue (Mr. Black).

It has been helpful for the students to be able to see it down on paper, and it was more than just my word that this is the way it would be....It's not me versus you, it's a practice which is outlined in school district policy (Mr. White).

The participating principals are quite consistent when identifying aspects of Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment which they feel contribute to its strength as a policy. The three most popular responses include (1) flexibility, (2) details, and (3) communication. To a lesser extent, however, there are individual suggestions also made during this discussion. For instance, Mr. Green recognizes the mere existence of the policy as being its greatest strength, while Mr. Red appreciates the administrative input that went into the policy prior to its official inception in 1999. Mr. White praises the policy for being reasonable in how it balanced the roles of the staff, the board, and the community. Mr. Blue compliments the policy for the level of comfort it provided because "there are an awful lot of tough decisions that administrators have to make."

Question 11: What are some particular limitations of the policy which may detract from its effectiveness as a method of reducing student violence?

There was some division among the principals when this research question was posed. Unlike other questions to which the answers were immediate and direct, this one seemed to create a sense of hesitancy for the participants. The researcher was often under the impression that the principals were searching for an answer that would satisfy the intent of the question so as not to leave any aspect of the interview incomplete. Because this was not the purpose of the question, the researcher did remind the respondents of their option to leave it unaddressed. In the end, however, there were statements given by all participants, and enough information was generated that certain points of interest could be noted.

Of the five principals responding, one clearly believes the policy is effective in its current application and is not hindered by any particular limitations. The other four administrators expand upon their responses and identify concerns which may only be termed as “possible limitations.” It is difficult to classify their comments within the context of the question because they are discussing previous perceptions that did not necessarily come true when the policy became a reality. Consider the following statements:

I guess when I saw it [Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment] originally, I thought that the District Response Team would be run off its feet, but that hasn't been the case to my knowledge (Mr. White)

If people put too much emphasis on the fact that this is the way it should be done, that puts too much stress on any policy....I don't think the policy does that because it's not over-structured (Mr. Blue).

It should reduce student violence if students are listening to the content of the policy. If students are just kind of there and not listening, then that's not good (Mr. Green).

Initially when we had our first Home and School interaction with the policy, there was a certain sense from some of the parents at those initial meetings that parents who weren't supportive of the school system would turn this policy back against administrators and teachers. And to some degree, that may be possible, but in reality, it has happened very, very few times (Mr. Black)

Concerning the last comment made by Mr. Black, it is wise of him to acknowledge that such a situation has happened in the past, albeit very infrequently. Within this research, in fact, there is evidence given by Mr. Red which details just such a situation:

There are times that I've had a parent come in and say, "Look it, you didn't follow this policy exactly the way it should be followed." It's happened twice. Basically, it wasn't their child so they wanted the other child hung by the neck until dead....So they came in with the policy, and I mean brandishing the policy saying, "Look, there it is."

To summarize the content of the responses, it is very difficult to say with conviction that all five principals have acknowledged actual limitations, as opposed to perceived limitations. It is true that Mr. Black's perception does occur on occasion, but is that enough to say the policy is weakened because of it? There is too much being left to chance. For instance, the District Response Team is not overworked, though it could be; the policy is not over-emphasized, though it could be, and the students are not necessarily ignoring the policy, though they could be. Upon reflection, the researcher is not convinced that the principals have clearly identified any pressing

limitations to the policy, but he does credit them for seeing the dangers inherent in future possibilities. Whether such concerns become the reality of Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment remains to be seen.

Question 12: What are some, if any improvements you would suggest for the policy both as a written document and a workable in-school practice?

Mr. Red and Mr. White do not have suggestions for improvement and generally believe the policy is well done and valuable. The former principal believes he has adapted the policy enough so that it works for him and he's "glad it is there." The latter principal contends the policy "fits reasonably well with [his] personal philosophy about how school discipline should be looked at," and therefore does not require improvements either as a written document or as a routine school practice.

Mr. Green and Mr. Black address the issue of awareness and policy promotion among interested stakeholders as an area of potential improvement. Each one, however, points to a different forum in which they see awareness lacking. For Mr. Green, it remains a school issue as he says:

Making it a workable document is up to all of us, the administrators, the teachers, and making it known, I think, is the important thing. Policy is only as good as you get it out to the people....I think we can do a much better job or making it a workable policy in the schools, a knowledgeable policy in the schools....I think we need to do a better job of getting the message out in that formalized package.

Mr. Black's improvements focus more on the community that surrounds the school. This tends to be characteristic of his thought pattern as one remembers this principal was very direct in

his previous assessment of society and its glorification of violence as the greatest obstacle to reducing violent or inappropriate student behavior. Mr. Black still suggests that:

The area that we probably have to do more work in is the greater community, in terms of their knowledge of the policy and their endorsement by word and deed as to how the policy actually plays itself out in life. Because you can verbally talk all you like about the fact that you support what the term refers to as a “peaceful school environment,” but that peaceful school environment isn’t going to come into being and won’t have a caring place to it unless we are able to extend that to the greater community. If you walk off school property and people are shouting at you, or if you go to another forum where people are living a different mode, then obviously it hasn’t done its job yet.

The final suggestion for improvement comes from Mr. Blue who would like to see the policy “subject to some sort of review, not necessarily an annual review, but maybe every three or four years.” The realization of such a suggestion would allow the policy to remain relevant to and current with the ever-changing needs of the educational system. It is a very good point to raise, and it could possibly prevent Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment from becoming obsolete and outdated in the future.

The Policy and the Reduction of Student Violence

Caring Place to Learn/Safe School Environment was created with the intention of addressing and reducing student violence and inappropriate behavior by putting into the system a documented frame of reference which contained clear definitions, expectations, and procedures. Now, several years after its official placement in the school, it is possible to ask the principals who are familiar with its application to evaluate its affect on reducing the level of student violence in

the Eastern School District. This question represented the final one in the interview process and gave the participating principals yet another opportunity to pass judgment, whether positive or negative, on the policy.

Question 13: Do you think Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment has made a difference in reducing the level of school violence in the Eastern School District?

The response to this question was quite positive with regard to seeing a reduction of student violence within the district. Four of the five principals clearly acknowledge the awareness and impact of the policy as being a contributing factor to creating safer, more caring places in which to teach and learn. There is some question as to whether this is the direct result of the policy's content, or merely a naturally-occurring consequence of all the time and attention paid to making the policy a top priority. Either way, the end result seems to be the same: Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment has, to some degree, accomplished what its title suggests.

The participants' responses to this final question are highlighted as follows:

It has to make a difference because we're all kind of put on a little bit of a high alert to make sure and to do what we can to ensure that the kids are feeling safe and secure. So it has to have made a difference (Mr. Green).

In one word, "probably yes." That's more than one word, but, yeah, I think it has because of the frame of reference, because of the fact that it's there, it's a tool and a guide, and it's nice to know that it's there. And there are times when people can look at something and they can say, "This is what happened, this is what should be done" (Mr. Red).

I think it probably is just due to the fact that the coverage and exposure and

attention it has been given within the school staff, the teachers, and administrators. A lot of work has been done by the Eastern School District to say this policy is in place. And when we have a situation that occurs, abuse of any sort, then we will refer to this policy, and people are made aware within the system (Mr. Blue).

I guess I'd have to say, "yes." I think it has because before that, before the policy was on paper, I think we had a lot of good school policies that were there but they may have varied from one school to the other. Their implementation had the potential to be applied in various ways. I think this one, this policy, helps us tighten up that aspect (Mr. White).

Only one principal, Mr. Black, did not give a resolute statement about the policy's ability to effectively reduce violence within the district. There was some reluctance to give undue credit to the policy as being responsible for a drop in student violence because, in his opinion, it could be attributed to a combination of factors. He suggests that "part of it is what happens in the school, part of it is what happens in the greater community." As a result Mr. Black quite frankly admits:

I'm not sure that it [Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment] has made a difference in terms of whether there is less violence in school or not. I think it has certainly made it more clear and more manageable from all levels of the educational system on how an issue is to be proceeded with, and what the expectations are from each of the partners as we go through the process.

It is interesting to note that Mr. Black is the only principal to remain consistent in his belief that the policy has not necessarily reduced violence just because it has been created and mandated throughout the school systems. Consider the other participants' responses to the ninth research

question which, although phrased slightly differently, explored a very similar issue as the question now being discussed. In that discussion, principals were more inclined to admit that the policy has not made a significant impact in reducing student violence, whereas now they suggest it has. The researcher may only speculate at the reasons for the discrepancy, but he is more or less convinced that the principals, whether knowingly or not, regarded one question as being specific to their own school and administrative situation, and the other question as being more global and applicable across the entire district. It is a small distinction, but perhaps it is enough to explain the difference. There is research (Hyman and Snook, 2000; MacAulay, 1995; Stephens, 1995; 1994) that seems to suggest teachers and administrators are very subjective in their perceptions of the world that surrounds them, and this has a dramatic impact upon their level of comfort and satisfaction with regard to evaluating the amount of student violence that occurs. For instance, if staff members feel safe and secure within their working environment, then they are likely to perceive a lower rate of violent or inappropriate acts even though this may not actually be the reality of the situation. Mr. Green referred to this as “the illusion of safety” which must be upheld at all costs for the school to function as an orderly institution. It is possible then that these principals do not credit Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment as being solely responsible for reducing student misbehavior within their particular schools because they perceive their schools as already being very caring and safe. This is strongly evident in the responses from the participants. Collectively they refer to happy students and good kids, to youngsters who just want to get along, and to compassionate people who care about each other. For these principals, their schools are not violent, and they do not see much difference between the way incidents were handled before the policy and the way they are dealt with now. On the other hand, when they look

beyond themselves and see how well other schools are functioning, then they may acknowledge the policy as having made a positive change in the reduction of student violence in the Eastern School District. Ironical, however, is the fact that the general district is composed of the specific schools, and the policy's influence on one is closely connected to the policy's influence on the other.

This is merely one of the issues to be considered in the final chapter discussion on the implications related to the Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment policy as researched according to administrative perceptions. It is now time to consider what the findings hold for the possible future and interpretation of the policy at the intermediate school level in the Eastern School District.

Chapter 5 - Discussion of Results

This study investigated what impact a relatively new education policy called Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment has had in reducing acts of student violence and inappropriate behavior at the intermediate school level in the Eastern School District. It also researched the roles, responsibilities, and strategies of the administrators who were most accountable for instituting and maintaining this policy within the school settings since January 14, 1999. The data was collected through five in-depth interviews which were guided by a number of pre-determined questions delving into specific areas of interest related both to the policy and to the administrators. In this chapter, the certain themes and understandings which emerged from the research questions and which are applicable to the general research categories that guided the investigation shall be considered. There will be a discussion concerning any possible limitations which may detract from the findings of the study. Finally, there will also be a review of the potential implications

suggested by the results. Points of interest here shall include how the results may have some bearing on future research into this subject area, and how they may affect the future of Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment and the role of the administrators who are so closely connected to its implementation in the Eastern School District.

The data was reviewed according to the thirteen questions posed to the participating principals during the course of the in-depth interviews. These questions were originally designed to illicit responses that could expand upon themes or issues previously identified from related literature. In terms of policy, for example, other educational researchers have determined that it is most effective when there is a clear and concise communication of policy expectations (Maher and Leone, 1999; Costenbader and Markson, 1998; Trump, 1998; Rossman and Morley, 1996; Wanat, 1996; Myles and Simpson, 1994); when there is a fair and consistent reinforcement of policy (Day and Golench, 1997; Cooke, 1996; Stephens, 1995; MacAulay, 1995); and when there are meaningful consequences for inappropriate behavior (Huff and Trump, 1996; Wanat, 1996; Day, Golench, et al., 1995; Noguera, 1995; MacAulay, 1995). In terms of administrative strategies for promoting policy, researchers discovered that principals should be prepared to maintain a highly visible school presence (Futrell, 1996; Stephens, 1995; Hill and Hill, 1994); to provide appropriate teacher support (Day and Golench, 1997; Futrell, 1996; Noguera, 1995); to communicate with stakeholders and community (Wanat, 1996; Day, Golench, et al., 1995; Hill and Hill, 1994); and to respond to students fairly and consistently (Hyman and Perone, 1998; Dusenbury and Falco, 1997; Stephens, 1995).

After considering the similarities and differences among characteristics that make for effective policy and administration, the researcher created four general categories into which the

applicable findings related to Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment and its implementations were placed. These categories were extrapolated from the literature, but further defined and substantiated by the statements of the participating principals. They include: (1) the impact of the policy on applied methods of school discipline; (2) the communication and awareness of the policy among stakeholders and community; (3) the impact of the policy on administrators; and (4) the assets and liabilities of the policy. These general categories are further sub-divided into specific sections that highlight related points of interest arising from the discussions. Together, these categories provide an insightful look at Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment and the administrators who make it routine practice in their schools on a daily basis.

The Impact of Policy on the Applied Methods of School Discipline

The research questions one, nine and thirteen were created and posed to the participating principals to learn more about how they viewed the degree of change wrought by Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment. The first question introduced the topic of changes in discipline as directly related to the new policy; the ninth question followed up on that and explored their thoughts on the success of policy; and finally the thirteenth question focused on the perceived reduction of student violence as caused by the policy. The information collected presented a comprehensive, if not somewhat contradictory evaluation of the policy according to these three criteria.

Change

Four of the principals interviewed agreed that they have seen some degree of change in how discipline is applied to students who act in a violent or inappropriate way while on school

property. However, this change is generally believed to be a further extension of the disciplinary procedures that principals had traditionally imposed prior to the advent of the policy. The remaining principal very clearly stated that the policy's procedures did not represent any real change for him and were more or less what he had been already been doing before the official launch of Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment several years earlier. It should be noted that all five principals did, in fact, give credit to the policy for increasing their awareness of the current expectations and responsibilities within the Eastern School District. Since the policy has become the standard response pattern in the district, these administrator have had to reacquaint themselves and their staffs with the policy's definitions of violent acts, its expected follow-up procedures, and the importance of being accountable when student violence occurs.

Success

Research question nine investigated the administrators' perceptions of policy success. Their responses revealed that Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment is not viewed as a particularly successful violence reduction tool. On the other hand, however, it is not considered an unsuccessful policy either. It is there, it is well-written, and it well-intentioned, but that is about the extent of its success to date. Not one principal could whole-heartedly support the idea that the policy has been instrumental in decreasing the incidents of student violence on school grounds. Similar to their responses to research question one, they expressed an appreciation for the efforts made by the Eastern School District Board Office to put in place a consistent, official procedure, and while this had improved their awareness of expectations, it did not necessarily make their schools less violent as a direct result. One principal did suggest that not enough time has passed to make a fair and accurate assessment of a reduction in student violence as a product

of the policy. In his opinion, another five years of policy application might reveal more significant statistics and present a more realistic picture of decreasing and/or increasing levels of student violence. Realistically, this could be true as such violence reduction programs are considered “a long-term solution, not a quick fix...and several years of commitment are required before we can expect these programs to yield system-wide counteraction to violent behavior” (Cortines, 1996, p. 267).

Violence Reduction

The principals seem to vacillate between giving Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment credit for accomplishing its objective as seen in the responses to research question one, and then suggesting it is not exactly a successful policy as presented by answers to research question nine. The final question of the interview, research question thirteen, sought closure and final comments from the principals in regards to their perceptions of the difference the policy has or has not made in reducing student violence in the Eastern School District. All but one of the principals positively endorsed the policy as having reduced the level of violence among students in the district. It seems quite a contradiction to the previous response and the researcher can only speculate as to why such a discrepancy exists. As alluded to in Chapter 4, the researcher suggests that perhaps the principals view the policy differently when it is presented in more global or district-wide terms, rather than when it is focused more locally on their own schools. In the former presentation, they may perceive violence reduction as a natural extension of a policy designed to make people more aware of how to identify and respond to inappropriate student behavior. Thus, schools should logically be making improvements across the district as an inevitable result of the time and energy spent communicating and promoting an awareness of the

policy's expectations and procedures. In the latter presentation, however, when their knowledge base is more site specific, these principals have a more in-depth understanding of the particular acts of student violence that occur on their own campuses. It is here that they may or may not have seen a notable difference in the occurrence of these acts based on their personal perceptions of their school environment. As these administrators implied throughout their interviews, they all generally felt their schools were safe places for staff and students where violence was the rare exception to the rule. The fact that they did not necessarily hold other schools to the same standard as they did their own is merely another example of the isolation of one school from another within a larger social and educational community. Establishing such a district-wide policy, however, is one solid step towards addressing this isolation and unifying the schools even more. As Mr. Green said in consideration of the policy's objective for consistency, "If you were working at [School A], and then you moved down to [School B], and then you moved up to [School C], you should be following the same guidelines." It is an interesting situation, and perhaps given enough time, the policy will allow principals to eventually see the district as the sum of all its parts.

The Communication and Awareness of Policy Among Stakeholders and Community

Making the stakeholders aware of the policy's content is very important to its overall success among various groups. The principals in this study demonstrated a good understanding of this fact, and were quite in favor of working to establish and maintain better lines of communication with students, parent, outside agencies, and the community at large. A number of the research questions were created to explore how the policy and the principals were instrumental in addressing and meeting the objectives as outlined by Caring Places to Learn/Safe School

Environment. For instance, research question two provided an introduction to the methods by which the principals communicated an awareness of the policy among staff, students, and other stakeholders. From that point, more specific groups were targeted separately. Research questions three and five addressed the issues of fair, consistent, and socially meaningful discipline among students. Research question six emphasized community and its role in violence reduction among students. And finally, research question seven focused on particular safety needs and concerns among the teaching staff. When considered as a related mass of data, it was possible to see similarities and difference emerge from the opinions expressed by the participating principals in these areas.

The Policy and the Students

The principals of this study agreed that the policy certainly does provide a consistent outline for the application of discipline for each inappropriate or violent student act. The procedural steps are itemized and clear, leaving no question as to what is to be done. This approach guarantees consistency if, and only if, it is applied consistently. At this point, the subjective definition of “fairness” is again invoked by the principals. For them, consistency and fairness are not the same things and one does not necessarily include the other. They believed that they could be fair as they imposed discipline, but that they may not be perceived as consistent by all parties involved. In their opinion, the policy is never as black and white in application as it is in print.

One must wonder, though, how do students see this application? As fair, as consistent, or somewhere in the middle? Although this study did not involve specifically seek student input, it did touch on the area of student perceptions during the interviews with the principals. It is their

belief that the policy is presented in a global way to the students, highlighting basic human rights and responsibilities, and promoting good judgment and accountability for actions. The consequences of disciplinary efforts such as home contact or suspension are outlined in student handbooks and reinforced by teacher discussion, and there was a general consensus that students are aware of what is expected of them in terms of appropriate school behavior. The principals also believed the policy allowed them to treat each student individually and to consider various factors involved in the misbehavior. This consideration, then, was the basis upon which discipline was often dispensed. While this may have created a difference in what one student received in the form of consequence as opposed to another, the principals still believed that fairness was attained if it were possible to explain and justify the difference. For instance, a third time offender was treated more harshly than a first time offender, and he/she would have been told why.

The administrators did not really address the notion of socially meaningful consequences as outlined by the policy. In most cases the procedures are very similar and easily implemented. Typically, there will be discussion with the student by the administrator, parents may be contacted as well, and there may be a school suspension for a period of one to five days. This is the most common response, even though it may not be the most effective. A number of studies have suggested that student suspension is a weak remedy for inappropriate behavior and often has little or no positive impact on future actions (Costenbader and Markson, 1998; Comerford and Jacobsen, 1987). However, in this study, suspension is still the most accepted, and most expected disciplinary measure. Only one principal questioned the efficacy of the practice, and in his opinion, it exists because it is easy, it sends a strong message to others, and in the void of any other options, it is better than no consequence.

The Policy and the Teachers

Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment places a large burden of responsibility on teachers to be more aware of and more willing to report student violence. As a result, teachers need to feel supported by the administration when making such decisions. In fact, Futrell (1996) found that when teachers perceived their principal as being there to reinforce and support their efforts to reduce violent student behavior, they were much more likely to be more attentive and responsive of all student actions, and less likely to ignore or tolerate misbehavior.

This research study was conducted to see how principals promoted the policy among teachers, while at the same time offering support and understanding. The participating administrators believed that they were very effective in reaching out to their staff members through both the formal and informal modes of communication. They made efforts to revisit the policy at various times in the year, they stressed the importance of adherence to policy objectives, and they allowed teachers the opportunity to discuss with them the possible consequences to be imposed when inappropriate behaviors were reported. By doing so, these principals believed they have created comfortable working environments in which their staffs feel supported, feel they have some input, and feel they will be taken seriously. If life reflects literature, and the results suggest that it does, then this should allow for the existence of at least five intermediate school staffs that work hard in the battle against school violence by holding their students to high standards of academic, emotional, and moral excellence.

The Policy and the Social Agencies

Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment identifies a number of social agencies as having a role to play in helping to address many of the issues that are involved in or created by

student violence. One aspect of this research study asked principals to consider how they communicated the policy to social agencies, and to evaluate how well these agencies responded. The answers suggested that principals felt there was still a great deal of work to be done before these agencies were as familiar with the policy as they should or need to be. There was the common feeling that groups such as Child and Family Services, the R.C.M.P, and the City Police Force, for example, were generally committed to helping schools deal with student issues, but this commitment was not necessarily born out of any conscious or strict adherence to policy. In other words, these groups did what they did because they felt it was their job, and not as a direct response to Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment. For this reason, the participants in this study stressed the need to make these groups much more aware of what the policy is requiring of them. Principals suggested that a stronger effort by the Eastern School District Board Office to communicate the policy and its expectations to these agencies would be much better than holding the current assumption that they are already aware of what they should be doing.

The Policy and the Community

A study by Day and Golench in 1997 revealed that the most effective disciplinary measures for students are ones that involve the support of the whole community. When the community takes an active role in educating children on proper and acceptable modes of behavior, the results often carry into the schools and are reinforced there yet again. This study discussed how principals viewed the community as an active participant in controlling student violence. Three evaluations of community influence were revealed. Two principals felt community and certain socially-oriented organizations have the potential to play a major role in teaching students about life in and beyond the school structure. Two principals believed the community had to focus on

reinstating its own good value system before it would be able to assist schools in meeting the high standards they impose upon the students in their care. And finally one principal lamented the fact that schools are overburdened with the responsibility of filling in the social and emotional gaps left by a community that no longer seems to meet as many of its childrens' needs as it realistically should.

With regard to Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment, these principals did not believe they have made any great inroads in communicating the policy to the community at large. They mentioned traditional methods of sending word home to parents such as student handbooks, newsletters, and meetings, but they were convinced that much more work and effort will be required before the community is fully aware of what the policy is attempting to accomplish in terms of violence reduction among students. Until this happens, there may remain a notable discrepancy between the behavior students are allowed to display at home and that which they are expected to display at school.

The Impact of the Policy on Administrators

As documented throughout this study, the role of the administrator is paramount to the creation and stability of a positive school climate. This leader is under tremendous pressure to meet a diverse range of needs from any number of internal and external sources, and must strike a balance between fairness, consistency, and now, policy. To investigate this balance further, the researcher of this study designed and posed research questions four and eight to generate thought concerning the areas of administrative discretion and high principal visibility in connection with the expectations and procedures outlined by the Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment policy.

Administrative Discretion

In his 1995 study, educational researcher Thomas Gabor explored principal perceptions as related to zero-tolerance philosophies. He discovered that school leaders were much more likely to use and appreciate policies that allowed them to consider individual student factors, to evaluate the seriousness of the inappropriate act, and to use administrative discretion during the follow-up disciplinary procedures. Several years later, it appears very little has changed in this regard. This study found that the principals interviewed still believed they can and do use their power of judgment to administer discipline in all but the most extreme situations of student misbehavior. Despite the inclusion of many definitive and directive words such as “will” and “shall” and “must” in the procedures outlined by Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment, this does not preclude participating principals from interpreting the policy so that it fits with their own personal and professional philosophies of discipline.

This is a very important finding because it allowed the theme of principal interpretation to emerge. It is a fact that every administrator involved in this study very clearly stressed the need to use common sense and good judgment when dealing with most incidents of student violence. In their collective opinions, discretion required looking at the motivating factors leading up to the incident, considering the student’s past history for misbehavior, talking with the students involved, possibly contacting parents, and providing consequences that are fair for the situation. It must be noted that the term “fair” as used here is considered very subjective and related to each situation in a way that may or may not necessarily be totally consistent with similar acts before or afterwards. Hence the need for interpretation. Each principal also cautioned against treating Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment too literally. They felt this could lead an administrator towards a

zero-tolerance approach in which every inappropriate act, no matter how minor, was always treated as outlined by the policy. This, they contended, was not the original intention of the policy and would do more harm than good because it could completely remove the humane element from the solution.

The researcher was initially tempted to question the benefit of any policy that could be so easily manipulated by principals who interpret discipline at will, but then realized this would be an unfair assessment. These administrators do not take the policy lightly, nor do they dismiss it as attractive yet useless rhetoric. They recognize the work that went into its creation, and they appreciate its objectives, but for them, the real strength of the policy is its ability to form a frame of reference that is grounded in common sense. It is so in keeping with what these school leaders already perceived as good discipline protocol that there is no real resistance or criticism of the policy. They do not see their interpretations as detracting from the policy's strength, but rather complimenting it and making Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment an even stronger defense against student violence and inappropriate behavior.

High Visibility

Every principal who participated in this study stressed the need to promote a highly visible administrator presence. By placing themselves in and around the school and its grounds, these school leaders were convinced they proactively prevented any number of potential student incidents from happening. And in most cases, their presence was all that was required; they were not usually called upon to intervene, to lecture, or to discipline. The fact that students were aware of their principal's presence and power was enough to maintain a certain acceptable standard of behavior among them. This visibility sent a message that the administrator was active in the

school, was aware of what students were doing, and cared enough to make the effort to ensure everyone's safety throughout the school day.

The relationship between high visibility of the administrator and improved student behavior is not a new one. Studies by Stephens (1994) and Futrell (1996) had previously examined how strong principal presence was associated with a more positive school climate and lower rates of student misbehavior. This seems to hold true in this study as well. This was actually one of the few issues upon which the principals were in such obvious agreement. To them, being out there in the hallways and classrooms, interacting with students formally and informally, and connecting with teachers professionally and personally went a long way towards creating the caring places and safe environments outlined in the policy.

Policy Assets and Liabilities

The principals in this study recognized the Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment policy as having a number of strengths which made it more applicable and valuable to the school settings. They commended it for the following reasons:

- (1) Flexibility - the policy allowed the principals to use their own discretion in most routine cases of student violence or inappropriate behavior;
- (2) Detail - the policy clearly defined each violent act and/or inappropriate activity, and gave specific procedural steps to follow;
- (3) Communication - the policy required a greater emphasis on communication among the various stakeholders involved in the education process and beyond.

As it stands now, the principals did not really name any current liabilities associated with Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment. They did, however, make mention of some

previous concerns, which to date, have not really come to fruition. These concerns included overtaxing the District Response Team, over-emphasizing the policy, student inattention to policy objectives, and quasi-informed parents using the policy against administrative or teacher decisions which may not have been in keeping with a literal policy translation. No principal actually gave any solutions to these possible problems, but each generally stated their concern as something to be aware of and vigilant against in the future.

The Limitations of the Study

The researcher recognized several limitations to this study that should be documented and explored to ensure that no false or undue conclusions are drawn from the results. Of primary concern is the issue of transferability. This study was limited to five intermediate schools and principals in the Eastern School District of Prince Edward Island. As previously explained, there were a number of reasons for this population and site selection. These included the research identifying the intermediate level as being more prone to violence among students, the implementation of a relatively new safety policy called Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment, and a relatively high population representation by the participating principals.

Admittedly these principals hold sway over 72.6% of the intermediate school student population, and therefore may deeply impact how policy is going to affect these young people on a daily basis. The researcher is satisfied that among the Eastern School District, there is enough representation that the findings herein could be reasonably applied to the other 27.4% of the intermediate student population. However, one is reminded of the recommendation of MacAulay in 1995 when she called for the province to create a comprehensive Island-wide policy regarding student violence that would align all administrative procedures among each and every school.

This did not happen. The Eastern and Western School Districts continue to follow policy that is applicable to each one separately; the gap has narrowed considerably, but it has not been eliminated. As a result, the researcher would caution against assuming that the findings in this study could be transferred and applied to policy and administrative procedures in the Western School District.

Another limitation to this study may be found when one considers the time of year in which the research was conducted. According to MacAulay's study (1995) which dealt with a similar if not much larger Island-wide school population, "violence occurs most frequently inside the school and is spread evenly throughout the school year except for May and June when it is less frequently experienced" (vi). The interviews took place in June, a time when perhaps the administrators were less likely to see student violence or inappropriate behavior as being such a pressing issue. Their comments, therefore, may have presented a more satisfied, more contented outlook which may not be as apparent at other times of the year when there is increased student misbehavior. It is possible then that these principals were so favorable towards Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment because they were enjoying a more peaceful lull in the school year. The researcher, however, must qualify this limitation as a remote possibility because in his opinion, these administrators display a comprehensive approach to student discipline and policy that appears remarkably well-maintained from the beginning to the end of the school year.

The final limitation to be considered is the role and influence of communities. It is well-known that Prince Edward Island is a friendly province with a rural, rustic way of life. Islanders value their sense of community and are often quick to distinguish some real or imagined difference they believe sets them apart from other communities of similar size, lifestyle, and/or

industry. While this may seem an issue of pride or perhaps, individuality, it is real enough. There are differences among communities which, in turn, are reflected in the support and involvement they display towards their schools. This has some bearing on how principals responded to questions regarding the role of the community in helping to reduce student violence in their school system. For instance, one principal who was very critical of the lack of community influence works in a place where, historically, parents and community have not been involved with the school. They have, in fact, not been able to sustain a Home and School Association, have low attendance at Parent/Teacher meetings, and have little or no significant relationship with parents or community members unless it is associated with a discipline issue. This is the reality and would therefore shape this principal's view of community to a certain perspective. On the other hand, one of these principals works at a school that is surrounded by a very active and school-oriented community. His comments reflected a trust in and expectation of the community to take an active role in promoting Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment, and for supporting the administration on how many of the school issues were handled. Clearly, there are opposite ends of the spectrum being presented, and as a result, it is difficult to treat the findings around community involvement as largely transferable to other schools without first learning what type of community is also being considered.

Possibilities for Future Research

The findings of this study showed that Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment is working reasonably well in the intermediate schools of the Eastern School District. Its success may, in large part, be attributed to the fine efforts made by the principals who use the policy in conjunction with good administrative judgment to deal with those incidents of student violence or

inappropriate behavior that arise. There is undoubtedly an increase in the degree of awareness of the policy and the responsibilities that many of the stakeholders have taken on as a result.

In terms of possible future research, it may be of interest to conduct a similar study at both the high school level and the elementary school level, so a more complete picture of how the policy is being used and interpreted across the grades emerges. This particular study focused on the intermediate level because it was deemed more violent by previous research, and it was a much more familiar area for the researcher to explore. This certainly does not mean that inappropriate or violent acts do not occur at the grade levels above or below intermediate, and a study into these areas may reveal insight as to different strategies used by administrators to promote awareness and communication of safe school issues to younger and older students. Following this line of thinking, it might also be of interest to expand the scope of the study to include the perceptions of the teachers and students who are also affected by this policy on a daily basis. Their opinions in regards to the promotion, communication, and implementation of Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment would more completely round out the attitudes and impressions of other vested stakeholders.

On a more provincial scale, it would be an excellent idea to conduct a similar study with intermediate school principals in the Western School District. This district uses its own policy to address many of the issues outlined in Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment, but there are some subtle differences. It would be interesting to compare and contrast the results of a similar study conducted in much the same way, but grounded in the context of another discipline policy. Perhaps then, the strengths and weaknesses of each policy could be considered, reworked, and combined so that the unified Island-wide policy that MacAulay (1995) had suggested years

ago could then become a reality.

Educational Implications

The original idea for this research study began long ago when Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment was first introduced into the school system. It became obvious to those involved in the education of students that there was now a new emphasis being placed on reducing violent acts or inappropriate behaviors that may occur on school grounds. Minor issues that once may have been tolerated or underestimated could no longer be ignored or untended. Teachers became aware of their heightened responsibilities largely through the efforts made by principals who were to play an even larger role in the implementation of the new policy. It was then that this researcher first began to think about how policy and administrative strategies could work well together to create a productive school environment. As the idea took hold, and the research literature cast light on a number of questions, it became easier to see what qualities were part and parcel of an effective policy and an effective administrator. The rest of the study evolved from that point, and the results now provide several implications for the education system.

Interpretation

In today's current climate of change, more and more people are moving into administrative positions in the Eastern School District. It is hoped that this study may serve as a guide to help new principals better understand their relationship with Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment. It is tempting for a first-time administrator to follow the policy as literally as possible to ensure that there will be absolutely no fault attributed to his/her actions. And, under the circumstances of a literal translation, there should not be. However, literal interpretation may not actually be the recommended method by which to make this policy work most effectively. The

principals who participated in this study were very clear on the need to be flexible within the policy parameters, to be willing to interpret each incident on its own merit, and to know the difference between a situation that requires their discretion and one that is beyond their control. They would caution new administrators to be confident enough to trust in their judgment, and to use the policy as a tool that strengthens their philosophies, not replaces them.

Visibility

A new administrator may face an overwhelming amount of paper work as he/she settles into a new career. Again, the temptation is to close the office door and get to work answering correspondence, filling out necessary documents, and meeting the inevitable deadlines. The principals in this study advised against such a fatal mistake in priorities. They obviously acknowledged the need to meet these objectives, but they felt that a principal must budget time and priorities wisely. There are certain times of the day when being visible on the school grounds is much more important to creating a safe and caring environment than paperwork. By patrolling the hallways, or eating in the lunchroom, or perhaps monitoring the parking lot before and after school, principals make their presence felt, stress their commitment to the school, and prevent any number of problems before they get a chance to occur.

Communication

Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment requires a great deal of communication among the different stakeholders. The principals in this study agreed that this is a big part of their job. The recommended communicating to both staff and students through the formal and informal channels that are present and active in every school setting. By staying current and knowing which people are involved in what incident, by seeking input and suggestions, and by

discussing and imposing consequences fairly and consistently, these principals believed they created a comfortable working and learning environment for teachers and students.

There was some concern expressed by several administrators that as policy became more familiar, there was less communication and discussion of its finer points. This is a situation they would like to see changed in the future, especially when it involves new staff members who should always receive a full and detailed explanation of Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment. This would require more vigilance and commitment on the part of the administrator to keep the policy at the forefront of the staff at the beginning of the school year and at various times throughout. There was also a suggestion of putting more onus on the Eastern School District to emphasize the policy and its content more completely through various programs such as the Teacher Induction Program or the Mentoring Program. The process of making all staff members, new and experienced, familiar with every part of Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment is an implication that could have far-reaching and positive results.

The Efforts of the Eastern School District

The Eastern School District Board Office should be pleased with how well the Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment policy has been implemented since its inception in 1999. Administrators and teachers were able to realistically accommodate the intention of the policy to reduce student violence by being more aware of their responsibilities, by communicating respectful expectations, and by following up incidents with consequences that are reasonably fair and consistent with what the policy has outlined. The transition and acceptance of the new policy has been very smooth, and school personnel appreciate the common sense approach to student discipline. There is, however, one implication that could conceivably see the policy become even

more effective. The principals in this study called for the Eastern School District Board Office to increase awareness of the policy and its clearly-defined roles among the various social agencies which are identified as participants in the disciplinary procedures. These administrators felt that organizations such as Child and Family Services, The Department of Justice, the R.C.M.P., and the City Police Force should be more aware of what they are required to do if contacted by schools as directed by the policy. This awareness could be accomplished through detailed presentations, in-service supplements, and/or other appropriate ways by which to further policy discussion.

In conclusion, this study has led to several suggestions for the Eastern School District of Prince Edward Island. This educational system is to be commended for its efforts to address student violence by creating such a detailed policy. However, such efforts should not be allowed to lapse as educators and other stakeholders become more comfortable with the policy. Do not assume that because it is working now, that it shall always do so. Continue to revisit the policy at various times, to update the information, to expand the range and definitions of violent acts, and to refine the procedures so the policy remains relevant and evolves as society and students do.

Another suggestion is grounded in the area of awareness promotion. The principals believed that better communication between the district, the schools, the stakeholders, and the outside agencies would be beneficial to the success of the policy. To date, much of the awareness promotion has been left to the principals who try to get the messages home through various means. It is time for the Eastern School District Board Office to assume a greater role in this by meeting with the different organizations mentioned in the policy, and explaining to them what their participation is expected to be as part of Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment.

In this vein as well, there could be more efforts made by principals, fellow teachers, and district programs to fully educate new teachers on the many details of Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment. The initial surge of education that accompanied the policy's introduction is now over, and it is possible that those familiar with the policy's objectives may just assume the newer staff members know more than they actually do. It would be good practice to ensure that ignorance of the policy is not allowed to grow through the complacency of assumptions. An educated staff is a prepared staff.

It was very clearly stated that a policy is only as good as the people who make it happen. This study dealt with some very dedicated, caring, and effective principals who were kind enough to share their experiences, and to shed some light on how they have made this policy a workable tool within their schools. The key here is interpretation. These school leaders do not take the policy as literally as they could, and this allows them to strike a balance between their own administrative discretion and policy objectives. They treat each student fairly, they communicate with the necessary stakeholders, they stand firm against student violence, and they are determined to create caring places to learn and safe school environments as suggested by policy and experience.

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Appendix A

FORMULATED BY ADMINISTRATION

CODE: ADDA-R

EASTERN SCHOOL DISTRICT

ADMINISTRATIVE REGULATION

SUBJECT: **Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment**

EFFECTIVE DATE: **January 14, 1999**

SUPERCEDED:

CROSS REFERENCE:

A. Expectations

1. The Board expects that teachers and staff will follow best practices in the classrooms and in the use of school property, and will use a variety of strategies to meet the learning and developmental needs of students under their care.
2. The board expects students and staff to conduct themselves in accordance with the principle of Duty of Care as follows:
 - a) Due Regard - Students and staff members will demonstrate regard, concern, and respect for the unique differences and worth of the individual. This is the basis for all programs and procedures which the district implements, and forms the basis for trust and confidence in the commitment and competencies among the staff to improve the quality of the student's school experience -- in this case the strengthening and maintaining of safe and caring learning environments. Students' conduct will demonstrate care for themselves, for each other, and for their school

and staff.

- b) Due Diligence - Staff members and students will demonstrate diligent effort at all levels of the District in setting purposeful objectives, organizing and directing appropriate activities, monitoring performance, and taking corrective action as required to ensure safe and caring learning environments.
- c) Due Process - The demonstration of just treatment and due process will govern the working relationships for all people involved in the strengthening and maintaining of safe and caring learning environments. Students and staff will:
 - a) know what is expected of them and have an opportunity to influence those expectations;
 - b) have ample opportunity and encouragement to seek assistance and will be actively helped to meet the expectations;
 - c) be informed of how well they are meeting the expectations;
 - d) be helped to take corrective action and to close the gap between what is expected and what is achieved;
 - e) be given every opportunity to be successful.
- 3. The Board expects school staffs to provide, through example, standards of behaviour which foster a safe and caring learning environment.
- 4. The Board expects students and staff to follow the requirements as outlined in the *School Act* and the *School Act Regulations*.
- 5. The Board will support schools in educating the public about the acceptable standards of behaviour in or on school property.

6. The Board expects all staff to report, and parents will be expected to report, all incidents which adversely affect a safe and caring learning environment.

B. Programs For Education and Violence Prevention

1. The Board will support instructional staff in their efforts to successfully implement the portions of the established curriculum which deal with self-esteem, appropriate problem-solving strategies, conflict resolution, and respect for others.
2. The Board will encourage the involvement of community-based groups in school activities that promote a safe and caring learning environment (*reference* Policy KC- Community Volunteers in Schools).
3. The Board will establish, promote, and recognize student programs and staff training which maintain and strengthen a safe and caring learning environment (*reference* Policy GCO - Supervision and Evaluation of Staff).

C. Definition and Examples of Behaviours

Act of Verbal Abuse - *The use of language which is insulting, hurtful, offensive, reproachful, or which ridicules, disparages or belittles another person.* Verbal abuse may include but is not limited to bullying, discrimination, sexual innuendo, or threats.

Act of Violence - *Any actual or threatened physical interference with another person which has or might reasonably have had the effect of impairing another person's health, welfare, or safety.*

Acts of violence may include but are not limited to physical bullying, discrimination, threats, or impairment of an individual's right to safety, health or personal welfare.

Bullying - *To use any means to coerce or intimidate another person by force or threats of any kind.* Bullying may include but is not limited to the following:

- a) acts of physical or social retaliation to an individual, an individual's family, friend, or group;
- b) threats of physical or social retaliation to an individual, an individual's family, friend, or group;
- c) acts of verbal aggression such as unwanted jokes, name-calling, demeaning or offensive remarks, or innuendoes with regards to one's gender, sexual orientation, race, culture, religion, ethnicity, age, physical attribute, perceived social status, disability;
- d) slander or the spreading of rumours;
- e) petty theft, extortion, demand for favours;
- f) intentional exclusion and manipulation of friendships;
- g) territorial bans;
- h) coercion.

Discrimination - *Any distinction, exclusion, restriction, differential treatment or preference of any individual or group of individuals based upon race, religion, creed, color, sex, marital or family status, national or ethnic origin, age, physical or mental handicap, political belief, sexual orientation, source of income, or socio-economic status of any individual or class of individuals that has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the right of every individual and every group of individuals to full and equal recognition on the basis of personal merit and to the exercise of human rights and freedoms.* Discrimination based upon race, color, descent, national or ethnic origin, physical appearance, gender, sexual orientation, and socio-economic status, may include, but is not limited to:

- a) banter;
- b) jokes;
- c) practical jokes;

- d) name calling;
- e) innuendo;
- f) discourteous treatment;
- g) offensive pictures, material or graffiti;
- h) threats;
- i) refusal to associate with or exclusion of others;
- j) physical violence or implied violence.

District Response Team (*Reference 1*) - *A group of school-based or board-based professionals called together to assess an allegation of a criminal, sexual, or other serious nature at a school.*

Electronic Devices- *Devices for communication by electronic means such as telephone, e-mail, facsimile, pager, etc.*

Harassment - *Engaging in a course of vexatious comment or conduct that is known to be unwelcome by another person.* Harassment may include, but is not limited to, acts of verbal abuse, acts of violence, discrimination, sexual misconduct or threats, and may or may not be related to another person's sex or gender.

School Property - *All buildings, vehicles or land owned or leased by the Eastern School District.*

Sexual Misconduct and Sexual Abuse -

Sexual misconduct is sexual or gender-based harassment of another person.

Sexual abuse is defined as any activity of a sexual nature in which a student's sexual integrity is violated and may include acts of touching, fondling, exhibitionism, harassment, exploitation, molestation, intercourse.

Sexual misconduct and sexual abuse may include but are not limited to the following:

- a) the display of sexually offensive pictures, graffiti, or other materials;
- b) insults and/or unwanted jokes of a sexual nature;
- c) sexual or gender-related comments about an individual's appearance, physical attributes, mannerisms, or characteristics;
- d) sexually suggestive gestures;
- e) leering;
- f) comments or questions about an individual's sexual activities;
- g) following or stalking;
- h) deliberate closeness;
- i) suggestive, demeaning or offensive remarks or innuendoes of a sexual nature;
- j) demands for dates or sexual favours;
- k) propositions of physical intimacy;
- l) touching of a sexual nature (touching of a sexual nature that involves an intentional application of force without consent constitutes sexual abuse);
- m) threats of a sexual nature.

Staff Member - *An employee of the Eastern School District or any person authorized to be on school property on a regular basis.*

Student - *A school student or other child under the care and direction of a staff member.*

Threat - *A use of words or actions which is, either expressly or implied, designed to instill fear in another person. Threats may include, but are not limited to notes, pictures, physical gestures, telephone calls, electronic messages, or personal property violation.*

Weapon - *Anything used or intended for use in causing death or injury to persons, whether*

designed for such purpose or not; or anything used or intended for use for the purpose of threatening or intimidating any person.

D. Intervention and Procedures to Prevent or Deal with Violations

The Board will support interventions through the recommended response to specific behaviours as outlined in the following Procedures.

The Board will support prevention education which may include curriculum-based programs, community-based programs, and programs as outlined in these regulations and District guidelines.

PROCEDURES

1. These regulations will guide the response in situations where there is a concern or complaint about the behaviour of a student.

A. Student to Student - where one student or group of students exhibit unacceptable behaviour against another student or group of students

1) Acts of Verbal Abuse

- a) All allegations will be reported to the principal/designate for investigation.
- b) Allegations will normally be resolved at the school level.
- c) Acts of verbal abuse will result in disciplinary actions and may include suspension as outlined in *School Act* Regulations.
- d) The school staff and/or District Response Team (*Reference 1*) will ensure that the appropriate counseling is made available to the victim(s) and alleged assailant(s).

2) Acts of Violence

- a) All allegations of acts of violence will be reported to the principal/designate and

parents should be contacted.

- b) All acts of violence resulting in serious injury will be reported to the parents and Superintendent of Education/designate and may be reported to police authorities and criminal charges may be initiated.
- c) All acts of violence involving a weapon will be reported to police authorities and the Superintendent of Education.
- d) Acts of violence will result in disciplinary actions and may include suspension, expulsion, or alternate schooling.
- e) All acts of violence resulting in injury will be reported on the District School Incident Report Form.
- f) The school staff and/or the District Response Team (*Reference 1*) will ensure that appropriate counselling is made available to the victim(s) and alleged assailant(s).

3) Bullying

- a) All allegations will be reported to the principal/designate for investigation.
- b) Allegations will normally be resolved at the school level.
- c) Bullying will result in disciplinary action and may include suspensions as outlined in *School Act* Regulations.
- d) Parents may be contacted.
- e) Police may be contacted.
- f) The school staff and/or the District Response Team (*Reference 1*) will ensure that appropriate counselling is made available to the victim(s) and alleged

assailant(s).

4) Discrimination

- a) All allegations will be reported to the principal/designate for the investigation.
- b) Allegations will normally be resolved at the school level.
- c) Discrimination may result in disciplinary action and may include suspension as outlined in *School Act* Regulations.
- d) The school staff and/or the District Response Team (*Reference 1*) will ensure that appropriate counselling is made available to the victim(s) and alleged assailant(s).

5) Sexual Abuse and Sexual Misconduct

Sexual Abuse

- a) In all cases of allegations of suspected sexual abuse, the Child Sexual Abuse Protocol will be followed as required by legislation.
- b) Child and Family Services will be contacted and a report will be made to police.
- c) The District Response Team (*Reference 1*) will be consulted and a report made to the Superintendent of Education.
- d) The initial investigation will not be conducted by school board personnel.
- e) Disciplinary action including suspension as outlined in the *School Act* Regulations may result.
- f) The school staff and/or District Response Team (*Reference 1*) will ensure that appropriate counselling is made available to the victim(s) and alleged assailant(s).

Sexual Misconduct

- a) Allegations of sexual misconduct will be reported to the principal/designate.
 - b) Allegations of sexual misconduct will require that the District Response Team (*Reference I*) be consulted, with a report to the Superintendent of Education.
 - c) Sexual misconduct will result in disciplinary action which may include suspensions under *School Act* Regulations.
 - d) An alternate education setting may be recommended.
 - e) The school staff and/or the District Response Team (*Reference I*) will ensure that appropriate counselling is made available to the victim(s) and alleged assailant(s).
- 6) Threats
- a) Allegations of threats will be reported to the principal/designate for investigation.
 - b) Parents may be contacted.
 - c) Allegations or threats using electronic devices will be referred to police authorities.
 - d) Police may be contacted and criminal charges may be initiated.
 - e) Threats will result in disciplinary action which may include suspension under *School Act* Regulations.
 - f) An alternate education setting may be recommended.
 - g) The school staff and/or the District Response Team (*Reference I*) will ensure that appropriate counselling is made available to the victim(s) and alleged

assailant(s).

7) Trespassing

- a) Blatant disregard for restricted school property access may result in police involvement.

8) Weapons

- a) Any weapons on school property will be confiscated and may be released to police as required by law.
- b) Police may be contacted.
- c) Parents will be contacted.
- d) An alternate school setting may be recommended.
- e) The school staff and/or the District Response Team (*Reference 1*) will ensure that appropriate counselling is made available to the victim(s) and alleged assailant(s).

B. Student to Staff - where a student exhibits unacceptable behaviour towards a staff member

1) Acts of Verbal Abuse

- a) All allegations of acts of verbal abuse will be reported to the principal/designate.
- b) Allegations will normally be resolved at the school level.
- c) Acts of verbal abuse will result in discipline and may include suspension as outlined in the *School Act* Regulations.
- d) The school staff and/or the District Response Team (*Reference 1*) will ensure that appropriate counselling is made available to the victim(s) and alleged

assailant(s).

2) Acts of Violence

- a) All allegations of acts of violence against a staff member will be reported to the principal/designate and the Superintendent of Education/designate.
- b) All allegations involving a weapon or threat of a weapon will be reported to police authorities and charges may be initiated.
- c) Parents must be contacted and follow Policy KGB - Relations with Law Enforcement and Child and Family Services.
- d) All acts of violence will result in disciplinary action and may include suspensions, alternative placement or expulsion.
- e) The school staff and/or District Response Team (*Reference 1*) will ensure that appropriate counselling is made available to the victim(s) and alleged assailant(s).

3) Bullying

- a) All allegations will be reported to the principal/designate.
- b) Allegations will normally be resolved at the school level.
- c) Bullying may result in disciplinary action including suspension as outlined in the *School Act* Regulations.
- d) Parents may be contacted.
- e) The school staff and/or the District Response Team (*Reference 1*) will ensure that appropriate counselling is made available to the victim(s) and alleged assailant(s).

4) Discrimination

- a) All allegations of discrimination will be reported to the principal/designate and the Superintendent of Education/designate.
- b) Parents will be contacted.
- c) Discrimination will result in disciplinary action and may include suspension as outlined in the *School Act* Regulations.
- d) The school staff and/or the District Response Team (*Reference 1*) will ensure that appropriate counselling is made available to the victim(s) and alleged assailant(s).

5) Sexual Abuse and Sexual Misconduct

Sexual Abuse

The sexual misconduct intervention process will be followed.

Sexual Misconduct

- a) Any allegation of sexual misconduct will be reported to the principal/designate and the Director of Human Resources and Administration for investigation and disposition.
- b) District Response Team (*Reference 1*) may be contacted by the principal.
- c) Parents will be contacted.
- d) Police may be contacted.
- e) Sexual misconduct will result in disciplinary action and may include suspension under *School Act* Regulations.
- f) An alternative education setting may be recommended.

g) The school staff and/or the District Response Team (*Reference 1*) will ensure that appropriate counselling is made available to the victim(s) and alleged assailant(s).

6) Threats

a) All allegations of threats will be reported to the principal/designate and the Superintendent of Education/designate.

b) Allegations of threats of use of weapons or a threat communicated by an electronic device will be reported to police authorities.

c) Parents may be contacted.

d) Threats will result in disciplinary action and may include suspension as outlined in *School Act* Regulations.

e) An alternate education setting may be recommended.

f) The school staff and/or District Response Team (*Reference 1*) will ensure that appropriate counselling is made available to the victim(s) and alleged assailant(s).

7) Trespassing

a) Blatant disregard for restricted school property access may result in police involvement.

8) Weapons

a) Any weapons on school property will be confiscated and may be released to police as required by law.

b) Police may be contacted.

- c) Parents will be contacted.
- d) The school staff and/or District Response Team (*Reference 1*) will ensure that appropriate counselling is made available to the victim(s) and alleged assailant(s).

II. These regulations will guide the response in situations where there is a concern or complaint about the behaviour of a staff member.

A. Staff to Student - where a staff member exhibits unacceptable behaviour against a student or group of students.

1) Acts of Verbal Abuse

- a) All allegations of acts of verbal abuse will be reported to the employee's supervisor and, where warranted, the Director of Human Resources and Administration for investigation and disposition.
- b) Parents will be contacted.
- c) Investigation will include accounts of all the allegations and documented times and incidents.
- d) Acts of verbal abuse may result in reprimand, leave, or suspension.
- e) The school staff and/or the District Response Team (*Reference 1*) will ensure that appropriate counselling is made available to the victim(s) and alleged assailant(s).

2) Acts of Violence

- a) All allegations of acts of violence against a student will be reported to the supervisor who will investigate and report to the Superintendent of

Education/designate.

- b) Parents will be contacted.
- c) The District Response Team (*Reference 1*) may be contacted by the principal.
- d) Police authorities and child authorities may be contacted.
- e) Investigation will include a report of the incident including documented times and incidents.
- f) Acts of violence may result in reprimand, leave, criminal charges, and termination.
- g) The school staff and/or District Response Team (*Reference 1*) will ensure that appropriate counselling is made available to the victim(s) and alleged assailant(s).

3) Bullying

- a) All allegations of bullying will be reported to the employee's supervisor/designate and, where warranted, the Director of Human Resources and Administration for investigation and disposition.
- b) Parents will be contacted.
- c) Investigations will include an account of the allegation and documented times and incidents.
- d) Bullying may result in reprimand or leave.
- e) The school staff and/or the District Response Team (*Reference 1*) will ensure that appropriate counselling is made available to the victim(s) and alleged assailant(s).

4) Discrimination

- a) All allegations will be reported to the employee's supervisor and the Director of Human Resources and Administration for investigation and disposition.
- b) Parents will be contacted.
- c) Investigations will include a report of the incident including documented times and incidents.
- d) Discrimination may result in reprimand, a leave, or termination.
- e) The school staff and/or the District Response Team (*Reference 1*) will ensure that appropriate counselling is made available to the victim(s) and alleged assailant(s).

5) Sexual Abuse and Sexual Misconduct

Sexual Abuse

- a) Any allegation of sexual abuse will follow the Child Sexual Abuse Protocol as required by legislation, and the employee's supervisor will be informed. Police and Child and Family Services will be contacted.
- b) Parents will be contacted.
- c) The District Response Team (*Reference 1*) will be consulted and make a report to the Superintendent of Education.
- d) Any allegation of sexual abuse will require the Director of Human Resources and Administration/designate to meet with the staff member immediately so appropriate action can be taken.
- e) Criminal charges may result from police investigation.

- f) The school staff and/or the District Response Team (*Reference 1*) will ensure that appropriate counselling is made available to the victim(s) and alleged assailant(s)

Sexual Misconduct

- a) Any allegation of sexual misconduct will be reported to the Director of Human Resources and Administration, Superintendent of Education, Child and Family Services and police authorities.
- b) Allegations of sexual misconduct will require that the District Response Team (*Reference 1*) be consulted, and a report will be made to the Superintendent of Education.
- c) Parents will be contacted.
- d) Any staff member accused of sexual misconduct will meet immediately with the Director of Human Resources and Administration.
- e) Sexual misconduct may result in reprimand, leave, suspension/termination or criminal charges.
- f) The school staff and/or the District Response Team (*Reference 1*) will ensure that appropriate counselling is made available to the victim(s) and the alleged assailant(s).

6) Threats

- a) All allegations of threats will be reported to the employee's supervisor and, where warranted, the Director of Human Resources and Administration for investigation and disposition.

- b) Parents will be contacted.
 - c) Investigation will include an account of the incident and a record of times and location of incidents.
 - d) Threats may result in a reprimand, leave, and/or suspension/termination.
- 7) Trespassing
- a) Blatant disregard for restricted school property access may result in police involvement.
- 8) Weapons
- a) Any weapons on school property will be confiscated and may be released to police as required by law.
 - b) Parents will be contacted.
 - c) Police may be contacted.
 - d) The school staff and/or the District Response Team (*Reference 1*) will ensure that appropriate counselling is made available to the victim(s) and alleged assailant(s).

B. Staff to Staff - where a staff member exhibits unacceptable behaviour against another staff member.

All allegations will be dealt with through the Eastern School District Policy GBBA-Workplace Harassment.

Reference 1 (new addition)

CARING PLACES TO LEARN/SAFE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

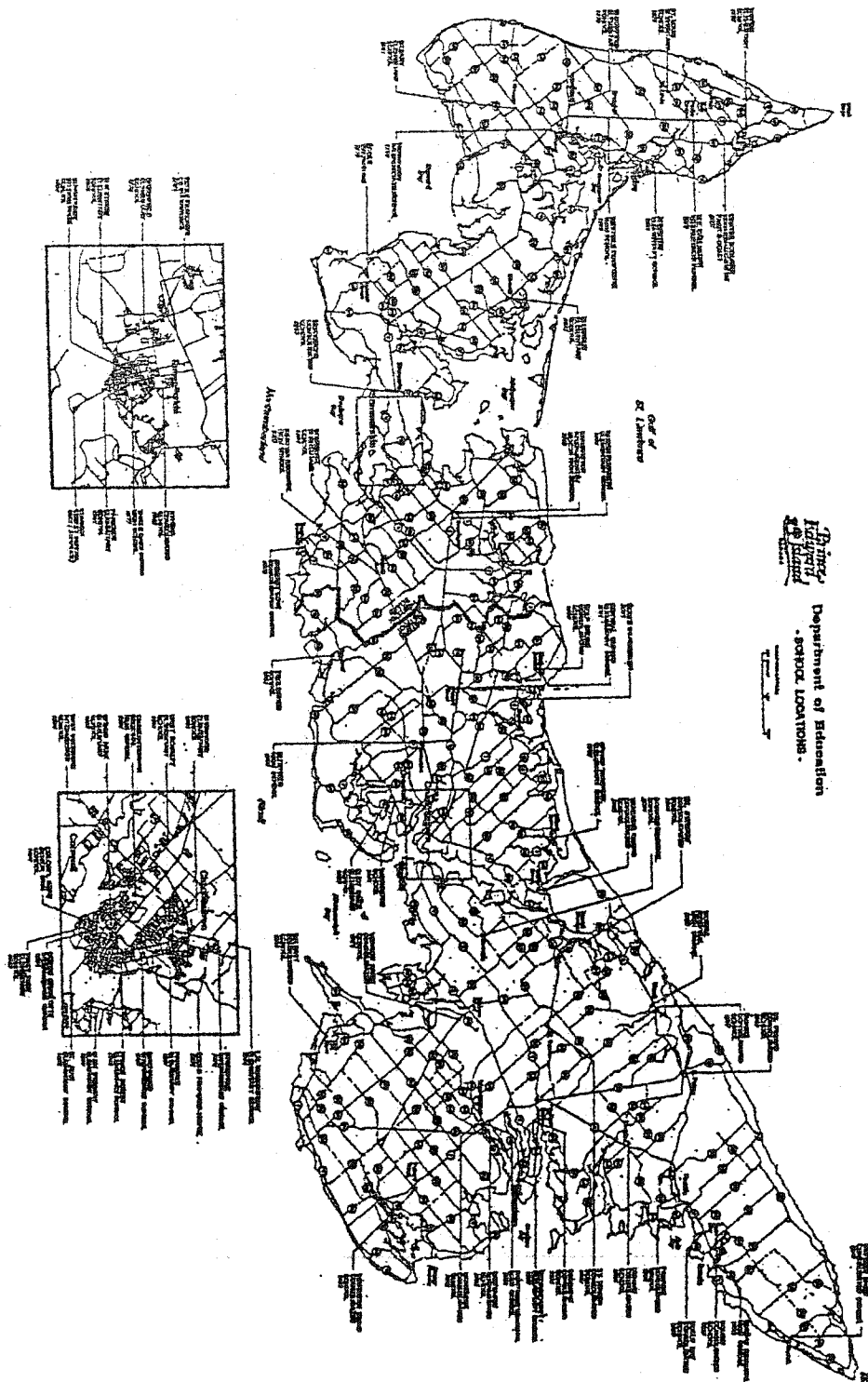
CHECKLIST FOR DISTRICT RESPONSE TEAMS

The District Response Team is a group of school-based and board-based professionals called together by the school principal to assess an allegation of a criminal, sexual, or other serious nature at a school. The team will follow the following procedures.

1. Review the facts.
2. Determine safety issues, and take appropriate action to maintain a safe and caring environment.
3. Ensure that the appropriate procedures for the incident (from the Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environments Procedure) are followed.
4. Ensure that adequate support for the victim(s) of the incident is in place. This support includes the following aspects:
 - a) The security and emotional needs of the victim(s) will guide decision-making.
 - b) Medical assistance is arranged if necessary.
 - c) Subsequent to the notification of appropriate authorities according to the Child Sexual Abuse Protocol, parents/guardians will be informed and involved throughout the process.
 - d) Counselling responsibilities will be assigned as soon as possible, and monitored as warranted.
 - e) The student will be assisted in accessing helping services within the school and larger community.

5. Where possible, ensure that appropriate counselling and support services are also in place for the alleged assailant(s).
6. Notify the Superintendent of issues.
7. Establish an external communications strategy, and designate a spokesperson (who will usually be the Superintendent).
8. Determine the scope of the “need to know” facts, and who should be included, in order to protect confidentiality and to make sure that the appropriate people are informed.
9. Recommend suspensions and/or alternate placements, if necessary.
10. Ensure that an incident report form is completed and maintained on file at the District Office.
11. Continue to monitor the situation until closure as warranted.

Appendix B



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Appendix C

Mr. Ken McAleer

Director of Instruction and Program Services

Eastern School District, P.E.I.

Dear Mr. McAleer,

The purpose of this letter is to introduce myself and to request permission to collect research data within the Eastern School District. My name is J.B. Crawford, and I am currently working towards my Masters Degree in Educational Leadership at the University of Prince Edward Island. As part of the program, I am required to conduct research on a topic relevant to the field of education, and to complete a thesis detailing the process and the results of the research. I have decided to examine the relationship between school safety policies and the strategies that principals use to promote, enforce, and maintain such policies. More specifically, I have selected Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment and would like to interview school principals to determine how they have implemented the procedures of the policy within their schools when student violence occurs. I hope to explore areas of theory related to the promotion of policy awareness, the communication with stakeholders, the consistent and fair application of policy, and the effective strategies for school-wide success.

I have focused my research at the intermediate school level exclusively as the literature indicates that this is the area in which school policies seem to be most necessary for controlling student violence. This requires contacting the principals of the Eastern School District intermediate schools and asking if they would agree to participate in interviews. I believe that these individuals could greatly assist my research and provide me with valuable insight into policy

implementation in a real school setting. This would be a fine complement to the theory and allow a more complete understanding of policy and practice to emerge.

I assure you that the information revealed in the interviews will be kept completely confidential and will serve only to promote the research questions being discussed in the thesis document. I have enclosed a copy of these questions for your consideration. I would like also to guarantee anonymity of the participants, and I will certainly take steps to ensure they remain nameless in all written work. However, I would be misleading if I did not acknowledge that in such a small population as intermediate schools of the Eastern School District, the possibility for identification of the participants does exist. I certainly hope this does not discourage you from allowing me the opportunity to contact these principals and explain the intent of my research project. I will discuss the issue of anonymity with each person, and try to alleviate any concerns they may have as a result.

Should you have any questions regarding my request, I would welcome the opportunity to discuss this project with you in greater detail at your convenience. I may be reached at 838-0860 (work) or 626-3070 (home), and I look forward to your response. Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.

Sincerely,

J.B. Crawford

Appendix D

Mr. _____,

Principal of _____ Intermediate School

Eastern School District, P.E.I.

Dear _____,

The purpose of this letter is to introduce myself and to outline the reasons why I am respectfully asking you to consider participating in a research project that I am conducting. My name is J.B. Crawford and I am a grade nine teacher in the Eastern School District. I am also currently working towards my Masters Degree in Educational Leadership at the University of Prince Edward Island. As part of the program, I am required to gather research on a topic relevant and important to the field of education, and to complete a thesis detailing the process and the results of the research. I have decided to examine the relationship between school safety policies and the strategies that principals use to promote, enforce, and maintain such policies. More specifically, I have selected Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment and would like to interview school principals to determine how and why they may or may not perceive this policy as being an effective violence prevention tool. I hope to look into areas of theory related to the promotion of policy awareness, the communication with stakeholders, the consistent and fair application of policy, the useful strategies to reduce levels of school violence, and the principals' general comments and suggestions for improvement.

I have focused my research at the intermediate school level exclusively because much of the literature indicates that this is the area in which school safety policies seem to be most necessary for controlling student violence. In fact, this age group is determined to be more

violent towards other students and teachers at a rate greater than what is found at elementary and high schools. As a result, my research involves looking at policy implementation at the Eastern School District's intermediate schools. Data collection involves asking particular principals, yourself included, to participate in an interview process. This basically requires a discussion during which I, the researcher, ask you, the principal, a series of open-ended questions regarding Caring Places to Learn/Safe Schools Environment and the role you feel it plays in helping to create a safe school setting. The interview would be tape-recorded for later transcription and would last approximately one hour in length. I believe that your insight could provide me with interesting data regarding the policy implementation in a school setting. This would be a fine complement to the theory and allow a more complete understanding of policy and practice to emerge.

In closing, I would very much like to express how valuable your participation is to this project. I hope to learn more about how we can make our schools safer for our students, and I believe principals such as yourself play a vital role in making this a reality. I ask you to please think about my request to participate, and I look forward to contacting you in the near future. Enclosed with this letter is a consent form in duplicate for your consideration. It lists the points to which consent may be given on your part, and the assurances and responsibilities I assume on mine. Should you have any questions regarding this study, do not hesitate to contact me and I will address any concerns you may have. I can be reached at 838-0860 (work) or 626-3070 (home). I will contact you within ten days to verify your acceptance or refusal. Thank You.

Sincerely,

J.B. Crawford

Appendix E

Consent Form

I understand that my participation in this research project is completely voluntary. Should I choose to volunteer and freely offer my insights and my time, I am assured of the following points:

(1) This research study has been fully authorized by the University of Prince Edward Island's Research Ethics Board. For verification or clarification of concerns regarding the ethical conduct of the research, I can contact this organization at 566 - 0637 or lmacphee@upei.ca.

(2) My schedule will be accommodated and a time will be arranged to conduct an interview that is most convenient for me.

(3) After the interview has been transcribed, the researcher will make a copy of the notes available to me for review. I am welcome to read these, to make further comments, or to change certain areas of discussion that I have reconsidered. With the exception of myself as a potential reviewer, and the primary researcher, no other person(s) will be allowed access to the interview data, in either the recorded or transcribed form.

(4) I am not required to answer any particular questions that I feel are not applicable or which make me feel uncomfortable, and I may terminate the interview at any time.

(5) The information revealed in my particular interview will be used only to promote the research questions being discussed in the thesis document, and will serve no other purpose or agenda beyond this context.

(6) I am provided with an additional copy of this consent form and am encouraged to retain this during the course of the research procedure. It allows for a documented frame of

reference which will be useful should I have any questions or concerns about my rights, and/or the responsibilities of the researcher in this process.

(7) Because of the small population of the Eastern School District, and the participants involved, I am aware that the researcher cannot guarantee my complete anonymity when the final document is published. I am also aware that the researcher has agreed to take precautions to see that every participant remains nameless in all written work, but this does not eliminate the remote possibility that some other interested party may try to surmise, whether correctly or incorrectly, which principal said which comments. The researcher has stressed that it is important that I am aware of this fact prior to my acceptance or refusal of consent so that my decision is truly informed and completely voluntary.

(8) I have the right to withdraw from the study any time prior to the final thesis draft and presentation.

I agree to participate in the thesis research project outlined above.

Signature: _____

Print Name: _____

Date: _____

Appendix F

Interview Questions for Participating Intermediate School Principals

1. Has Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment changed the way discipline is applied to those students who commit violent acts in the school setting?
2. In what ways do you believe an administrator may effectively communicate an awareness of the policy among the teaching staff, the students, and other various stakeholder such as parents, police, etc.?
3. Is it possible to ensure a fair and consistent approach to student discipline within the parameters set out by the policy?
4. Do you find it possible to balance administrative discretion with the very concise procedures outlined by the Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment policy?
5. How do you evaluate the consequences set out in the policy? In other words, do you believe that the policy provides for socially meaningful consequences which help students realize their inappropriate behaviour? If so, please explain more fully.
6. What role do you perceive the larger, external community as having to help promote a reduction of student violence within the school, and in accordance with the policy?
7. What are some particular strategies you believe could be used to make staff members feel safe and supported within the school and in relation to their reporting of student violence?
8. In what ways do you believe the presence of the administrator can be made well-known around the school property? How do you think this may affect the level of school violence that occurs?
9. How do you evaluate the success of Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment in terms

of reducing violent incidents among students and staff members?

10. What are some of the particular strengths of the policy which allow it to be consistent, fair and relevant to those who are most affected by it?
11. What are some particular limitations of the policy which may detract from its effectiveness as a method for reducing student violence?
12. What are some, if any, improvements you would suggest for the policy both as a written document and a workable in-school practice?
13. Do you think Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment has made a difference in reducing the level of school violence in the Eastern School District?